**Article title**

'It's just absolutely everywhere': understanding LGBTQ experiences of queerbaiting

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**Abstract**

Queer media plays a significant role in the education and validation of emerging LGBTQ individuals. Although the volume of such media has increased, there are still ways in which it is misrepresentative. One such example is the practice of queerbaiting, which has been defined as media appearing but failing to provide allegiance to issues of queer visibility. Utilising phenomenological inquiry through application of semi-structured interviews, five university undergraduates who self-identified as LGBTQ described their experiences, thoughts, and feelings of queerbaiting. Consistent with prior research, participants felt that queerbaiting was an exploitative practice, which may have implications on identity development and acceptance. Opinions differed on what constitutes queerbaiting and the intentions of those who contribute to queerbaiting practice, suggesting that queerbaiting is a multi-dimensional phenomenon best understood as an umbrella term for diverse practices. From this we developed a new taxonomy of queerbaiting with three major forms: consumer queerbaiting; cultural queerbaiting; and social queerbaiting. Recognition of these three forms of queerbaiting may improve understanding of queerbaiting and its effects in future research and the diverse settings in which queerbaiting occurs.

**Introduction**

Over the last decade, the volume of queer media has undoubtedly increased (Chu, 2019).

Less than 2% of characters identified as LGBTQ in the 2005 television season compared to

11% in 2019 (GLADD, 2005; 2019). Although a rise in queer characters and plots is positive,

it is paramount that queer media is also well-represented; merely existing is not enough

(Scott, 2019). However, misrepresentative depictions are still prevalent (Chambers, 2017),

insofar as a majority of queer characters are portrayed as one-dimensional (McInroy & Craig,

2017) and lack intersectional variety. GLADD highlight in the television season of 2018 to

2019, only 2.1% of queer characters had a disability, and over half of queer characters were

white (GLADD, 2019). Characters are often portrayed as "the sassy gay best friend" (Stanley,

2019, p. 8) or follow the socially isolated and bullied trope (Marcoux, 2020). Although these

storylines depict the reality of many LGBTQ individuals, and parts of their identity they are

empowered by, the lack of variety in depictions is harmful to LGBTQ individuals and non-

LGBTQ individuals alike. These stereotypes have been recognised by those identifying as

LGBTQ, who report that a majority of storylines are misrepresentative of what it means to be

queer (McInroy et al., 2017). Similarly, plots focus largely on LGBTQ individuals as victims

(Waggoner, 2018) – queer characters are often killed, a phenomenon referred to as *Bury Your*

*Gays* (Hulan, 2017; Waggoner, 2018; GLADD, 2018). This issue is so pervasive that it has

led to articles detailing LGBTQ television shows and films which *do* have a happy ending

(see Guiltenane, 2018; Megarry, 2019; Marcoux, 2020)

      **The role of media in representing queer identities**

      Although some argue that queer media representations have improved (Stanley, 2019;

Jacobs & Meeusen, 2020; Cook, 2018; Ayoub & Garretson, 2017), some counter this,

suggesting that improvements are still required (Paceley & Flynn, 2010; Sanz López, 2018;

Avila-Saavedra, 2009). In a heteronormative society where there are often calls to axe shows

depicting queer characters (Wilkinson et al., 2019), it is imperative that media is representative; especially as it plays an important role in education, validation and self-esteem of LGBTQ individuals (Gray, 2009). LGBTQ depictions through film and television bring a level of emotional investment that imagery alone cannot, due to developing characterisation and storyline (Murphy, 2015), helping to diminish stereotypes and promote acceptance in heterosexual audiences (Bond & Compton, 2015).

The importance of media in representing queer identities is amplified by the lack of LGBTQ education presented to those emerging as queer (Bradford, 2019; Bond et al., 2009). In the last Stonewall School Report, 76% of LGBTQ pupils had never discussed bisexuality at school, 77% had never been taught or discussed gender identity, and just 10% had learned where to go for advice about being transgender (Bradlow et al., 2017). Despite media being the main source of education for emerging queer individuals, there are still inconsistencies in representation, with some identities represented more commonly than others. Gay cisgender males made up 38% of LGBTQ media representation in 2019, compared to bisexuality making up 25%, and transgender individuals just 6% of representation (GLADD, 2019). Promoting validation of queer identities in media is critical, especially as LGBTQ youth are likely to experience greater levels of distress, substance misuse and increased suicide attempts relative to those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender (Almeida et al.,2009; Bolton, & Sareen, 2011; Law et al., 2015). Validation through representative media depictions can increase positive feelings of self (Craig et al., 2015), providing an "affirmational impact" upon its queer audiences (Roach, 2018, p. 7). Such validation is reliant on reducing practices that contribute to misrepresentation. One such practice is the phenomenon of queerbaiting.

**Queerbaiting**

Queerbaiting is a term originally reclaimed as a means of queer activism through fan discourse, to hold producers accountable for their role in potentially misrepresentative queer media (Brennan, 2019). It was typically used to describe a storyline depicting two same sex characters who appeared to be developing a romantic relationship with one another (for examples of queerbaiting practice, see Collier, 2015; Brennan, 2018a; Bridges, 2018). Despite the characters' apparent interest, they would never establish a romantic relationship, much to the confusion of viewers. Queerbaiting was thus originally understood and coined by queer activists as an unrealised queer subtext or plot used to lure queer audiences (Nordin, 2015). This may occur in the main body of text, show or film, or equally the paratext and marketing of the work (Ng, 2017). A more recent understanding of queerbaiting encompasses many forms beyond entertainment (Abidin, 2019). LGBTQ rainbow marketing – *rainbow washing* – has been postulated as a form of queerbaiting (Abraham, 2019), which appeals not only to LGBTQ audiences, but also cisgender and heterosexual audiences (Bronski, 1984; Sender, 1999; Tsai, 2012; Oakenfull et al., 2008). Moreover, celebrities and those in the public eye are increasingly being accused of queerbaiting, as they make hints towards a queer identity but confirm that they are straight and cisgender (Brennan & McDermott, 2019; Ritschel, 2019), through what is termed 'queer coding'(Roach, 2018). As activism through queerbaiting evolves, it has been difficult to ascertain a unified definition of the phenomenon; for example, some content regarded as queerbaiting can provide queer visibility (Ng, 2017). What appears to underpin the queerbaiting phenomenon is how queer visibility develops (Ng, 2017) and how consumers perceive the intentions behind such visibility. Therefore, Brennan's (2019, p. 1) recent definition of queerbaiting as "the act of appearing to provide allegiance to issues of queer visibility and then failing to provide this in any tangible way",

arguably provides a suitable multi-dimensional definition that incorporates the role of perception in the consumer.

There are a number of explanations for why queerbaiting might occur. First, as a tactic to lure queer audiences whilst ensuring that heterosexist audiences are not alienated by queer content (Bridges, 2018; Scott, 2019; Gillig & Murphy). Alternatively, as an attempt to market to the LGBTQ community and allies (Hicklin, 2012; Santen, 2015; Cowan & Valentine, 2006; Abraham, 2018). Companies who openly support the LGBTQ community encourage not only a queer marketing demographic, but also their non-queer counterparts, who are more likely to support a company that openly supports gay rights (Ennis, 2019; Nölke, 2018). Queerbaiting is a subjective experience, thus the reasons why it occurs (and inferences of intention) are necessarily contested.

The definition of queerbaiting has varied heavily (Nordin, 2015), perhaps due to the subjective and evolving multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon. However, whilst there is active discussion on definitions, investigations into how LGBTQ individuals experience and perceive queerbaiting are underrepresented. It is evident within prior literature and fan discourse, that queerbaiting is regarded mostly as a negative practice (Brennan, 2019), yet opinions from LGBTQ individuals outside of fandom space have not been explored. This is especially important, as it has been argued that outside of social media sites such as Tumblr and Twitter – where fan and queer activism is high – queerbaiting may not be recognised (Nordin, 2015). Previous studies have used virtual ethnographic and close reading methodologies to explore individual views and examples of queerbaiting (see Nordin, 2015; Brennan, 2018a). Therefore, we used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of queerbaiting in those who self-identify as LGBTQ.

**Method**

**Methodology**

We used an interpretive phenomenological methodology, underpinned by the philosophical principle that "lived experience is an interpretive process, situated in an individual's lifeworld" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.92). This allows those with lived experience of a phenomenon to share their own, often overlooked, understandings of the world (Creswell & Poth, 2016), which is crucial when exploring a phenomenon that potentially affects minority communities (Crockett et al., 2018).

**Participants**

Five undergraduate students who self-identified as a member of the LGBTQ community were recruited using opportunistic sampling. The mean age of participants was 21. Participants identified as: mostly gay and non-binary (1), bisexual cisgender female (1), pansexual cisgender female (1), bisexual transgender masculine (1), gay transgender masculine (1).

**Procedure**

The first author (NW) conducted audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with the participants, lasting approximately 1.5 hours, using the FaceTime video calling application. NW asked participants about their perceptions and experiences of identity development, LGBTQ media and queerbaiting, using an interview schedule developed from prior literature. Audio recordings were transcribed for analysis within five days of each interview and subsequently deleted.

NW is a white, cisgender woman, who self-identifies as queer in sexuality. Disclosing a likewise identity to participants can help to reduce hierarchical relationships between participant and researcher (Campbell & Wasco, 2000) but it may produce social desirability

effects (LaSala, 2003). NW decided to disclose her identity to participants to encourage participants to feel at ease whilst discussing LGBTQ issues. Such an insider approach provides perspective that an outsider may not consider (McDonald, 2013; Wigginton & Jenny, 2016) but may lead to overlooking things deemed logical and unimportant (McDonald, 2013). We accepted this potential trade-off in the service of enacting social change and providing a level of LGBTQ advocacy (Schmitz, Tyler & Robinson, 2019).

### Data analysis

We analysed the data using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which follows six phases of analysis. The first phase of familiarising oneself with the data commenced whilst transcribing the interviews. NW then produced initial codes which were developed into themes and sub-themes. We reviewed and developed the themes and sub-themes, ensuring they worked in relation to one another. We then refined and defined each theme and sub-theme. Although other methodologies, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis could be used within a phenomenological framework, we used thematic analysis due to its epistemological freedom (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) and practice-based approach.

### Ethics

The British Psychological Society's (2018) Ethical Guidelines were followed. All participants gave informed written consent prior to data collection, and were given debrief forms which further clarified study intentions and included signposting information to various LGBTQ and wellbeing organisations. To ensure confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms. Ethical approval was granted by the Bournemouth University Department of Psychology Ethics Committee, case number 29213.

**Results**

Two main themes and six sub-themes were identified. The first theme, *importance of queer media*, encapsulates a fundamental point from the data: queer media plays a highly important role in queer and queer emerging individuals' lives by providing a safe place to explore and develop identity. The second theme, *issues of queerbaiting*, highlights experiences and opinions of queer individuals on the practice of queerbaiting. Participants experienced multiple occasions of queerbaiting and generally regarded it as a negative and exploitative practice. Given the importance of queer media, participants suggested that queerbaiting may have significant implications for queer identity development and validation.
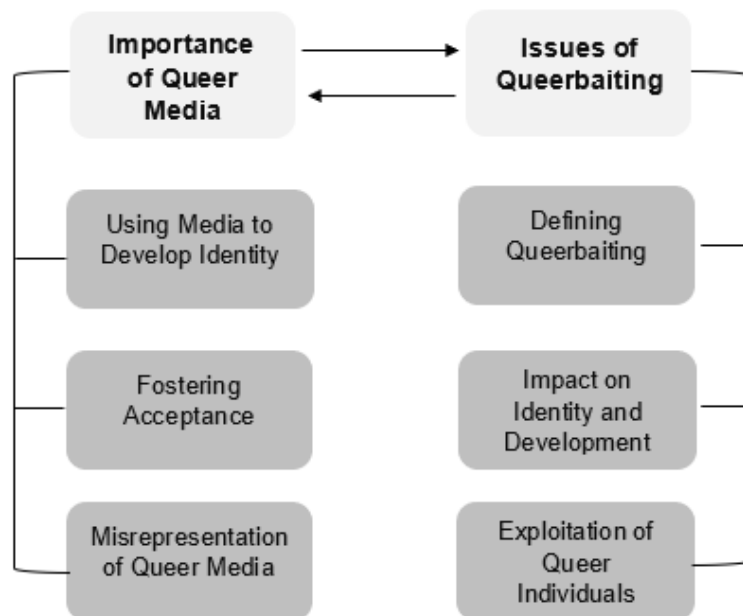


*Figure 1. The relationship between themes.*

**Importance of Queer Media**

Queer media was identified as a positive force that can promote acceptance of self, acceptance of the LGBTQ community and provide a safe place to start exploring one's identity. Participants highlighted the many forms of queer media they consume online and offline, including TV, film, print, music, video games and social media. Misrepresentations, underrepresentation, and stereotypes were considered present within the queer media participants used and were perceived as posing a risk to the positive aspects of queer media. Within the first theme, we identified three sub-themes: (1) using media to develop identity, (2) fostering acceptance, and (3) misrepresentation of queer media.

### *Using media to develop identity*

All participants reported that queer media helped them to develop their identity in some way, with some seeking out media to develop their identity: "*I did seek out queer based media a lot when I was younger, probably around when I was 14 and coming to terms with my sexuality, I tried to watch a lot of things.*" (George). However, one participant "*found my identity because I was already watching LGBT-based media.*", by realising that they related a lot to the queer depictions, "*you know like YouTubers? They were like saying about how they knew they were like gay or whatever and then I was like… 'oh some of this applies to me actually!'*" (Amy). Some participants also shared how an increase in queer media may make it easier for individuals to come to terms with their identity, insofar as "*a lot more people are coming out due to TV shows and that, a lot of people are now, yeah.*" (Harry).

### *Fostering acceptance*

Seeing queer depictions whilst developing identity led to acceptance of identifying as queer, because "*it'd just make me and just others who are coming out to just be more comfortable with themselves*" (George). Queer media also acted as a safe place, fostering a

sense of comfort: "*it's kind of homely to watch people who feel the same and identify a little bit differently with gender and sexuality*" (Harry). Furthermore, some added that queer media representation may promote acceptance in those outside the community, because "*people would change their perceptions of people who were LGBT and hopefully people then would stop bullying or being homophobic, which would be, ideal*" (Elsie). Such acceptance was in part attributed to the increase in queer media and the presence of queer identity generally:

> There's definitely a lot more coverage of pride events and just like, just general LGBT sort of activity. (Harry)

> Yeah, I never could have expected this, like I had seen one trans character on TV when I was younger, but it was a bad representation. Yeah, I think now there's a lot more lesbian, gay, bi, trans, even asexual stuff! (George)

### *Misrepresentation in queer media*

All participants expressed that there are misrepresentations and stereotypes in queer media, inasmuch as storylines are centred solely on a character's struggles, rather than presenting a queer character as a well-rounded depiction: "*the representation side needs to be, better thought out for most TV shows and such.*" (Craig).

> LGBT characters, need to be seen more as like, people and not like, their sexuality or gender, or 'transness' or whatever, because I often find that all of their storylines often centre around them being gay, them coming out and then like, and then like they find a relationship and the whole issue of, like any issue they have is because of their sexuality. (George)

> Yes, that's it, bury your gays! Because of the amount of gay characters that just get killed off unnecessarily in TV programs. Everybody is dying for no reason. I mean at least it's not of HIV or AIDS, but that's beside the point. (Craig)

These depictions left individuals feeling frustrated that queer media "*should be more realistic for how it is, it doesn't need to be educational, it just needs to be a bit more*

*accurate.*" (Harry). Misrepresentation also took the form of underrepresentation of queer identities, particularly certain sub-identities:

> Just show the same amount that straight, cis people get, have the same amount of characters,
> because there are so many LGBT people in the world now. (George)

> Bisexuals don't get much representation, like I can list maybe a small handful where bisexuals are
> actually represented. (Craig)

One participant further discussed how the volume of free queer media is low, resulting in individuals either having to pay to access queer content, or try to access it illegally, noting that "*you literally have to pay for the gay*" (Craig).

### Issues of Queerbaiting

The second main theme incorporates the ways in which queerbaiting presents itself as an issue, highlighting how it may affect queer and queer emerging individuals. Overall, queerbaiting was perceived by participants as an intentional and inherently negative, exploitative practice, with possible implications for self-acceptance and identity development. Within the theme we identified three sub-themes: (1) defining queerbaiting, (2) impacts on identity development, and (3) exploitation of queer individuals.

#### *Defining queerbaiting*

Definitions of queerbaiting differed strongly between participants; however, the phenomenon appears to be underpinned by a feeling of deception towards the community. Two participants gave similar definitions of queerbaiting as a queer TV plot or character which is not fully realised. One participant suggested that queerbaiting is a tactic utilised in both media and marketing, to increase fans and revenue:

> See there's like two types for me: there's like in the media and then there's when business or
> brands try and adopt like, an LGBT stance to promote their products. I guess they work similarly,
> in terms of making profit and television ratings. (Craig)

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All participants seemed unsure on a definition but were aware of queerbaiting as a concept. This lack of a clear definition resulted in the topic of queerbaiting being "*not one of these things that gets brought up very often* [in conversation]" (Craig). Regarding a cohesive definition of queerbaiting, opinions were mixed. One participant felt "*there should* [not] *be a set definition because as you say, it can mean anything to anyone. I think there should be kind of requirements of what it should mean. But not an actual definition.*" (Elsie). Another highlighted the toxicity that can be found on online social media platforms, suggesting that individuals may take part in online shaming of individuals and companies, through what is known as '*cancel culture'* (Amy). A lack of a cohesive definition may result in disagreement over queerbaiting in practice, resulting in the shaming of an individual who is perceived, perhaps contentiously, to be queerbaiting**.** Other participants felt that a set definition may make queerbaiting a less common occurrence, as media outlets and those who consume queer media would become aware of queerbaiting tactics and "*they'll be like 'oh yeah, this isn't right!'*" (George).

### *Impacts on development and identity*

All participants said that experiencing what they perceive to be queerbaiting when developing their identity would have had an impact upon their development. When discussing this, some suggested that watching media that was perceived as queerbaiting made them feel confused about their identity, potentially leading them to question it:

> I mean **I** did watch shows that had queerbaiting when I was coming out with my sexuality, and erm yeah, I think it kind of does just yeah, kind of confuse you? And it slows down kind of the process? Because you don't get the content that you're almost expecting and get excited by and it kind of leaves you just a bit upset and yeah, just confused. (George)

> It's one thing googling or looking for information on what you think 'you are' and what you identify as. But then, seeing differently or seeing it then not happen in the media just makes you

more confused. It just makes you think, 'wait is this wrong? Am I wrong?' You just make yourself more confused and it just becomes harder for you. (Elsie)

Participants agreed that anyone may be affected by queerbaiting, regardless of their identity, insofar as "*not everyone's necessarily seeking out LGBT media because they are* [LGBTQ]. *Sometimes, they just want to become more informed, or they're just an ally or just enjoy it.*" (Elsie). Queerbaiting may thus, beyond impacting identity development in queer emerging individuals, also affect perceptions of those outside the community.

### *Exploitation of queer individuals*

Through discussion of queerbaiting experience and prevalence, the theme of exploitation emerged heavily. Participants discussed their own experiences of queerbaiting, suggesting it is a prevalent multi-dimensional phenomenon, present in TV and film, marketing, and daily interactions with others:

'Yeah, queerbaiting is just absolutely everywhere.' (George)

Sometimes when you speak to people online and they say certain things or they'll use certain slang that used to like, belong to the LGBT community and you see that terminology and you're like 'Oh, so are like you?' and they're like 'Uh, no'. (Amy)

All individuals perceived queerbaiting to be an intentional tactic employed by media and marketing to receive more views and revenue and therefore exploit queer culture and individuals. Individuals ultimately felt that companies appear to promote queer visibility through the creation of LGBTQ themed products and participation in pride parades, but such products were often deemed to offer poor representation, with some participants highlighting the lack of support for queer individuals throughout the rest of the year:

I understand from a marketing perspective there is a lot of psychology behind it like 'how can we get the gays to believe in our product!' and it's like, but you've just put a rainbow flag on a plain white t shirt and marketed towards us you know. (Craig)

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They're like 'well it's really only 3 months out of the year that we have to generically include every member of this community and then it's just back to normal and all the products go off the shelves. (Harry)

Queerbaiting was viewed by participants as an intentional practice, which is thought to occur to draw in viewers through controversial practice or to ensure non-queer individuals are not alienated by queer media. Ignorance of what it means to be queer was also identified as a possible reason why queerbaiting may occur, because "*people don't understand the whole being queer… they think they're representing someone when they're actually not.*" (Elsie).

Participants also explicitly questioned the morality of queerbaiting, suggesting that it is wrong to exploit certain identities in order to receive more views and money:

It makes me feel like you've been cheated a bit. It's kind of that feeling that you know something really bad exists that it's kind of affecting a group of people that are already vulnerable and already are 'targeted' if you want to say, negatively. And it just kind of, it makes the perception of the community kind of worse. It seems to target vulnerable groups. (Elsie)

If you're going to flout it around and make money off of it, like, you've got to define yourself. Because you can't just be doing it for the sake of profit. (Craig)

Participants ultimately thought queerbaiting misleads people into thinking they are going to receive adequate representation when they are not, leading to feelings of frustration and dehumanisation: "*I would just like people to get their shit together and stop luring us in like we're not people.*" (Craig). It is a practice which all participants agree should stop, as it presents issues in LGBTQ lives and negatively impacts outside perspectives of the community.

**Discussion**

In this study we explored queerbaiting experience in individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ. We found that participants generally view queerbaiting as a prevalent and exploitative multi-dimensional practice, which may be found in media, marketing and social interactions. Given participants highlighted the importance of queer media for developing identity and fostering acceptance, queerbaiting could be considered a threat to the usefulness and importance of queer media in particular.

**A threat to identity development and acceptance**

Consistent with prior research (Gray, 2009), our results suggest that individuals seek out queer media to develop, disclose and feel valid in their identity. However, queerbaiting threatened the role that queer media plays in such identity development within participants, supporting the concept that merely existing in media is not enough (Scott, 2019). Furthermore, our results support the idea that media and culture have the power to change, inform and reaffirm identities, and also promote acceptance, consistent with prior research (Bond and Compton, 2019; Gray, 2009; Roach, 2018).

**A multi-dimensional phenomenon**

Given the importance of queer media, it is not surprising that our results show that individuals feel frustration, exploitation, and dehumanisation as a result of queerbaiting, which has been suggested in prior literature (Brennan, 2019). However, our results also suggest tensions in the definitions of and intentions underpinning media and behaviour viewed as queerbaiting (Brennan, 2018b). Whilst prior literature hints that only queer individuals might perceive media as queerbaiting, our results suggest that anyone may experience queerbaiting, regardless of their identity. Moreover, although some participants in our study defined queerbaiting as exclusive to TV or film plots and character – conforming to Nordin's (2015) definition – others suggested that queerbaiting can also be found in social interactions. This suggests that the practice of queer coding, outlined by Roach (2018), may
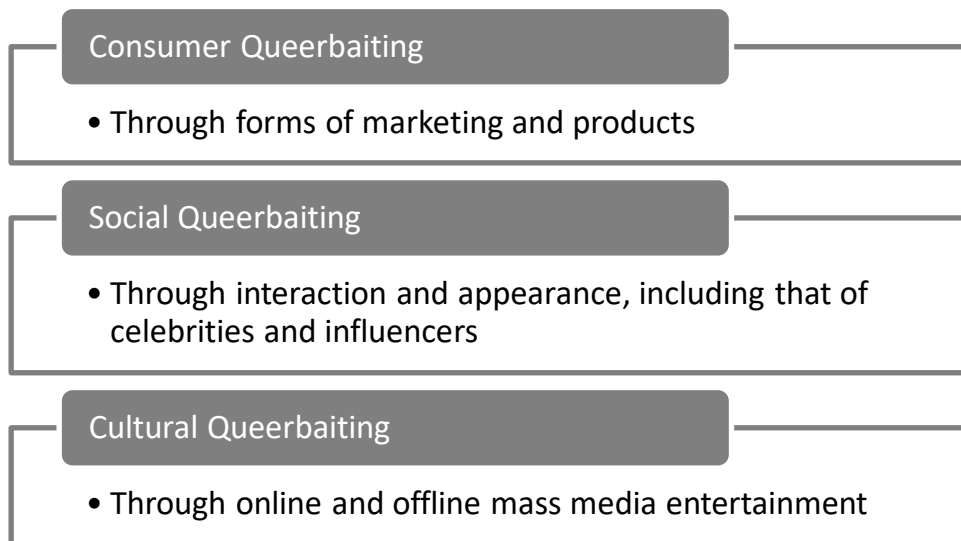
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not be confined to fictitious characters or celebrities, but can be adopted by any non-queer individual as a means to deceive queer individuals. Whilst this is not an entirely new practice, it is interesting that this is regarded as a form of queerbaiting not explicitly identified within the literature.

With regard to intentions underpinning queerbaiting, our results suggest that tensions exist. For example, in social interactions our results suggest that queerbaiting may occur due to a desire to fit in with LGBTQ individuals, or to entice a member of the community. In the media, our results suggest that it occurs to avoid the loss of non-queer viewers. These findings support theories of heteronormativity underpinning queerbaiting (Nordin, 2015). Combined with the diverse definitions previously highlighted, this suggests that queerbaiting should be conceived as a multi-dimensional phenomenon involving a diverse set of practices, with diverse intentions.

**A new taxonomy of queerbaiting**

Prior research indicates that queerbaiting may be found in various forms of media (Abidin, 2019), Furthermore, although concepts such as rainbow washing and queer coding exist within marketing and everyday social interactions respectively, neither have been explicitly labelled as queerbaiting. Given the multi-dimensional nature of queerbaiting experiences within participant accounts in this study, prior literature, and fan discourse, we propose a new taxonomy of queerbaiting with three major forms: consumer queerbaiting; cultural queerbaiting; and social queerbaiting (see Figure 2). These forms of queerbaiting may be found across platforms and different types of media, with some overlap in categorisation.

Consumer Queerbaiting
- Through forms of marketing and products

Social Queerbaiting
- Through interaction and appearance, including that of celebrities and influencers

Cultural Queerbaiting
- Through online and offline mass media entertainment

*Figure 2. A new taxonomy of queerbaiting*

Cultural queerbaiting most closely encompasses practices related to the original, narrow definition of queerbaiting, in particular misrepresentation in narrative depictions. Social queerbaiting extends the term to encompass everyday encounters and what has been termed 'queer coding'. Consumer queerbaiting further extends the term to explicitly encompass commercial marketing practices such as rainbow washing. These categories should not be interpreted as discrete. In modern social and media landscapes, cultural, social and consumer practices intersect. Reflecting wider changes in social and media landscapes, it is clear that queerbaiting is no longer a practice confined to TV and print, but an umbrella term for situations where queer individuals feel a sense of exploitation or an ulterior motive in queer visibility and depictions. Our new taxonomy thus aims to deepen Brennan's (2019) broad definition of queerbaiting, noted previously. Recognition of the three major forms of queerbaiting, highlighted in our taxonomy, may improve understanding of queerbaiting and its effects in research and the diverse settings in which queerbaiting occurs. In explicitly extending the scope of queerbaiting, we hope to provide a framework in which the intersection of cultural, social and consumer queerbaiting practices can be better analysed.

We posit that it may be in the processes of intersection themselves that queerbaiting can be most effectively confronted and challenged.

**Strengths and limitations of the study**

Our study explored detailed first-hand experience of individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ, which provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon from within the LGBTQ community. However, our findings suggest that that anyone may experience queerbaiting, regardless of their identity, our study is limited by sampling only LGBTQ identifying individuals. Moreover, although we purposively recruited participants from outside new media, given the mean age of the participants it is possible that similar findings could have been achieved through studies in new media. Future studies may benefit from more diverse sampling to gain a wider perspective on queerbaiting, especially outside the LGBTQ community.

## Conclusion

We conducted a phenomenological exploration of the experiences of queerbaiting in those who self-identify as LGBTQ. Our results highlight the importance of queer media for developing identity and fostering acceptance, and the potential threat to this by the perceived prevalent and exploitative multi-dimensional practice of queerbaiting. We propose that queerbaiting is best conceived as an umbrella term, which we developed into a new taxonomy with three forms – consumer, cultural, and social queerbaiting. This taxonomy may improve understanding of queerbaiting for research and in the diverse settings in which queerbaiting occurs.

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[None]

**Declaration of interest statement**

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

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