Tumblr and Gender Pronouns

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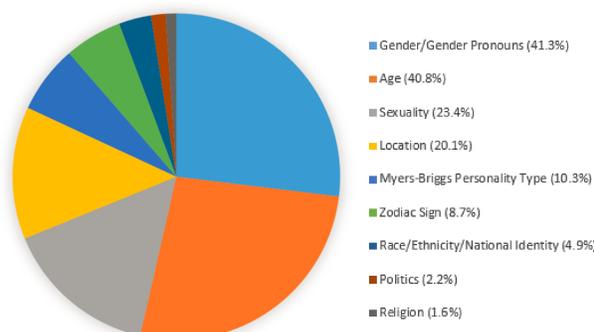
INTRODUCTION

- Tumblr is an online microblogging platform that allows users to post text, and upload images, animated GIFs, music and videos.
- The Tumblr sphere hosts more than 312 million blogs, which contain more than 138 billion individual blog posts.
- Users are not required to provide any identity information on their blogs.
- **Despite the anonymity afforded, many users opt to share their preferred gender pronouns.**
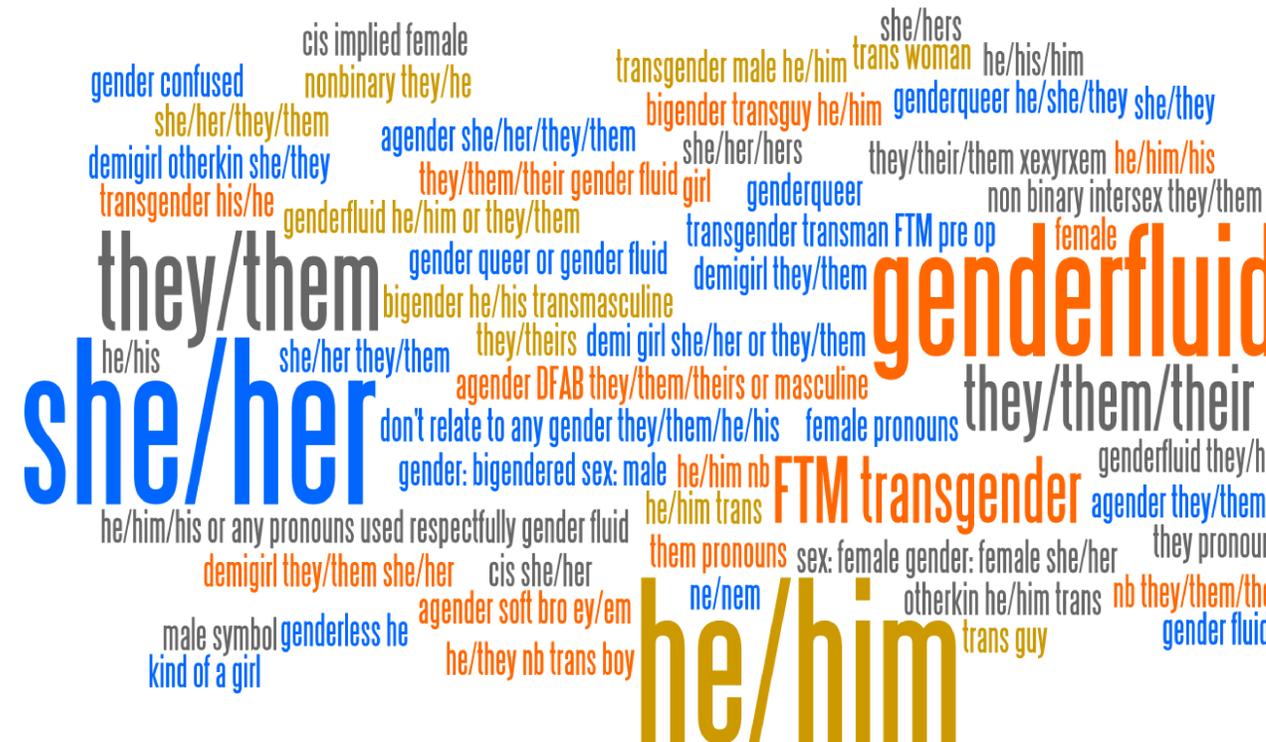
METHOD

- Qualitative content analysis of blogs with text-based posts about gender pronouns.
- Manually collected the following data from 200 blog posts, when available: web address, blog title, blog description and/or about page text, blog post text, tags, date posted, and total number of notes (number of likes and reblogs combined).

IDENTITY INFORMATION

- Gender/Gender Pronouns (41.3%)
- Age (40.8%)
- Sexuality (23.4%)
- Location (20.1%)
- Myers-Briggs Personality Type (10.3%)
- Zodiac Sign (8.7%)
- Race/Ethnicity/National Identity (4.9%)
- Politics (2.2%)
- Religion (1.6%)

GENDER IDENTITY ONLINE

- Fink & Miller found that "for transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming people, emergent media technologies offer new outlets for self-representation" (611).
- Tumblr has provided a structure to allow people who "oppose traditional systems of gender distinction" to come together in a networked online community (Fink & Miller 611).
- Tumblr attracts "members of counterpublics looking to 'be themselves,'" particularly those young people who identify with LGBTQ communities or otherwise feel alienated in their offline lives (Renninger 1520).

Fink, M. & Miller, Q. (2014). Trans media moments: Tumblr, 2011-2013. *Television & New Media*, *15*(7): 611-626.

Renninger, B. J. (2015). "Where I can be myself… where I can speak my mind": Networked counterpublics in a polymedia environment. *New Media & Society*, *17*(9): 1513-1529.

CONTENT OF BLOG POSTS

Gender-related announcements:
"I think I may start using strictly male pronouns but idk im scared to commit not to mention the trouble I'd have to go through to get people to actually change… and then id also have to still go by female pronouns at work/with family etc so it seems kinda counter-productive I guess… idk im still figuring out a lot of things about myself I guess."

Personal stories about being misgendered:
"So this has been happening lately and I just want to make things clear. If you're my friend, and at times you mess up on my pronouns, it's okay, I still love you, thank you for at least correcting yourself and trying. But for those who purposely misgender me, just to piss me off or to put me down, please just leave me alone, I don't need to feel shittier than I already am."

Backlash toward these type of posts, ranging from skepticism to jokes to hate messages:
"It's not so much that I'm upset about your special snowflake pronouns or am invalidating your identity (even though sometimes I kind of am because this is LITERALLY a first world thing, I guarantee there are zero people in the Saharan desert that are like "I'm a genderfluid queer femme lesbian boi but I have to hide it because I'll get beheaded if I don't") because your pronouns are fucking ridiculous, I'm simply saying that your pronouns are fucking ridiculous."

IMAGES IN CENTER COLUMN

The word cloud represents each of the gender pronouns provided in the sample.

The small boxes are screenshots that were taken from various blogs in the sample to demonstrate the context of many users' ways of sharing gender pronouns within blog descriptions and blog page texts.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further directions for this research include continuing to analyze the wealth of data for additional meaning, as well as beginning to look at the data across various demographic factors. It would be greatly illuminating to combine this study with in-depth interviews with Tumblr users who blog about gender pronouns to further understand the contexts of the posts and to ask about whether the affordances of Tumblr make this specific online community an acceptable place for discussing and expressing gender identity.