Queer Joy on Social Media: Exploring the Expression and Facilitation of Queer Joy in Online Platforms

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Abstract

Queer Joy is conceptualised as a form of resistance to oppression by celebrating queerness in the face of adversity. This research aimed to centre queer joy and understand how it is expressed and may be facilitated in online spaces. To do this we conducted a survey with 100 UK participants who indicated they identified as LGBTQ+ on the online recruitment platform Prolific. We asked a series of open and closed questions in an online survey to investigate 1) what queer joy looks like on social media 2) how queer joy content is engaged with on social media 3) which platforms are perceived to facilitate queer joy and 4) how queer people protect their privacy online. The results suggested that to facilitate queer joy online, platforms should allow flexible self expression and community engagement, while allowing for granular control over privacy and the audience such content is shown to.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**; • **Social and professional topics** → **Gender**; **Sexual orientation**.

Keywords

queer, joy, social media, lgbtq+

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1 Introduction

Queer HCI encompasses queer as an inclusive term for non-normative sexualities and genders, as well as elements in research which challenge normalisation [24, 26, 80]. Much HCI research with the queer community has focused on how technology can be used to offset and protect from experiences of marginalisation and harm [*e.g.*, 45, 71, 97] but there have recently been calls to focus this research on positive elements like *joy* [83, 85].

Marginalisation and associated negative experiences is often the lens through which queer experiences of online spaces have been explored [83]. For example work has quantified LGBTQ+ activism and hate speech against the community online [44, 92, 95]. This online marginalisation has further led to LGBTQ+ people undertaking privacy behaviours such as self-censorship [77]. Nonetheless online spaces afford positive engagement for queer people, by affirming queer identities [17, 33, 64] and promoting community support [10, 35]. However, much of this research still stems from the focus of marginalisation in real life spaces, rather than stemming from joy.

While joy is traditionally defined as the opposite of negative emotions like sadness, scholars have suggested that joy is rather experienced alongside or in resistance to negative experiences [4, 48, 62]. Some work has already integrated laughter in interaction design to promote pro-social behaviours [67], however this has not led to joyful behaviours being centred in online interaction design.

Given this, our research centres joy to understand queer people's social media use and how these platforms facilitate the expression of queer joy. We set out to answer four main research questions:

RQ1 How is queer joy defined, and what does it look like in online spaces?

RQ2 How do queer people engage with social media in relation to queer joy content?
RQ3 Which social media platforms are perceived to facilitate the expression of queer joy?
RQ4 How do queer people protect their privacy on social media platforms?

We recruited 100 UK-based participants from the crowd-sourcing platform *Prolific*, who had indicated that they identified as LGBTQ+. We asked them a series of open and closed questions in an online survey.

Our findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge about how queer communities create and share content on social media platforms. Although a minority of participants posted content that they recognised as an expression of queer joy, there were commonalities in how queer joy was defined and conceptualised on social media. Specifically there was a focus on community and authentic self-expression. There was also a focus on audience – participants indicated that they predominantly post queer content to other LGBTQ+ people and highlighted concerns that their posts may be seen by unsupportive members of their social network, or by those who will exhibit prejudiced and bigoted behaviour in response.

Based on these results, we contribute three recommendations for social media platforms to facilitate the expression of queer joy. First, **the queer community should not be treated as a homogeneous entity**. While there are commonalities in some attitudes and experiences, there are notable differences in how people wish to express their identities on social media (if at all). Second, **the ability to engage with the wider queer community is important**, and is the audience that most queer people are posting their content to. As such, we recommend methods of supporting engagement with the queer community, without posting to groups who are not the target audience for queer joy content. Third, **granular control over privacy options should be supported**. The ability to post to target audiences and protect themselves from marginalisation is a priority, even in the context of expressing joy.

Our research centres queer joy, combating a narrative that HCI can only consider LGBTQ+ people as a marginalised group. Further, much as joy itself exists alongside and despite negativity, we suggest that design approaches that pursue the facilitation of joy will simultaneously affect marginalisation. Thus joy-centric research is a promising avenue to address existing concerns whilst celebrating communities.

2 Background and Related Work

This work is informed by queer HCI research in which the term *queer* acts both as an inclusive descriptor of non-normative gender and sexuality, and as a set of characteristics, practices, perceptions and expectations that challenge normalization [24, 26, 80]. By centring queer joy (rather than *e.g.,* marginalization and oppression), we address a previously articulated gap in this research [83]. We do so within the specific context of social media, a domain that has been shown to be of significant importance for queer self-expression and community building [10, 35, 76]. We also draw on explorations of queer privacy, acknowledging the potential impact of privacy perceptions and behaviours to impact expressions of queer joy online.

2.1 Queer HCI

Queerness in HCI has been framed first as a design orientation, theory, and practice [46]; and subsequently as a distinct community of users and researchers engaging with technologies and contributing to HCI research [83]. Whilst these two conceptualisations initially emerged as distinct and parallel [80], the term Queer HCI has since been used as a unifier for research *"by, for, or substantially shaped by the queer community itself and/or queering methods and theory"* [24, 26, p.2 of both].

As a design orientation, Queer HCI challenges socially maintained structures (including those of gender and sexuality) as a source of assumptions and foundations for technology [40, 46]. Through queering and troubling, researchers are encouraged to design for divergence and subversion, and in so doing *"to make space for the negotiation and implementation of social justice"* [46, p.436]. Recently, Biggs and Bardzell also highlight disorientation as a mechanism for generative and critical reflection on normative orientations in HCI [9]. Contemporary examples of queering and related approaches in HCI include the centring of ephemera, non-normative bodies, and non-surveillance technologies for queer historical archives [65], and descriptions of 'glitching' productivity software by queer and crip researchers [40].

The study of queer individuals as a distinct user group emerged in the mid-2010s [83] and has given particular attention to online platform use [25, 27, 75, 82, 89, 91], as well as dating apps [11, 60], wearables [65], location-based technologies (*e.g.,* [58]), and social VR [30]. In their characterization of HCI research papers that were substantially about or significantly involved LGBTQ+ people, Taylor et al. [83] observed significant growth in research over time. However, they also note a focus on queer people as a marginalized, stigmatized and oppressed group whose 'problems' and activism can be studied or addressed through technology, or who need HCI research to mitigate their relatively high risk of technological harm [83]. Given this, Taylor et al. call for HCI researchers *"to expand their inquiry beyond forms of marginalization queer communities face and to instead consider other aspects of queer life, such as queer joy"* [83, p.9].

2.1.1 Queer Use of Online Spaces. The mining and analysis of online data has been used to quantify activism and online hate speech related to LGBTQ+ users/issues [44, 95], and the use of online platforms by explicitly queer user groups [10, 60], or user groups with high levels of queer participation (*e.g.,* fandom [89]). Others have sought to understand the experiences of queer users online through, for example, surveys and interviews [29].

These studies indicate that online platforms can help users participate in and promote LGBTQ+ activism and/or alternative politics [10, 16, 18]; to express and gain visibility for their identities [10, 17, 39] (sometimes experimentally or as a part of the formation those identities [17, 33, 64], *i.e.,* using platforms as a "testing ground for identity" [17, p.115]); as well as to be affirmed by and build connections (community) with those with shared identities [10, 16, 18, 76]. Thus, online platforms, particularly social media

have been identified as queer utopias that provide a safe space outside of heteronormity and a model of hope for the future [10, 18]. However, these same platforms can also be seen as "queer vortexes" [18] that promote unsustainable engagement patterns and act as an echo chamber in which users disengage from alternative viewpoints.

Researchers have noted a number of limitations to existing platforms and their affordances for LGBTQ+ users [29, 60], with some providing guidance or prototypes for how alternative platforms might be developed [29, 34]. For example, Fadrigon et al. [29] explored experiences of, and recommendations for, representations of gender and sexuality within digital account creation processes. Their results indicate that LGBTQ+ people often found that their sexual orientation and/or gender identity were not represented in the processes of existing products, and platforms with inclusive representation were memorable and affirming. LGBTQ+ users were hesitant to share representative information during account creation, and would refuse or reluctantly comply, and envisaged alternate paths for sharing representative data [29]. Others have highlighted that, whilst some users leverage social media for self-expression, others engage in self-censorship [77] – in part because platforms do not allow them sufficient control over the visibility of their identity presentation for different audiences [16, 27].

2.1.2 Queer Privacy. Addressing the specific needs of "marginalized groups" has been a significant topic for privacy research in HCI [69]. In their review of literature across HCI, communication and privacy venues, LGBTQ+ people were the second-most prominent identity that papers concerned themselves with, accounting for 16% of papers that concerned themselves with specific marginalized identities (∼ 13% of all papers, second only to disabled identities centred in ∼ 26% of all papers).

Self-censorship and selective visibility [3, 16, 27, 28, 77] are one mechanism through which queer people may protect their privacy. This may be an individualistic selective visibility, *i.e.,* use of self-censorship, differing levels of participation and use of platform privacy controls for selective sharing in order to exhort control over what aspects of their identity are made visible on digital platforms. Alternatively, selective visibility may emerge from community activities that help participants to explore and express aspects of their identity in a safe online space [28]. This latter form of selective visibility, also referred to as "collective privacy" [89], may take place on platforms that are not overtly queer but that include significant queer sub-communities and develop through iterative processes of norming and boundary setting. Alternatively, queer-specific platforms like 'Trans Time' specifically promote privacy [34], and by being specific to a community, has a defined audience that helps to mitigate context collapse (where usually distinct audiences of content are brought together [51]). However, only engaging with a narrow community runs the risk of forming a 'queer vortex' which can lead to only being exposed to certain views and information [18]. Thus, supporting queer people's engagement with general-purpose platforms may provide the affordances of platforms like Trans Time, while mitigating vortex effects. Moreover, by the same mechanisms by which queer communities are engaging in collective privacy and community-orchestrated selective visibility, may be mechanisms by which users find and express joy online.

Consistent with Queer HCI more generally, these papers problematise queer users' privacy needs, suggesting that aspects of queer identities are a secret to be protected online. This paper recognises that the sharing of queer identities online is a significant means by which users express and experience joy.

2.2 Queer Joy

Joy is broadly understood as the experience or expression of happiness and pleasure, and as being in opposition to negative emotions and experiences (*i.e.,* that it occurs in the absence of pain and sadness). However, Black and queer scholarship challenges this definition, acknowledging that joy often arises from (and alongside) these negative emotions and experiences rather than being mutually exclusive [4], that it can be a radical act of resistance in the face of adversity and negative affect and that it explicitly counters expectations on these groups of being unable to express the full range of emotions [48] (*e.g.,* the 'angry Black woman' [41] or vulnerable queer refugee [2, 68]). Queer joy, therefore, is "experienced as a result of queerness, not despite it" [59, p.2]. Despite this, research (in HCI and beyond) typically centres marginalization in ways that align with and add to representations of these populations as constantly suffering [83, 100].

In addition to tempering and resisting oppression and discrimination, queer joy "fuels activism against oppression by energizing people and offering alternate possibilities" [96, p.17]. This notion of alternate possibilities can also be seen as *queer utopias* [56] in which open-ended futures of belonging are imagined and performed in the present. Similar utopias have been envisioned and reflected on in the context of Black feminist joy [78], and a body of work has been built considering Black joy in the context of social media [6, 50, 57, 81]. Alongside utopias though, is the idea of everyday resistance. For example, in the wake of the killing of Ma'Khia Bryant at the hands of the police, Black girls on TikTok shared videos of Bryant doing her hair and lipsyncing to music [50]. These joyful acts of the everyday were shared as an act of resistance against the sharing of body-cam footage of Bryant's death [50]. The power of joy was noted by Persaud and Crawley who indicated the importance of "...foreground[ing] joy in a world that otherwise doesn't want us to have it." [62]. While Persaud and Crawley were particularly speaking of Black queer joy, work has begun to emphasise the importance of joy for Black women and femmes [57], and trans people [72]. Queer joy on social media more broadly however, has had limited research, with recent work focusing on the context of the Covid-19 pandemic [4]. Thus, there is a need for us to further understand queer joy, and from an HCI perspective, explore how it can best be facilitated online.

2.3 UK and Ireland LGBTQ+ Rights and Attitudes in 2024

This research was conceived in, and recruited LGBTQ+ participants from, the UK and Ireland in 2024. The UK and Ireland both have significant LGBTQ+ populations. 2021 UK census data indicated that 3.2% of respondents aged 16+ identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation [7], and 0.5% of respondents reported that their gender identity and sex registered at birth were not the same. Similar questions were not present in the 2022 Irish census

data, but previous surveys have indicated that between 5% and 10% of the total Irish population are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender [Central Statistics Office 2021 as cited by 37]. Asexuality was not captured in either of the most recent UK or Irish census surveys.

Despite legislative provisions for same-sex marriage and parenting rights, and against discrimination and hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity, there is significant and growing hostility towards LGBTQ+ people in the UK, particularly towards trans and non-binary people. In 2024, legal measures restricted access to puberty-suppressing hormones for trans young people, and many trans adults have since been refused HRT [86]. The uptick of anti-trans attitudes has also led to changes in non-statutory guidance and regulations in education and sports, respectively [94]. The UK Equalities and Human Rights Commission also recently supported proposed changes to the Equality Act (2010), where the protected characteristic sex would be redefined as biological in an attempt to negate rights on the basis of acquired legal sex, which were then debated in Parliament [93]. This trans-hostile politicking has a wide-reaching impact, including on the relationship between devolved powers in the UK [73] and as the basis of several submissions of written evidence underpinning the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 [93]. Online, the same discourses that are deployed to legitimise these regressive ideologies and practices are emulated in radical conspiracy theories of transgender ubiquity, social contagion, and an elite transgender political cabal [95].

Although trans-hostility in the UK is particularly notable, other queer groups also experience implicit and explicit harms. One recent report highlighted lower rates of openness about their sexuality amongst asexual people when compared to other UK LGBTQ+ populations, and found that asexual people were more likely to have experienced negativity in response to disclosures of their sexuality [8]. In Ireland LGBTQ+ hostility is also evident, for example in accusations of child sexualisation and abuse directed at libraries that provide LGBTQ+ books and resources [43].

3 Method

Our research responds to calls for Queer HCI to research positive elements of queer life [83]. In particular, we investigate how queer people define queer joy, and how they express it on social media platforms, with a view to providing recommendations as to how the expression of queer joy may be facilitated on social media. Acknowledging that privacy behaviours like self-censorship [77] may be barriers to expressions of joy, we also consider privacy as part of our research questions (see Table 1).

We conducted a mixed methods survey with 100 people, residing in the UK and Ireland, who identified as LGBTQ+ on the online crowdsourcing platform Prolific. The survey was distributed on the 30th of January 2024. The study was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework where the dataset is also archived[1]. Ethical approval was received from the University of Southampton (ref: 89469), University College Dublin (HS-LR-23-174-Steeds), and Northumbria University (project no. 5776).

3.1 Measures

Survey questions are summarised in Table 1.

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3.1.1 Initial Open Questions. Participants were asked four open questions regarding their definitions of queer joy and how it looks online (see Table 1, Q1-Q4).

3.1.2 Social Media Use Questions. Participants were asked to approximate how many hours they spent online outside of work (Q5), and whether they consider themselves to be a professional content creator (Q6). They were then asked to select the online platforms they do/have posted on (Q7); the options were: X (formerly Twitter); Facebook; Instagram; Tumblr; Reddit; Mastodon; BlueSky; Threads; TikTok; YouTube; Other (please specify). Participants were then asked to rank these same platforms from 1 to 11, where 1 was the best for facilitating queer joy and 11 was the worst (Q8).

3.1.3 Posting Queer Joy. Participants were asked if they had made any social media posts that focused on queer joy (Q9). Those who had, or reported that they may have done, were asked a series of questions about their posting behaviour (Q10a-Q13a) in which they selected platforms they had posted on about queer joy (from the same options as Q7), indicated if the platforms they had posted about queer joy on had changed over time (and if so, the factors impacting this, Q12a). Participants were then asked to indicate the extent to which their queer joy posts were posted to specific seven social groups, using a five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). Participants who reported not having made any queer joy-focused posts were asked why they had not done so (Q10b).

3.1.4 Privacy. Participants were asked 'As an LGBTQ+ person, how do you protect your privacy online?' (Q14). This was a multi-select question with the following options: restricting who can see my posts; Keeping separate accounts for different identities (*e.g.,* professional, personal, anonymous); Restricting who can interact with posts; blocking users; reporting users; redacting personal identifiers; using an online persona; other (please specify). They were also asked the open-ended question 'Do you have any other comments regarding how you protect your online privacy?' (Q15).

3.1.5 Demographics. Participants were asked to report their age, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in open text, and to indicate whether they identified as transgender (Q16-Q20).

Participants were asked to indicate their social class on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status [1, 55] (Q21). Scoring self as a 1 on the scale indicates feeling you are the worst off wealth wise, while a 10 represents being the best off. The question text read:

> Think of a ladder with 10 rungs. Each rung represents a different level of wealth.
> At the top of the ladder (rung 10) are the people who are the best off, those who have the most money, best education and most respected jobs.
> At the bottom of the ladder (rung 1) are the people who are the worst off, who have the least money, least education and least respected jobs or no job.
> Where would you place yourself on the ladder?.

Participants were also asked to complete an adaptation of the Nebraska Outness Scale (NOS, Q22) [52]. The question read:

> How often do you talk about topics related to or otherwise indicating your sexual orientation and/or

Table 1: Online survey questions, organised by research question. Original presentation order is indicated in the leftmost column, with the suffixes a and b indicating two routes through the survey depending on the response to Q9 (yes/maybe: route a; no: route b). Both routes resume at Q14 (there are no Q12-Q13 in the b route).

Preamble and Consent		
RQ1: How is queer joy defined, and what does it look like in online spaces?		
Q1	When you hear the term "Queer Joy" what does it make you think of?	open text
Q2	How would you define "Queer Joy"?	open text
Q3	What might a social media post exemplifying "Queer Joy" look like to you?	open text
RQ2: How do queer people engage with social media in relation to queer joy content?		
Q4	Have you made a post about Queer joy? If so please paste it or summarise it here.	open text
Q5	Approximately how many hours a week do you spend online (outside of work)?	open text
Q6	Do you consider yourself to be a professional content creator?	yes | no | unsure
Q7	Which of the following platforms do you or have you posted on?	checkbox/other
Q9	Have you made a post on any social media platform that focussed on Queer Joy?	yes | no | maybe
Q10b	If you don't post about queer joy on a given social media platform, why not?	open text
RQ3: Which social media platforms are perceived to facilitate the expression of queer joy?		
Q8	Please rank these platforms in terms of how well they facilitate sharing Queer Joy (where 1 is the best and 11 is the worst).	Rank order
Q10a	Which of the following platforms do you or have you posted on about Queer Joy?	checkbox/other
Q11a	Have the platforms you post about Queer Joy changed over time?	yes | no | unsure
Q12a	What factors impacted where you post about Queer Joy?	open text
Q13a	Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. When I make a post about Queer Joy I am posting to Close Family Extended Family Friends Strangers Other LGBTQ+ people Romantic and/or sexual partners Colleagues	7x 5-point scale
RQ4: How do queer people protect their privacy on social media platforms?		
Q14	As an LGBTQ+ person, how do you protect your privacy on social media?	checkbox/other
Q15	Do you have any other comments regarding how you protect your online privacy?	open text
Demographics		
Q16	How old are you in years?	open text
Q17	What is your gender?	open text
Q18	Do you identify as transgender?	yes | no | unsure | n.d.
Q19	How do you define your sexual orientation?	open text
Q20	What is your ethnicity?	open text
Q21	MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status	10-point scale
Q22	Nebraska Outness Scale (adapted)	5x 11-point scale
Closing		
Q23	Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this topic?	open text

gender identity (*e.g.,* talking about your significant other, changing your mannerisms and/or gender presentation) when interacting with members of these groups?.

The question was rephrased from the original scale in order to present the question positively. The groups were: Members of your immediate family (*e.g.,* parents and siblings); Members of your extended family (*e.g.,* aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins); People at your work/school (*e.g.,* co-workers, supervisors, instructors, students); Strangers (*e.g.,* someone you have a casual conversation with

in line at the store); People on social media or online platforms. We added this final group as we are particularly interested in social media interactions. This was rated on an 11-point scale where 1 was 'Never', 6 was 'About half the time', and 11 was 'Always'.

The final question of the survey was an open-ended question asking 'Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this topic?' (Q23).

3.2 Analysis

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics and the data was downloaded from there. It was run through a python script using the 'csv' library to reduce the dataset to only the relevant columns, and to convert scales into numerical values. All the participants had identified as LGBTQ+ when they signed up to be a participant on Prolific. Given this, we did not apply any further exclusion criteria based on survey responses, although we note that sexual orientation and gender identity can change over time [54, 70].

Demographic information was collected predominantly via open-text responses in order to allow the participants to self-identify as they felt most comfortable. As such, some terms (*e.g.*, "man" and "male") were grouped together and considered equivalent for the purposes of reporting participant demographics. The spelling of the term non-binary was also standardised for reporting purposes. Demographic information, and other categorical and ordinal responses, were then summarised using descriptive statistics.

A thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework was conducted over responses to the eight non-demographic open-text questions [12, 49]. An initial reading was conducted by five of the authors; these authors (referred to as coding authors) each read responses to between one and three questions. Coding authors noted their initial impressions and identified a set of initial codes. These initial impressions and codes were then shared amongst all authors.

The first author then read all response data, codes, and impressions, and assembled an initial set of themes for each research question. Finally, the first and second authors worked together to unify language across codes and themes resulting in the final themes as presented in this paper. As per reflexive thematic analysis, we did not strive to establish consensus between coders [13], rather we only standardised terminology where individual authors had generated similar themes with different names.

3.3 Participants

One hundred people residing in the UK and Ireland who had indicated on Prolific that they identified as LGBTQ+ participated in the study.

In terms of gender, 89 participants indicated they did not identify as trans(gender), 7 did identify as trans, 2 were unsure, and 2 preferred not to say. Of the participants who did not identify as trans, 63 identified as women, 22 identified as men, two identified as non-binary, one identified as a demigirl, and one identified as fluid[2]. Of those who did identify as trans, two indicated they were women, one identified as male, and another as a trans male, two identified as trans masc[3] non-binary, and one identified as agender.

[2]Likely meaning genderfluid, whereby one's gender identity varies
[3]Short for masculine

Table 2: The frequency of participant responses on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status.

Rung	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or 10
Frequency	1	3	11	22	23	22	14	4	0

The two participants who were unsure if they were trans identified as a woman, and as non-binary. Of those who preferred not to say if they were trans, one indicated they were a man, and one as non-binary but assigned as female at birth.

Participants were also asked to self-define their sexualities. 50 described themselves as bisexual, 16 identified as gay, 13 identified as lesbian, six identified as queer, three identified as straight or heterosexual, two identified as asexual, two as bisexual/pansexual, and two identified as pansexual. The following sexualities were identified by one participant each: lesbian (homoromantic demisexual); bi-curious; queer/bisexual; homosexual; and biromantic asexual. One participant preferred not to say. Of note, one of the bisexual participants caveated their entry by saying that as an autistic person, social labels don't hold much meaning for them.

The mean age of the participants was 31.96 years (standard deviation: 9.13). These ranged from 20 to 57, with a median age of 30 and an interquartile range of 25 – 36. On the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status [1, 55], the participants rated themselves as being between 1 and 8 (inclusive), with a mean rating of 5.05 (standard deviation: 1.50). The median score was 5 with an interquartile range of 4 to 6. The frequency of ratings can be seen in Table 2.

Participants also self-defined their ethnicity. 52 participants identified as white, 16 identified as white British, five participants identified as Caucasian, three participants identified as Chinese, two identified as Indian and two participants identified as mixed race. Other ethnic identities identified by a single participant were: White European; Pakistani; mixed race - Black Caribbean and White; White British/European; mixed White and Asian; White Irish; White Scottish; White Other; Black Caribbean and African; Korean; Black - British and Caribbean; White English; and Black. A further seven participants did not answer this question with an ethnicity, with five indicating they were British, one indicating they were Scottish and one indicating they were male.

The results from the NOS [52] can be seen in Figure 1. People on social media had the highest mean score, indicating they were the group participants were most out to, while extended family had the lowest mean score.

4 Results

4.1 RQ1: How is queer joy defined, and what does it look like in online spaces?

Q1-Q3 received 100, 98, and 99 responses respectively. From these, we identified five major themes: Self-expression, Community, Safety, Role models & representation, and Discomfort & uncertainty around terminology. These themes, and their sub-themes where identified, are depicted in Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes were not mutually exclusive; some responses were relevant to multiple themes and sub-themes.

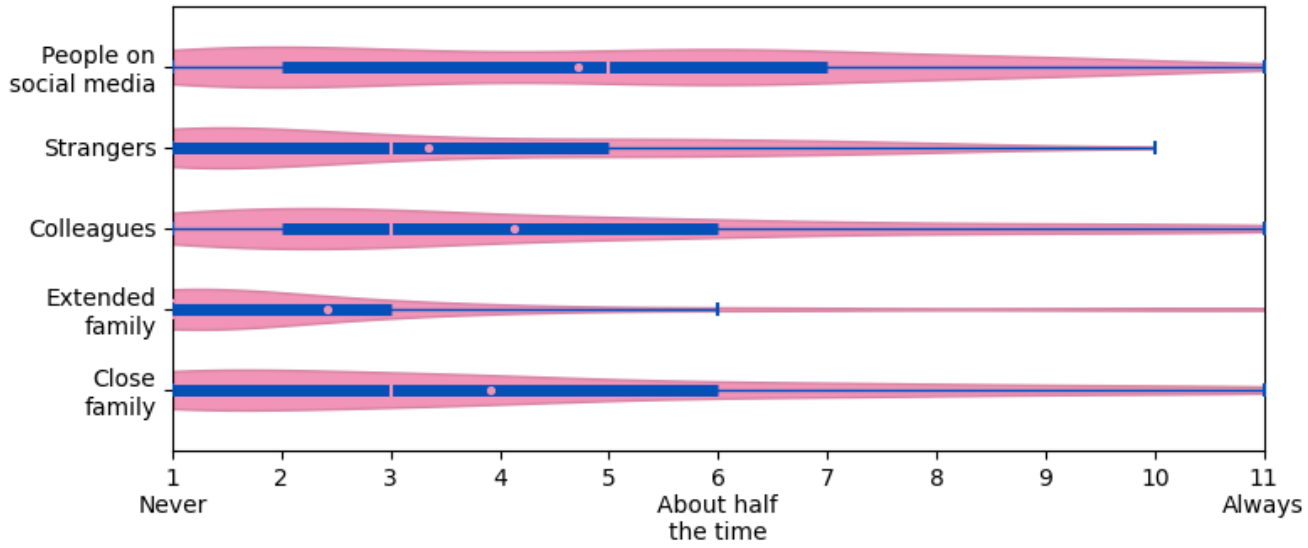

Figure 1: Nebraska Outness Scale (NOS) scores indicating how willing respondents were to discuss their sexuality with members of different social groups. A violin plot (pink) indicates the distribution of scores. The overlaid boxplot (blue) includes the median (pink vertical line), mean (pink dot), with whiskers representing 1.5x the interquartile range.

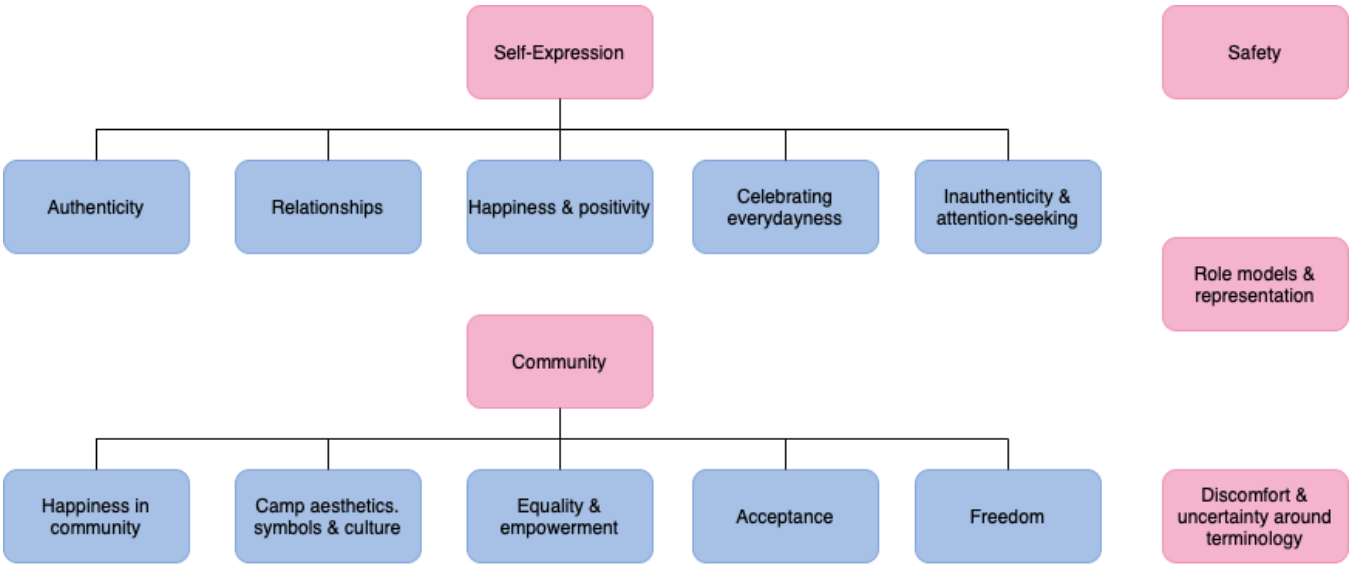

Figure 2: Themes pertaining to RQ1: How is queer joy defined, and what does it look like in online spaces?

4.1.1 Self-expression. Comments relating to identity and self-expression were elicited in response to all three questions. Within these, we identified five sub-themes: Authenticity, Relationships, Happiness & positivity, Celebrating everydayness, and Inauthenticity & attention-seeking. This theme and subthemes were diverse in content, but generally encapsulated elements of queer life that are visible to those outside the community. While many of these were depicted in a positive light, this was not always the case, and some elements of self-expression were seen as negative.

Authenticity: Responses to all three questions indicated that participants saw queer joy as a form of happiness that stemmed from an individual's identity and their expression of that identity (*"Something that makes my sexuality happy and heard"* [P53: Q1]; *"Existing and living authentically and happily as oneself in a heteronormative world"* [P29: Q2]). The word authentic (or some variant thereof) was present in responses to all three questions (*"Queer people being able to celebrate happiness in being their authentic selves"* [P79: Q1]; *"The*

feeling of happiness and euphoria of living authentically as a queer person" [P94: Q2]; *"…LGBTQ+ individuals…expressing authenticity, love, and inclusivity"* [P76: Q3]). These expressions of authenticity could take place both within/to queer communities (*"Being able to openly express yourself and hanging out with other people that are queer - going to events or drag shows, for example"* [P66: Q2]; *"The joy you have in being able to celebrate, enjoy, and completely embody your sexuality, both as individuals and as a collective…"* [P1: Q2]) and in wider social and societal contexts (*"People being themselves while living in society, showing that queer people are regular people and have every right to live a regular life like everyone else"* [P82: Q3]). However, responses also noted that proud and authentic expressions of identity could be challenging in the context of social media (*e.g.,* censorship, shadow banning): *"Something that celebrates the people, all the joy and wonderful things being queer and expressing yourself does, and it's hard to do on social media, but celebrating the sexuality part of being queer too! Queer joy shouldn't be sanitised and de-sexualised or de-politicised."* [P1: Q3].

Relationships: Seventeen participants noted that representations of relationships, particularly romantic relationships, could typify queer joy (*"Couples being happy, maybe celebrating an anniversary"* [P91: Q3]). These joyful representations of non-normative relationships could also act as a form of resistance in the face of marginalization and prejudice (*"A queer couple holding hands or kissing, or smiling wide in the face of bigots"* [P67: Q3]).

Happiness & positivity: Responses indicating that queer joy pertains to happiness were along the lines of *"The purest of joy"* [P19: Q2], or *"Everyone in society being genuinely happy/ content"* [P77: Q2]. Relatedly, posts that captured happy people (as per P67's *"smiling wide"* above) were felt to be good portrayals of queer joy (*"A diverse group of people, no gender stereotypes, together outside in the sunshine, laughing, picnicking"* [P81: Q3]). Whilst some such descriptions appear to be quite visual, others simply refer to feelings of happiness and positive stories involving queer people (*"Highlighting feel-good stories of queer people." [P63: Q3]*).

Celebrating everydayness: Eleven responses to Q3 noted that queer joy could be exemplified through posts that centred the normal, everyday lives of queer individuals (*"Any post that openly celebrates a person's queer sexuality in some way or another in a joyful fashion as if it is natural, normal and nothing to hide."* [P88: Q3]). These responses also highlighted the acceptance of queerness as normal (*"Showing examples of queer joy in the everyday life, showing that it is not a far out idea or existence."* [P29: Q3]).

Inauthenticity & attention-seeking: Four participants highlighted how queer joy social media posts might be self-serving and performative. These included posts that drew too heavily from stereotypes, (*"Overly dramatized queer people" [P3: Q3]*) and/or individuals who posted about their identity to gain online influence and/or attention (*"An irritating person capitalising on a minor aspect of their identity and using it to get attention online"* [P87: Q3]).

4.1.2 Community. Ideas relating to the LGBTQ+ community were also highly prevalent within responses to all three questions. Within these, we identified five sub-themes: Happiness in community; Camp aesthetics, symbols & culture; Equality & empowerment; Acceptance; and Freedom. This theme and its sub-themes speak to collective events and experiences that relate to the LGBTQ+ community, rather than the personal experiences, relationships and friendships that were reflected in the theme of self-expression.

Happiness in community: This theme represents communal joy and the joy of others as being key to the concept of queer joy. Participants expressed how queer joy could be found in expressions of happiness and *"Good news in the community, for the community, about the community that makes me feel warm and happy"* [P72: Q3]. This could be moments of progress or celebration affecting groups (*"A happiness felt by someone towards the LGBTQ community when something good happens for the community itself"* [P13: Q2]) or individuals. Participants found joy in the self-expression (*"Self-expression and celebration of the diversity of the queer community"* [P96: Q1]) and happiness of others (*"queer people succeeding and being happy!! seeing that and sharing that feeling of joy with them"* [P39: Q1]). Thus, social media posts that relate queer joy have a consequent effect on the other queer social media users (*"…makes me stop doom scrolling, smile and or have a spontaneous emotional response"* [P71: Q3]).

Camp aesthetics, symbols & culture: This subtheme reflects participants' discussion of emblematic representations of queer joy; positive depictions that were recognised both within and beyond queer communities. This subtheme was reflected in 31 Q3 responses and included adjectives referencing to colour and aesthetic style (*"Joyful, colourful, camp"* [P6: Q3]), and imagery commonly considered to be symbolic of/within LGBTQ+ communities (*"Probably a stereotypical image along with a rainbow flag or something that highlights being queer"* [P84: Q3]). Others referenced queer media (*"Someone posting about the winner of RuPaul's Drag Race?"* [P59: Q3]) or clothing (*"An excited text post about someones first skirt, first binder, first hrt appointment, or maybe pictures of them in that first piece of gender affirming clothing, smiling…."* [P42: Q3]).

Equality & empowerment: This subtheme particularly reflects historical and current political activism and milestones in LGBTQ+ lives, as well as expressions and experiences of personal empowerment. Participants found joy in the progress made towards liberation, equality and representation for members of the queer community (*"Feeling joy about the progress towards equality for the LGBTQ community"* [P62]; *"More equality for Queer people"* [P48: Q1]; *"Euphoria over the queer community being perceived in the way in which you wish it to be perceived"* [P4: Q2]). Others felt that queer joy captured feelings of pride and empowerment (*"People that are lgbt+ feeling proud of their identities"* [P45: Q2]; *""Queer Joy" encompasses the celebration, liberation, and empowerment experienced within the LGBTQ+ community, embracing diversity and authenticity"* [P76: Q2]).

Acceptance: Self-expression (see Section 4.1.1) took place in the context of a community that was seen to be accepting and non-judgemental (*""Queer Joy" is the happiness of embracing your sexuality and being part of a community where you can be your true self without being judged"* [P96: Q2]; *"The innate joy that comes from being a part of a community and feeling loved accepted and free"* [P20: Q2]). This subtheme pairs strongly with the self-expression theme and highlights that while self-expression part of queer joy, it is paramount that self-expression is met positively.

Freedom: As indicated in the above quote from P20, feelings of equality, empowerment, and acceptance were often interrelated, and could bring or sit alongside feelings of freedom. However, we included freedom as its own theme, as it also represented the ability to be oneself beyond validation from peers or legislature. This freedom itself was seen as a manifestation of queer joy (*"People live how they want with whoever they love"* [P43: Q2]).

4.1.3 Safety. Thirty-eight responses to Q1 highlighted the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people, resulting feelings of fear, and/or the need for safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people. We summarised this as safety both in terms of recognising where safety can be found but also the lack of it. Similar sentiments were expressed in responses to Q2. Here, queer joy was presented as something that emerged in spite of oppression, (*"The cultural collection of things, places and people that showcase happiness for and within the queer community, who have and continue to suffer discrimination as an oppressed minority in society"* [P74: Q1]) or as an absence of bigotry, discrimination and fear (*"Queer people being able to express themselves authentically without fear. Things like Ballroom come to mind"* [P2: Q1]; *"Not having to fight against bigotry, just being able to exist in harmony"* [P79: Q2]; *"Queer people being authentically themselves (dressing how they want etc.) together without fear of persecution or judgement, happy in their sense of community"* [P20: Q3]). Thus, queer joy was perceived as a feeling of safety or comfort (*"...not being uncomfortable"* [P26: Q2]), and/or created safe spaces (*"Safe spaces away from hetero spaces, where everyone is free to be themselves and be free in their queer experiences without fetishization or judgement"* [P67: Q1]).

4.1.4 Role models & representation. This theme was expressed in responses to Q2 and Q3, and referenced positive depictions of real and/or fictional individuals. We differentiate this from community, as it includes fictional representations or identifies individual experiences of those who are not necessarily known to the participants. For example, *"Positive representations and feel good stories"* [P7: Q2], and *"Likely going to those events or enjoying seeing a relationship that looks like mine reflected in television (even though the Bury Your Gays trope still reigns)"* [P9: Q2]. This included athletes (*"female football players that are celebrating with a pride flag"* [P34: Q3]), actors (*"Sarah Paulson and Holland Taylor doing jsut [sic] about anything"* [P11: Q3]) and those who may not necessarily be in the public eye (*"Examples of personal stories of success or going against the odds, from queer people"* [P15: Q3]).

4.1.5 Discomfort & uncertainty around terminology. A small number of responses to Q1 ($n = 8$) and Q2 ($n = 1$) related participants' understanding of, or feelings towards, the term queer Joy. Of these, eight indicated they had not come across the term before, with some speculating as to what it may meant (*'I don't know what this term is, I guess it means the joy of being queer'* [P98: Q1]). Three responses indicated a dislike of the term 'Queer' due to its use as a slur against the LGBTQ+ community, with one referring to the word as *"a wannabe term"* [P75: Q1]. This theme also raises the potential issue of academic terminology ('queer joy' having been discussed in academia since at least 2022 [62]) not being in line with the wider LGBTQ+ community. This may then limit the extent to which others engage with research under this name, and may to an extent explain the low numbers of participants in our study identifying as posting queer joy.

4.2 RQ2: How do queer people engage with social media in relation to queer joy content?

Participants reported spending a mean of 22.25 hours per week online outside of work (Q5; standard deviation: 12.59 hours; minimum: 4 hours; maximum: 60 hours; median: 20 hours; interquartile range of 12.75 – 30 hours). Few participants within our sample identified as a professional content creator (Q6). Responses to these questions are summarised in Table 3.

The most posted-to platform (Q7) was Instagram which was currently, or previously, used by 91 participants. The second most posted-to platform was Facebook ($n = 72$), followed by X (formerly Twitter)($n = 66$), Reddit and TikTok ($n = 42$), YouTube ($n = 41$), and Tumblr ($n = 33$). Lesser posted-to platforms were Threads, Bluesky, and Mastodon, with seven, six and six participants posting to them respectively. One participant also indicated that they posted to another platform (specifically "Grindr").

Q4 and Q10b received 87 and 74 responses respectively. From these, we identified four major themes: Not posting about Queer Joy, Relational joy, Affirmation & representation, and Community empowerment. These themes, and their sub-themes where identified, are depicted in Figure 3. Themes and sub-themes were not mutually exclusive; some responses were relevant to multiple themes and sub-themes.

4.2.1 Not posting about Queer Joy. Most participants ($n = 64$) gave responses to Q4 indicating they had not posted about queer joy with no further elaboration or qualification (*i.e.,* responses such as *"I have not"* [P3: Q4], *"I do not believe I have"* [P26: Q4], and *"not that i can recall"* [P54: Q4]). Eleven further responses indicated that the participant had not posted about queer joy with some elaboration, for example indicating an emotion (*"I have not :("* [P9: Q4]), and/or stating behaviours they do/don't undertake on social media (*"I haven't made a post about queer joy sadly. However in Pride Month I often post from the perspective of a bisexual woman being in what looks like a hetero relationship; but how the person I am with (a man) does not mean I am now 'straight'. I find the joy in being bi, and nothing can take away from that and the pride I feel."* [P78: Q4]). These elaborations were not analysed further as participants were specifically asked about non-posting behaviours later on (Q10b). One participant expressed uncertainly (*"Unsure"* [P63: Q4]), whilst

Table 3: A table indicating whether participants post about queer joy online, organised by whether they consider themselves to be a professional content creator.

Professional Content Creator	Post about Queer Joy	Frequency	Total
Yes	Yes	2	4
	No	1	
	Maybe	1	
No	Yes	7	91
	No	72	
	Maybe	12	
Unsure	Yes	0	5
	No	4	
	Maybe	1	

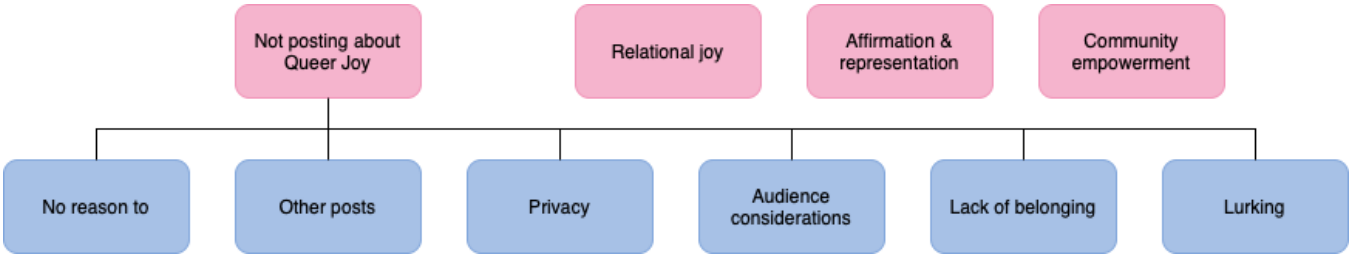

Figure 3: Themes pertaining to RQ2: How do queer people engage with social media in relation to queer joy content?

another responded *"Not necessarily, I put my wedding photos on social media, which i hope would spark queer joy in someone!"* [P90: Q4], suggesting that while they don't intentionally post about queer joy, their posts may still be considered as such by others. This again may be reflective of the use of the term queer joy in academia not being commonly used by the wider community. Had the question been posed differently, more participants may have indicated they did post this kind of content, even if they did not recognise it to be 'queer joy' content.

There was a small difference between the number of participants who indicated that they had not posted about queer joy in Q4 (n = 75, plus n = 13 non-responses), and the n = 91 who answered "no" in the categorical question Q9. Of those who responded "no" to Q9, 74 answered Q10b. These responses were grouped into six subthemes: No reason to, Other posts, Privacy, Audience considerations, Lack of belonging and Lurking.

No reason to: Sixteen participants indicated that they did not post about queer joy because, in one way or another, they did not need to. This subtheme reflects that queer joy is not necessarily considered important to post by some participants, and that while it has value to some in the queer community, this is not universal. Three participants (one woman-heterosexual, one woman-bicurious and one man who preferred not to say his sexuality) said that was because they were not queer (*"...I am not part of the LGBT community"* [P5: Q10b]"). Others indicated that they simply had no reason, opportunity, or need to (*"Opportunity and reason has not occurred"* [P3: Q10b]). Similarly, some felt they had no need to identify themselves on social media by this identity (*"Because I don't feel like I need to identify myself online through queer joy."* [P46: Q10b]).

Other posts: Thirteen participants indicated that their social media posts focussed on other topics. Similar to the prior theme, this reflects the potential lack of value seen by participants in posting queer joy, but goes further to identify elements they place more value on posting. For one this was because other identities took precedence for them (*"It's never occurred to me. my primary identity is autistic and mixed race and that's what I concentrate on..."* [P81: Q10b]). For some their social media posts were largely related to their occupation rather than their identity (*"I don't make many posts these days that aren't promoting my business"* [P79: Q10b]). Some posted about their lives but not in a way they considered to be about queer joy (*"I don't feel that I have anything to add to the subject. I post about my own joy, but I wouldn't say that was conveying a message of queer joy specifically."* [P69: Q10b]).

Privacy: Twelve participants indicated that they do not post online due to privacy considerations. Some indicated that this was because they keep their personal lives offline (*"I don't share much of my personal life online"* [P14: Q10b]). For others they stated explicitly that they were private about these topics (*"I dont use social media I am a private person"* [P15: Q10b]).

Audience considerations: Fourteen respondents indicated that who their audience was, or how their audience would respond to such a post, played a role in why they would not post about queer joy. We differentiate this theme from the prior, as it speaks to a level of self-protection from hostile groups, rather than a more general wish to not share personal

details online. Some highlighted that such content would not be relevant to their audience on social media (*"The majority of my social media is family and work and i don't think this would be relevant to them."* [P4: Q10b]). Of these, six participants indicated that there were potential concerns around bigotry or lack of acceptance from their audience which made them hesitant to post about queer joy. For some this was a hypothetical fear (*"...bigots seem to run rampant on social media."* [P17: Q10b]) but for others, they knew that their audience on social media would respond negatively (*"I have family following me on social media that disapprove of this."* [P21: Q10b]). There were further indications that sharing of queer-related content may be platform specific (*"I am less likely to share a queer post on Facebook"* [P24: Q10b]) or as a response to queer posts rather than the initiation of a queer post (*"...I tend to join in discussions / comment sections on queer joy / queer community."* [P28: Q10b]).

Lack of belonging: Five participants indicated that they may feel like they do not belong in the queer community and as such do not post queer content. Notably all of these participants indicated they identified (to some extent) as bisexual. One participant said *"...Being bisexual I have often been pilloried by other queer people (women) for being so, so don't really feel included in the community"* [P81: Q10b]. This reflects previous research findings of biphobia from within the queer community [61].

Lurking: Sixteen participants indicated that they prefer to "lurk" online rather than post themselves. As such this leads to a lack of posts relating to being queer as while they have social media, they prefer to observe (*"I don't really post on anything. I'm more of a lurker."* [P45: Q10b]).

Eleven responses to Q4 described posts that participants had made about queer joy. These were grouped into the remaining three themes.

4.2.2 Relational joy. This theme reflects relationships with people known to the poster as an element of queer joy. Six responses described posts that depicted relationships: attending events with friends/partners (*"Attended trans pride with my friends. Posted on Instagram"* [P24: Q4]) or about celebrating queer love (*"I have made a post with my partner being celebrating our love"* [P95: Q4]).

4.2.3 Affirmation & representation. Four participants highlighted posts that brought joy by affirming their identities, such as *"...i posted a screenshot of a voice app, showing that my voice was firmly in the male/masculine range, and some text accompanying it about how happy that made me (and also me using yhe [sic] term 'egg' wrong, because i was new)"* [P42: Q4].

4.2.4 Community empowerment. Two participants described posts that highlighted advances or successes for and within the community. We differentiate this from 'relational joy' as while it relates to other people, it is content involving people beyond the poster's personal acquaintances. For example, *"I did regarding gay men being able to donate blood in Scotland which could not previously"* [P48: Q4].

Table 4: The mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum (min), maximum (max), median response score indicating the extent to which participants agree that they post queer joy content to each group (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree). Partners was qualified as romantic and/or sexual partners.

Group	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Median
Close Family	2.19	1.36	1	5	2
Extended Family	2.19	1.47	1	5	1
Friends	4.33	0.97	1	5	5
Strangers	3.90	1.00	1	5	4
Other LGBTQ+ people	4.57	0.51	4	5	5
Partners	3.57	0.93	2	5	3
Colleagues	2.24	1.04	1	4	2

4.3 RQ3: Which social media platforms are perceived to facilitate the expression of queer joy?

Participants were asked to rank social media platforms in regards to how well they facilitate sharing queer joy. If a participant opted not to change a platform's rank, the default rank would be submitted. The results of this can be seen in Figure 4, where the default rank is represented by the green dot, and the bars represent the mean rank given by the participants. The difference between the default rank and mean rank indicates that TikTok and YouTube were generally ranked five ranks below their default. This suggests that they were seen as good at facilitating sharing queer joy, whereas X (formerly Twitter) were on average moved four ranks higher, indicating they are worse for facilitating queer joy. Instagram was generally kept near its default rank of three, indicating that participants felt this was an appropriate ranking (or that they opted not to engage with ranking that platform). This data highlights that not all platforms are considered equal in terms of facilitating queer joy. Specifically, it appears as though platforms that afford photographs and videos are seen as more facilitative.

Of the participants who posted about queer joy ($n = 9$) or were unsure if they posted about queer joy ($n = 14$), thirteen indicated that the platforms they posted about queer joy on changed over time. Four indicated the platforms had not changed over time, and the remaining six participants who were asked this question were unsure. The participants were asked which platforms they posted queer joy content to. Of the 23, 11 posted to X (formerly Twitter), 8 posted to Facebook, 11 posted to Instagram, 5 posted to Tumblr, 2 posted to Reddit, and 3 posted to TikTok. None of the participants posted queer joy content to YouTube, Mastodon, BlueSky, Threads or another platform.

Likert responses to Q13a described the social groups that individuals posted queer joy content to and are presented in Table 4. The group most frequently posted to was other LGBTQ+ people, followed by friends, then strangers. Colleagues were the least posted to, with close family and extended family being tied (in terms of means) as the second least posted to.

An open text question captured the factors impacting where participants post about queer joy (Q12a), receiving 13 responses.

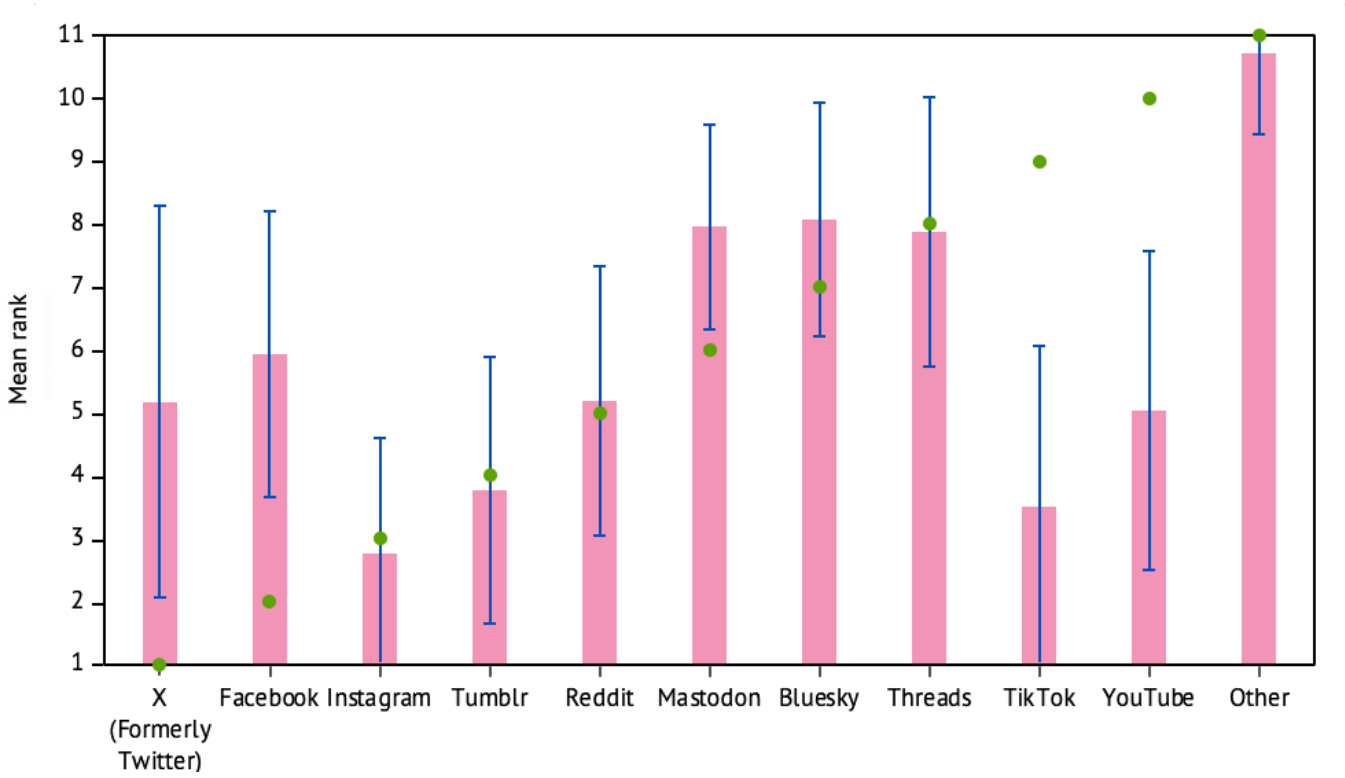

Figure 4: Mean rankings of how well a platform facilitates the sharing of queer joy. The bars represent the mean participant score, error bars represent the standard deviation, and green dots represent the default rank.

From these, we identified two major themes: Audience, and General usage patterns. Themes and sub-themes were not mutually exclusive and are depicted in Figure 5.

One participant response did not fit into any of these themes, but described their curation practices when reposting queer joy content from other users: *"... Typically I would need the post to be authentic and genuine from a reliable source who is queer themselves."* [P77: Q12a].

4.3.1 Audience. Eleven responses fit into the theme of Audience, within which we identified three sub-themes: Visibility, Receptiveness, and Platform.

Visibility: This theme pertains to not posting queer joy content due to not wishing to be seen by an audience. Four responses described decision-making on the basis of who their posts would be visible to. For example, one participant indicated that *"mainly i post where family cant see as I'm afraid that if they see my queerness they wont accept me"* [P16: Q12a].

Receptiveness: We differentiate this theme from the former, as it focuses on posting to the right audience rather than not wishing to be visible. Six responses indicated that where participants posted depended on how well they felt those types of posts would be received by the platform's audience (*"Knowing the range of followers I have on different media and who would be more receptive"* [P48: Q12a]).

Platform: Responses in this theme highlight the consideration of the platform itself, instead of and/or in conjunction with who else uses that platform. Seven responses referenced platforms (or their owners/founders) on which they were more or less, likely to post queer joy content (*"the viewership - with instagram its more intentional and 'curated' whereas on tiktok and twitter its random and spontaneous which is often not carefully 'curated'"* [P95: Q12a]). Three of these responses specifically mentioned X (formerly Twitter) or its owner Elon Musk as a platform they would not post queer joy content to.

4.3.2 Usage patterns. Two participants reported that their broader usage patterns determined the platforms to which they would make posts about queer joy: *"My personal own usage of certain social media platforms. I use TikTok more than Instagram so more of my posts go there in general."* [P74: Q12a], and *"Which social media accounts I use and the community on them"* [P86: Q12a].

4.4 RQ4: How do queer people protect their privacy on social media platforms?

Motivated by a potential tension between privacy and expressions of queer joy, we asked participants how they protected their privacy online (Q14). 62 participants indicated they restrict who can see their posts, 38 keep separate accounts for different identities, 43

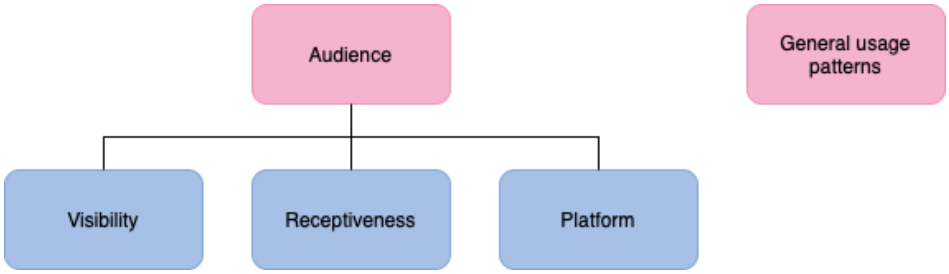

Figure 5: Themes pertaining to RQ3: Which social media platforms are perceived to facilitate the expression of queer joy?

restrict who can interact with their posts, 59 block users, 47 report users, twenty redact personal identifiers, nineteen use an online persona, and eight indicated other methods of protecting their privacy. Of the eight that indicated they use other methods, six provided more detail. Three indicated that they make a limited number of posts about their life and/or the topic of queer joy, one stated they have private accounts, and one indicated that '[They] don't hide anything'. The final participant indicated that they don't specifically do anything online because of their sexual orientation, and that the previously listed precautions were sensible for anyone to undertake and not in anyway specific to the LGBTQ+ community.

An open text question solicited other comments about how participants protected their online privacy (Q15), receiving 22 responses. From these, we identified four major themes: Restrict visibility, Restrict content, Limit Use and Responses to hostility. Themes and sub-themes were not mutually exclusive and are depicted in Figure 6.

4.4.1 Restrict visibility. The theme 'restrict content' contained four sub-themes: Avoiding platforms, Privacy controls, Block individuals and Other technology barriers.

Avoiding platforms: Consistent with the Platform theme described in Section 4.3.1, avoiding specific platforms was noted by four participants and contained sentiments such as *"I stopped posting on twitter..."* [P1: Q15]. One participant described how they had adopted platforms that *"people are slow to move to"* [P9: Q15], noting that as and when their platform became more visible to others, they would *"join a server that doesn't federate with Meta so that people using Threads can't see me"* [P9: Q15].

Privacy controls: Affirming some of the more popular options from Q14, four participants described their use of privacy controls provided within social media platforms (*"Having a private account" [P25*: Q15]).

Block individuals: Also repeating sentiments from Q14, two responses indicated that they block some users. For example, *"...I don't do much but block certain people"* [P75: Q15].

Other technology barriers: One participant described how they used technology outside of the social networks to create technology barriers that maintained their privacy: *"I always use a VPN..."* [P49: Q15].

4.4.2 Restrict content. The theme 'restrict content' contained four sub-themes: Being bland, Omitting personal information, Multiple profiles, and Lurking.

Being bland: Two participants described how they sought to ensure that their social media pages were bland. For example, *"I am aware that my online persona is reviewed when looking for work opportunities etc so I try not to have anything/stay bland online."* [P4: Q15].

Omitting personal information: Eight responses indicated that participants were making conscious decisions not to share specific types of personally-identifying information: *"Don't share too much personal info"* [P50: Q15], and *"By not using it much and never posting any photos or videos inside my home"* [P55: Q15].

Multiple profiles: One participant described use of multiple personae that were used differently: *"I have two online personae, and use them both for different things"* [P12: Q15].

Lurking: One participant described how they used social media as a read-only platform: *"I am a long time internet lurker. I simply do not interact."* [P24: Q15].

4.4.3 Limit use. Two responses described indicated that they protected by limiting their use of social media: *"Limited use"* [P12: Q15] and *"By not using it much..."* [P55: Q15].

4.4.4 Responses to hostility. Three responses specifically referred to instances or trends of hostility on social media, and the impact this had on their privacy behaviour. This response took the form of a withdrawal (*"I stopped posting on twitter because it's a hate platform now"* [P1: Q15]) or general tightening of control (*"I have protected it more in recent years, as the internet has begun to feel more specifically hostile to queer people."* [P92: Q15]).

5 Discussion

This study examined how queer joy is expressed on social media via an online survey with 100, UK-based individuals. While the survey was diverse in its topics, there were consistent trends and themes throughout. We discuss these here, focusing on reoccurring themes.

5.1 Self-Expression

The theme of self-expression emerged in response to **RQ1** (how is queer joy defined and what does it look like). This emphasis on self-expression echoes the findings of previous work whereby online platforms are used to express and gain visibility for their identities [10, 17, 39]. Within self-expression were a broad array of sub-themes. One of these was "celebrating everydayness" which has been identified as a facet of queer joy in contexts outside of

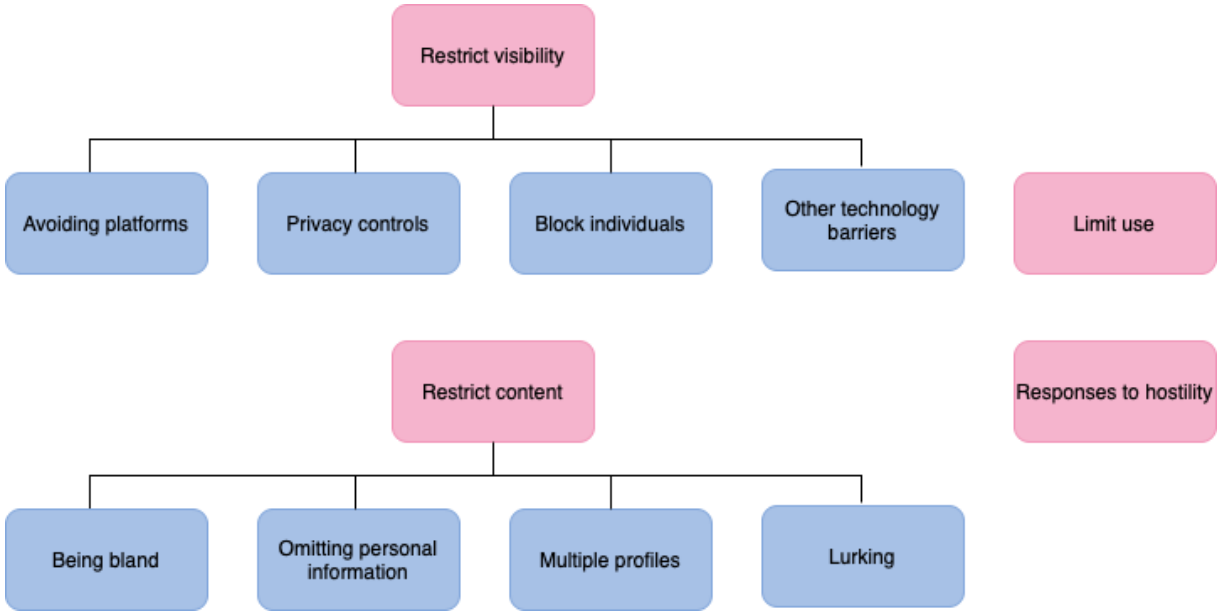

Figure 6: Themes pertaining to RQ4: How do queer people protect their privacy on social media platforms?

social media as well [15]. This speaks to the import of celebrating everyday life, particularly when queer lives are politicised and simple inclusive acts such as supplying LGBTQ+ literature in libraries results harassment of staff [43]. This supports the design tenets set out by To et al. [85], about designing for flourishing in the everyday, and suggests that such design practices can facilitate joy. The issue of politicisation of LGBTQ+ lives was also reflected in the 'equality and empowerment' subtheme, which was also commonly identified as part of queer joy.

However, self-expression was sometimes perceived as inauthentic. Some participants expressed a dislike of people performatively highlighting elements of their identity for the perceived goal of attention. This reflects the concept of 'personal identity economics', which highlights how some on social media use elements of identity for economic gain [47]. As such, while for some their LGBTQ+ identity is something they like to emphasise on social media, others have reservations over the motivation behind such self-expression. Additionally, when reporting their sexuality one participant expressed that as an autistic person, they did not value social labels. This highlights a notable issue that not all people feel fully represented by labels, and at times may not wish to settle on a single label due to the fluid nature of identity [70]. However, our participant's statement also reflects that some labels may be seen as more important than others, and there are many facets of identity that are joyfully expressed online. This is similarly reflected in the theme of 'Other Posts' in response to why participants did not post queer joy. Thus, while self-expression is important in joy, this is not limited to just expressing queer identities.

Promoting queer joy via self-expression may also be hard to implement in social media spaces. While authentic self-expression online is associated with better well-being [5], such expression can leave queer people at risk of harassment and abuse [16]. Peer pressure and a need to conform, can also impact self-presentation and expression online [20, 22]. Further, algorithmic bias can lead to content creators "flattening" their identities and only highlighting certain elements [23], limiting self-expression. Therefore, to facilitate queer joy, further work is required to understand how self-expression can be supported both algorithmically, and socially.

5.2 Community (Empowerment)

The theme of community and community empowerment was also identified as being important to queer joy in response to **RQ1** and **RQ2**. Community connectedness positively correlates with well-being for LGBTQ+ people of all ethnicities [66] supporting the importance highlighted by our participants. Similarly affirmation and representation, which emerged in relation to **RQ2** (how do queer people engage with social media), reflects prior research regarding the role of community in online spaces in identity affirmation [10, 16, 18, 76]. Facilitating community engagement and empowerment to promote queer joy may in tandem help to promote self-expression by facilitating acceptance – another facet of queer joy.

However, LGBTQ+ community is not always cohesive. The theme *lack of belonging*, highlights that while the queer community is often treated as a single, cohesive group, this is not necessarily the case. Our results contribute to existing reports of hostility between some groups of LGBTQ+ users, confirming previous research has highlighting biphobia within the queer community [61]. Previous research has also noted acephobia (a prejudicial attitude to asexual/aromantic individuals) and transphobia within the LGBTQ+ community [61, 98]. Even in the absence of deliberate hostility, previous research has demonstrated that platforms for queer users can promote normative and exclusionary categorizations of queerness, *e.g.*, by promoting specific archetypes of queerness such as

butchness, and by excluding trans, bisexual or asexual individuals [60]. Thus, platforms that seek to foster and facilitate the posting of queer joy need to critically reflect on how diversity within the queer community can be fostered. This includes, and extends beyond, the digital account creation processes and information users provide to describe their identities to the platform and other users [29, 60]. Homewood et al. [38] highlight the benefit of acting as a 'killjoy' of affirmative atmospheres when designing. They emphasise the need to remind fellow designers to critically think about the assumptions and exclusions occurring from their design choices, even when it can lead to difficult conversations. In the context of queer spaces, our research indicates this also needs to occur to prevent over homogenisation of the queer community, and only designing for stereotypes and archetypes within the community. Alternatively, platforms may emerge for use by specific queer populations, particularly those that are excluded or subject to hateful and prejudicial behaviour from other LGBTQ+ users (*e.g.,* trans users [34]), or support users in setting boundaries and or soliciting specific kinds of engagement/engagement from specific groups of users [89]. Such platforms would support the expression of queer joy, however, as previous research notes, steps would need to be taken to prevent these becoming 'queer vortexes' [18].

Notably as well, a minority of participants highlighted their dislike of the term 'queer' given its history. Indeed, research from 2023 highlights that the term is currently seen as reclaimed by some and a slur for others [99]. Thus, while as an academic community we have embraced the concept of Queer HCI [80, 83], not all participants may feel enthused about engaging with this term due to its history [99]. As such, when conducting research in this space, it is important to be sensitive to this point of view, and ensure participants are being engaged in research using terminology that is comfortable for them.

5.3 Audience

The audience who would see queer joy content was the major consideration for our participants, and was a theme or sub-theme in response to **RQ2** and **RQ3**. The quantitative data indicated that participants predominantly posted content to other LGBTQ+ people. The quantitative and qualitative data both reflected not necessarily posting to family and one participant specifically highlighted that this was related to the issue of not being accepted by family. These findings support prior work regarding self-censorship of queer people on social media [16, 27, 77]. This further highlights that context collapse can be an issue for LGBTQ+ people [19, 87]. From a design standpoint, context collapse may be difficult to prevent entirely. However, considerations could be made to help support *controlled* context collapse. This could help queer people use online platforms in a way that gives them agency over the visibility of their identity.

Audience considerations were also reflected in relation to which platforms were seen to facilitate queer joy. Notably despite 11 participants reporting posting queer joy to X (formerly Twitter), three participants referenced it as a platform they would not post queer joy to, following its acquisition by Elon Musk. This mirrors the debate among Black Twitter [4] (X) users regarding whether their community should remain on the platform or move to another platform [88]. This highlights the awareness of social media platform reputation on whether certain groups feel it is able to facilitate their interactions and discourse. Further, there is empirical evidence that hate speech increased on Twitter/X after it was purchased by Musk [36], demonstrating why queer and otherwise marginalised users would wish to leave the platform. Recent changes to Twitter (X) in late 2024 have only exacerbated the exodus from the platform with Bluesky (which had a low uptake in our sample at the time of the study) being the popular choice of replacement platform [63]. Thus, platforms that wish to facilitate joyful expressions need to be conscious of the perceived platform reputation, and utilise appropriate moderation techniques to prevent harm.

5.4 Safety and Privacy

Even in questions eliciting definitions of queer joy, concepts of safety and experiences of marginalisation were brought up. This is consistent with prior descriptions of joy a resistance [62] that emerges despite and alongside negativity [4]. Although our explicit goal with this research was to centre joy, queer joy co-exists and interacts with marginalization, leading our participants to reference safety and privacy both as a barrier to, and in their definitions of, joy: *"A queer couple holding hands or kissing, or smiling wide in the face of bigots"* [P67: Q3].

Correspondingly, discussions of how platforms facilitated queer joy led some users to identify a need to promote safety by avoiding certain platforms as discussed in section 5.3. This was attributed both to hostility expressed by other users of a specific platform (or platforms in general), or perceived risk and/or value mismatch associated with the ownership and identity of a platform. Fear of hostility from other users reflects the model of minority stress [31, 53], which highlights the processes through which minority groups experience stress originating from prejudice and stigma. The increase in privacy behaviours in expectation of rejection or prejudice reflects the 'Minority Stress Processes (proximal)' in the model [53]. Participants also implicated ownership as a factor that influenced their perceptions of online platforms, in particular Twitter/X and its owner Elon Musk. Similar fears about ownership and values have been noted by LGBTQ+ users of TikTok [74], both in terms of safety and of mismatched morals.

When asked specifically about queer people's privacy mitigations, participants reported diverse online privacy behaviours. Many of these amounted to some form of (individual) selective visibility (Figure 6), mirroring the audience considerations discussed in previous sections. Privacy controls were used in differing combinations, and varied by platform. However, as highlighted by one participant, the reported practices were not unique to LGBTQ+ people, but are instead sensible for anyone to undertake. Thus our findings both indicate that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to queer privacy (the queer community is not a homogenous entity) and that, while the risks may be higher [69], meeting the privacy

[4] defined as "a heterogeneous Black discourse collective, bound by certain cultural and digital commonplaces in pursuit of similar and sometimes competing goals, which may include political action." [14, p.87]

needs of queer users (*e.g.,* through the provision of more granular controls [34]) addresses those of others.

Our original inclusion of privacy (RQ4) as a specific topic for exploration alongside queer joy was likely informed by the persistent centring of queer user's marginalisation online [83] and the representation of queer users needs in privacy research [69]. Our results do indicate that queer users consider privacy and safety when engaging with queer joy online. Moreover, many of their articulations of joy (*e.g.,* community, self-expression) are both, made possible by, and contribute back into collective selective visibility [28, 89]. However, our results also show that neither the centring of trauma, nor the problematisation of queer user's needs, are required for HCI to develop understanding and best practice in topics of interest such as privacy.

6 Recommendations

Based on the results, we highlight three major design recommendations for online platforms to better support the facilitation of queer joy. While the recommendations are based on a small sample, the results highlight a need to support individuality rather than homogeneity of the queer community. In this vein then, these recommendations should be a starting point that allows customisability for individuals, rather than seen as a one-size-fits-all solution.

Support individual and diverse expression. The queer community is not a homogenous entity, despite often being treated as such. Different individuals place different emphasis on their identity in online spaces and thus designing systems which allow people to centre (or not) their identity and queer joy as best suits them is important. Further, authentic self-expression was frequently highlighted as a key element in queer joy. Thus, allowing people to express themselves without content expressing these identities being censored or limited by algorithms [23, 79] will facilitate the expression of queer joy. However, social dynamics and peer pressure should also be considered in design, as these can hinder self expression [20, 22].

Support community engagement. Many queer people post queer content for other LGBTQ+ people and so supporting community engagement is important. In particular, community engagement facilitates the creation of accepting spaces, which was an important element in definitions of queer joy. The enabling of these spaces can also allow selective visibility and safe exploration of identity [28]. In doing so, queer joy can be spread both through interpersonal interactions (relational joy) and community empowerment. However, designers should also consider how these can be designed to reduce the risk of them turning from a queer utopia to a queer vortex [18], and forming spaces where 'lack of belonging' within the queer community arise.

Allow granular control over privacy options. Our findings highlight that LGBTQ+ people engage with and post queer content to varying degrees. Thus account controls should be flexible to support engagement to the extent each person feels they prefer. This includes platforms supporting granular control over who sees posts, through methods such as by making posts visible to certain groups/people, allowing multiple profiles/personas, and other methods of audience curation. Some platforms have limited individuals' abilities to create multiple personas [42] but users already circumvent such barriers in order to restrict the visibility of queer (joy) content for the purpose of ensuring that it is not seen individuals that they are not out to, or who are upset by their expression an LGBTQ+ identity [16, 27].

It is notable that the centring of queer joy in this work still generated some considerations that have previously arisen from research that stemmed from queer marginalisation. This indicates that focusing on joy is a fruitful lens through which to undertake Queer HCI research. More widely, this positive lens through which to conduct research could be similarly fruitful for other areas of HCI research, whether it is user group specific, or focusing on interactions more generally.

7 Limitations and Future Work

This study engaged a relatively small sample of queer people based in the UK, limiting their generalizability. Many of our questions and responses centred on platforms prevalent within the UK, and whilst many of these platforms are also popular in the Americas, Europe and Australasia, there is significant variation particularly in Asia [32, 90]. Further, we only focused on queer identities, and while we collected demographics representing other identity elements such as social class and ethnicity, we did not analyse the data focusing on how these intersected. Some research centering joy has focused on specific intersectional identities [*e.g.,* 62] but further work investigating HCI with intersectional identities should be pursued.

Participants in this study self-reported a diverse array of genders and sexualities, but these are not exhaustive and there are genders and sexualities that are poorly-represented or absent from our sample. The specific placement of this study in the UK and Ireland in 2024 may have contributed to these absences, particularly hostility to trans people (7 participants) and low rates of openness around asexual identities. Within Queer HCI more broadly, some groups are consistently omitted from study [83]. Thus, further engagement with specific identities within the LGBTQ+ community is needed. In this study, four participants identified as being on the asexual spectrum (three asexual and one demisexual) with only two of those indicating a romantic orientation. Given asexuality and aromanticism are broad spectrums [21, 84] future research may want to focus more on this particular group.

Perhaps most significantly, very few participants indicated that they engaged in posting queer joy. Engagement with a larger group of users who post queer (joy) content on social media would allow greater understanding of how active posters engage with the content, and give more insights into how these posts can be facilitated.

The survey method, utilising only closed questions and open text fields also may have limited how the participants felt able to express their opinions on this topic. Our results indicated that visual mediums and platforms were perceived as better facilitating the expression of queer joy. Therefore to get deeper insights into how queer joy can be facilitated, future work would benefit from running interactive workshops and methods that better facilitate visual content.

8 Conclusion

Queer joy has been highlighted as an important area of study, rather than queer HCI exclusively focusing on marginalisation [83]. Social media platforms have been shown to be a beneficial environment for the affirmation of queer identities [17, 33, 64], but queer people still feel the need to protect themselves in these spaces through privacy measures like self-censorship [77]. By conducting a survey with 100 UK residents, we strove to understand how queer joy may be best facilitated in online spaces. We further asked how our participants defined queer joy, how they engaged with it, and how they protected their privacy online. The results indicated that while a limited number of participants posted about queer joy, there were major commonalities in how it was defined, and the aspects that would best support its facilitation. Through this we contribute three major recommendations to support the facilitation of queer joy:

(1) Support individual and diverse expression, without treating queer people as a single homogeneous group.
(2) Support community engagement, and sharing queer content with other LGBTQ+ people.
(3) Allow granular control over privacy options to prevent context collapse and allow posts to be shared with selected audiences.

Our results highlight the fruitful insights gathered from centering joy, and further the calls for Queer HCI research to focus on positive experiences [83]. In doing so, we combat the narrative that Queer HCI must focus on marginalisation, and find that joyful research can support combatting hate and negative online experiences, as joy is not mutually exclusive from negative emotions [4].

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