



“Legit Can’t Wait for #Toronto #WorldPride!”: Investigating the Twitter Public of a Large-Scale LGBTQ Festival

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This article investigates whether participation on Twitter during Toronto’s 2014 WorldPride festival facilitated challenges to heteronormativity through increased visibility, connections, and messages about LGBTQ people. Analysis of 68,231 tweets found that surges in activity using WorldPride hashtags, connections among users, and the circulation of affective content with common symbols made celebrations visible. However, the platform’s features catered to politicians, celebrities, and advertisers in ways that accentuated self-promotional, local, and often banal content, overshadowing individual users and the festival’s global mandate. By identifying Twitter’s limits in fostering the visibility of users and messages that circulate nonnormative discourses, this study makes way for future research identifying alternative platform dynamics that can enhance the visibility of diversity.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, LGBTQ, Pride, identity, platforms, publics, sexuality

Introduction

In the summer of 2014, Toronto became the first North American city to host WorldPride, a festival intended to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ) and other diverse gender and sexual identities internationally. Coordinated by InterPride, an organization that “ties Pride together globally” (InterPride, n.d.), WorldPride has been held biennially since its controversial inception in Rome during the Catholic Church’s Great Jubilee at the turn of the millennium (Luongo, 2002). WorldPride brought additional funding and attention to Toronto’s Pride celebrations, building on annual festivities like the Dyke March, Trans March, and Pride Parade. It also expanded the festival’s online presence with the establishment of a dedicated Toronto WorldPride website and Twitter account as part of a broader media campaign.

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Date submitted: 2015–02–08

¹ Many thanks to Professor Jean Burgess and Professor Ben Light for their support and guidance, the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and insights, as well as my friends and colleagues for their helpful comments.

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As a range of Twitter users incorporated WorldPride hashtags into tweets, online expressions of the festival varied in theme. Some issued calls to action: "Everyone has a right to be treated with respect & dignity. Together, we must prevent & eliminate discrimination & harassment. #WorldPride." Others had undertones of self-promotion, including singer Carly Rae Jepsen's declaration that her WorldPride performance had been filled with "Pure love tonight!" These expressions reflect Pride festivals' potential to either enable LGBTQ identity expressions, leading to collective connections and visibility that challenges dominant attitudes toward gender and sexuality, or be so commercialized and normalized into mainstream culture that they have no broader effect. This study is therefore interested in which potentials were realized through WorldPride participation on Twitter and how the platform itself mediated these outcomes.

To address this, 68,231 WorldPride tweets were analyzed through close and distant readings. This allowed for exploration of the public formed on Twitter during WorldPride from two perspectives. First, aspects of WorldPride reflected on Twitter were examined to determine the presence and extent of individual identity expression, the formation of connections during the festival, and visible challenges to the assumed heterosexuality of public space. Second, the article traces how Twitter shaped participation in the WorldPride public, both facilitating and constraining certain expressions of Pride. Findings show that although the WorldPride public made celebrations visible, aspects of Twitter that called attention to politicians, businesses, and celebrities demonstrate this platform's limits for amplifying the visibility of diverse individuals and nonnormative identities.

Expressions of Pride

Although a regular occurrence in many urban centers today, Pride festivals have shifted in their expression since their origin in the gay liberation movement (Young, 1992). The Stonewall Riots of 1969—protests in response to police raids of a gay gathering space, the Stonewall Inn—were commemorated with annual Pride parades that spread from New York to other cities (D'Emilio, 1983). In Canada, Pride was shaped by Stonewall but also celebrated the 1969 amendment to the Canadian Criminal Code decriminalizing homosexual acts (Frolic, 2001; Goldie, 2001). This change was accompanied by the then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's declaration that "the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation" (Goldie, 2001, p. 18). Stonewall (and, arguably, this turn in Canadian history) carried enough resonance to become institutionalized into annual celebrations with a common "design, compatibility with media routines, cultural power, and versatility" (Armstrong & Cragie, 2006, p. 725).

As protest marches transitioned into parades, scholars began to debate the meaning of contemporary Pride festivals. Howe (2001) contended that large-scale festivals such as the San Francisco Pride Parade can provide a queer homeland where some individuals are able to safely enact their identity with others, reinforcing individual identity development and giving rise to a collective identity. Operating from the notion that rather than a singular public sphere, multiple publics (Fraser, 1990) exist as self-organized gatherings of people around a particular dialogue or discourse (Warner, 2002), these aspects of Pride can create and influence overlapping publics. The collective formed through connections among LGBTQ people has the potential to be a *counterpublic*, defined by its tension in relation to broader publics. In these broader publics, heterosexual culture is ubiquitous (Berlant & Warner, 1998), from bus

advertisements boasting heterosexual attraction to Facebook's limited tick boxes for labeling sexuality. Therefore, highly visible LGBTQ counterpublics organized around alternative discourses of sexuality can challenge heteronormative assumptions, mainly the notion that public space is characterized by heterosexuality (Brickell, 2000). Browne (2007) identified how this visibility can be achieved through both serious LGBTQ politics and playful events, such as drag shows demonstrating the fluidity of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990). This playful aspect of Pride, which includes parties and parades, can engage a range of people, from LGBTQ individuals and allies to those who rarely encounter nonheteronormative discourses. In this way, Pride also has the potential to form mixed *queer publics* (Berlant & Warner, 1995) that not only make LGBTQ people visible but also circulate new understandings of sexuality among diverse audiences. As the visibility of diverse sexual identities alongside alternative discourses expands understandings of sexuality, Pride's expressions may have outcomes for individuals, in terms of identity expression; the formation of counterpublics, as LGBTQ people come together; and broader publics.

Despite this potential, visibility also brings the possibility of less emancipatory outcomes, such as stereotyping, assimilation, and reducing minorities to niche markets (Barnhurst, 2007). Browne (2007) recognized Pride's potential as a "party with politics" (p. 75) but admitted that Pride's increasing commercialization may override political outcomes. This concern, along with reservations about "equal rights" approaches to LGBTQ politics, has led some scholars to conclude that LGBTQ identities are being rendered invisible through conformity with heterosexual norms (Duggan, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Warner, 1999). This may also be reflected in Pride festivals, as the prominence of corporate sponsors and community organizations has a normalizing effect on their expression (Frolic, 2001). However, community organizations, such as sports teams, can also unite people of diverse sexualities over common interests. Additionally, Kates and Belk (2001) maintained that discrimination may be resisted *through* consumption, as it legitimates and increases the visibility of Pride festivals while supporting LGBTQ economic participation. Therefore, the way that Pride is communicated may facilitate individual identity expressions, leading to connections that form counterpublics and challenges to the assumed heterosexuality of public space, but it may also—or instead—amplify normalizing and commercialized expressions that reinforce heteronormativity. The following sections consider communicative, sociocultural, and political factors that influence what kinds of Pride expressions are disseminated and become salient.

Twitter's Social Media Logic

The Internet's possibilities for (re)creating participatory spaces for public dialogue have been long debated (Allen et al., 2014). Some opinions see networked communications technologies as enabling the rapid *spreadability* of ideas and user-generated content (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), giving rise to new forms of social movements (Castells, 2009) and possibilities for organizing activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Others have emphasized that economic interests have given technology an increasingly locked-down, proprietary character (Zittrain, 2008) that prevents networked collective action from having longer-term outcomes (Couldry, 2014). Social media platforms may foster networked publics—publics structured by networked technology—that can enhance users' personal development and provide access to public dialogue (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010), but platforms' profit motives also prioritize data archiving and marketing (Gehl, 2014). Van Dijck (2013a) asserted that rather than *social* media, these can be better understood as *connective* platforms that use algorithms to encourage a particularly profitable form of

online sociality. However, in agreement with Hinton and Hjorth (2013), she also maintained that platforms can be at once exploitative and empowering for users.

From within these debates, this study draws on a particular understanding of platforms to discern how Twitter shaped WorldPride's expression. It applies the framework of *social media logic*, which identifies platforms' norms, strategies, mechanisms, and economies (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), to distinguish qualities of Twitter and users' responses to its features. In relation to WorldPride, it examines four main elements of social media logic: *programmability*, the ability of both the platform and users to steer communication through technological mechanisms; *popularity*, algorithmic and socioeconomic components that boost the prominence of certain people or ideas; *connectivity*, mutual shaping between users, advertisers, and platforms; and *datafication*, the rendering of many aspects of the world into data. This lens permits the study to move beyond polarized debates about the participatory potential of networked technologies to identify tangible ways that this platform shaped public dialogue during WorldPride.

Toronto as WorldPride Host

The *Pride Guide* (Pride Toronto, 2014a) declared WorldPride "a shared moment in our global communities" while thanking local partners for "ensuring WorldPride stretches across the city." This illustrates how Pride Toronto tied the city closely to the expression of WorldPride. Though Johnston (2005) cautions that "not all cities are equally enabling as queer tourism spaces" (p. 103), Toronto's history of Pride celebrations, occurring since the late 1970s (Pride Toronto, 2014b), makes the city appear welcoming to LGBTQ people. Most events are held in The Village, a neighborhood self-described as "the historic home of Toronto's LGBTQ communities" (The Village, 2015). However, some individuals have viewed The Village as a form of gay ghettoization (Nash, 2006) and have been unable to see their identities represented there following its increased commercialization and heterosexualization (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). As a result, the LGBTQ residential population and its events and venues have dispersed throughout the city (Nash, 2013) as sexually diverse communities become fractured over political approaches to self-representation (Frolic, 2001). Toronto's municipal politics have involved contrasting stances toward LGBTQ issues, with the then mayor Rob Ford's history of avoiding Pride (Huffington Post Canada, 2014) alongside city councillors' vocal support of WorldPride (Pride Toronto, 2014a). These details about WorldPride's locality provide insight into the festival's sociocultural and political context.

Methods

The computational turn in the digital humanities incorporates digital components into the examination of new technologies and their relation to cultures (Berry, 2012). Burgess and Bruns (2015) further articulate this as a twofold increase in opportunities that digital technology affords for sociocultural research and for application of a critical lens to digital artifacts. This study applied such an approach to

analyze expressions of WorldPride on Twitter² and this platform's influence on the WorldPride public. Though the festival was publicized through news articles and other social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, Twitter was one of Pride Toronto's prominent means of engaging people. Analysis of tweets necessitated close and distant readings of the data (Moretti, 2007), involving examination of aggregated datasets as well as visual and textual analysis of individual tweets, photos, videos, and links. This combination permitted identification of themes that would not have been recognizable through any single analytical approach.

Data collection occurred prior to, during, and following the festival over a span of 40 days from May 13 to July 23, 2014. YourTwrapperKeeper (see Bruns & Liang, 2012 for an overview) was used to collect tweets by tracking the six most widely used WorldPride hashtags: #WP14TO and #PrideToronto, promoted by the WorldPride account (@WP14TO); #PrideTO and #WorldPride, promoted by Pride Toronto's account (@PrideToronto); and the user-created variations #TorontoPride and #WPTO14. Although other hashtags sometimes appeared throughout the festival, often around specific events such as #TBGPride, featured in tweets about the Toronto Botanical Gardens' mass gay wedding, these were generally used in conjunction with main festival hashtags. Though not exhaustive, hashtag-based collection of tweets captured those featured in dialogue surrounding the event (Bruns & Moe, 2014), since hashtags can allow for the formation of *ad hoc publics*, gatherings of users spontaneously participating in dialogue around a specific topic or event (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Table 1 shows the number of tweets collected through each hashtag. When combined with duplicates removed (tweets using more than one hashtag appeared in multiple datasets), the full WorldPride dataset comprised 68,231 tweets generated by 27,172 accounts.

Table 1. Tweets Collected.

Hashtag	Tweets
PrideToronto	1,278
TorontoPride	2,819
PrideTO	4,657
WPTO14	5,117
WP14TO	17,203
WorldPride	45,443
Total	76,517
Total without duplicates	68,231

² For an overview of Twitter and associated metrics for sociocultural research, see Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt, and Puschmann (2014).

Three techniques were applied to interrogate the data. First, Tableau analytics software was used to determine frequencies, such as tweet volume over time, providing a sense of key moments that resonated with Twitter participants (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Second, network analysis provided insights into who was popular, loud, and highly connected (Kumar, Morstatter, & Liu, 2014). The WorldPride conversation network was extracted using a Gawk script (Bruns, 2012) to obtain a directed edgelist of accounts that either sent or received tweets (@replies), talked about other accounts (@mentions), or retweeted others. Using Gephi, measures were applied to detect communities (*modularity*, see Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008), the most mentioned accounts (*highest in-degree*, see Newman, 2010), the most mentioning accounts (*out-degree*), and accounts that played a role as network brokers, connecting different communities (*betweenness*). Lastly, specific data artifacts, such as the most retweeted photos, were examined based on their visibility. This close reading identified qualities of popular content shared throughout the festival. Overall, these three techniques allowed for examination of the range of individual identity expression, connections with others, and visibility of WorldPride Twitter activity with the potential to challenge heteronormativity. These findings were then critically analyzed to identify how Twitter's sociotechnical and economic influences may have facilitated or constrained WorldPride expressions and their outcomes.

Reflections of WorldPride on Twitter

The study's findings show that dialogue concerning WorldPride was visible through the formation of a WorldPride Twitter public, generated through WorldPride hashtags, that also permeated other Twitter publics. Connections among users reinforced this visibility, forming smaller publics, or communities, connected by political affiliation. Individual expressions forged these connections by circulating personal, affective, and commonly recognizable content. The following sections describe these WorldPride expressions in detail and then critically analyze how Twitter shaped their form and the extent of their potential to influence discourses related to sexuality.

Visibility

The volume of WorldPride Twitter activity, popularity of participating accounts, and permeation of WorldPride tweets into other publics are all indications of WorldPride's visibility. Twitter activity over the course of the festival included surges that drew attention to particular moments or information (Figure 1).

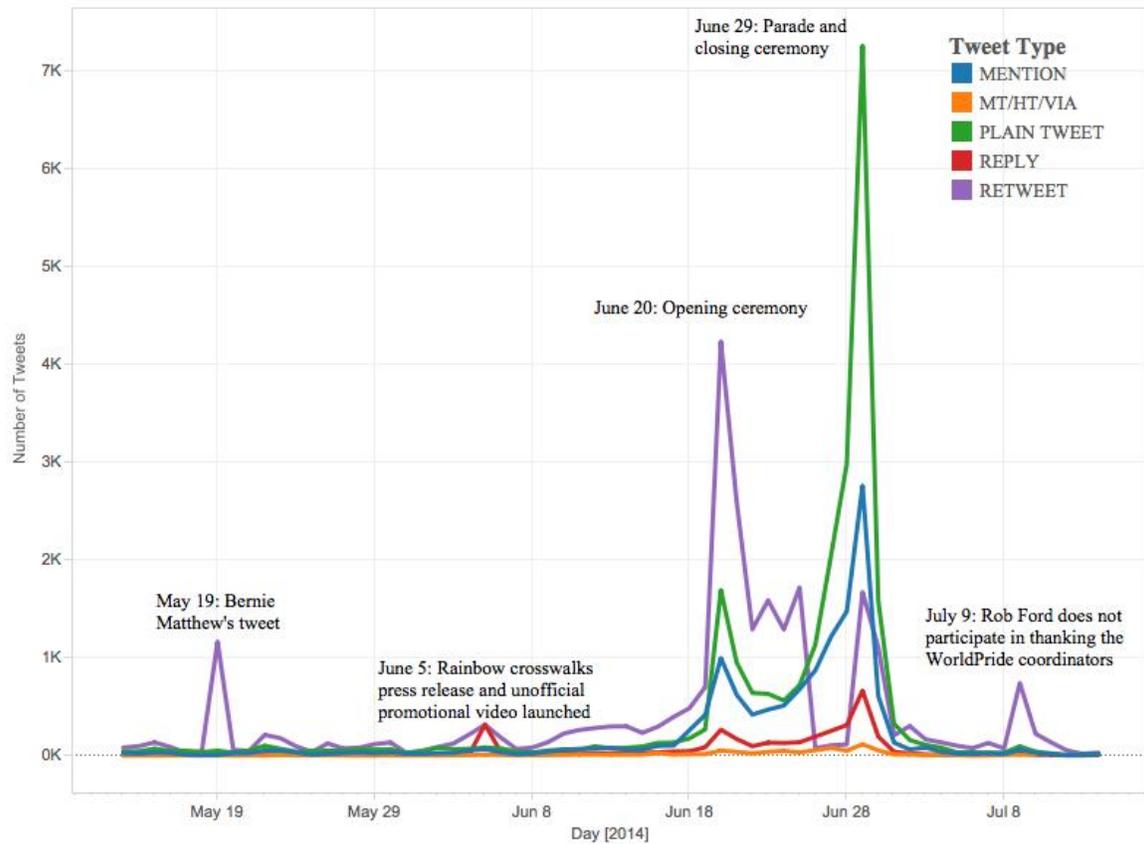


Figure 1. Frequency of tweets over time, separated by type.

The first surge occurred on May 19 when openly gay actor Bernie Matthew tweeted to approximately 530,000 followers that he “Legit can’t wait for #Toronto #WorldPride” (Figure 2). His emoji-laden message was the most retweeted of the entire festival, with 1,116 accounts echoing his sentiment. A small spike on June 5 involved both the release of a news article about WorldPride’s rainbow crosswalks and an unofficial WorldPride video with the tagline “Toronto, the only thing we hide in the closet is our mayor,” referring to Toronto’s then mayor Rob Ford. On July 9, Ford inspired the final surge in Twitter activity by not participating in the city council’s standing ovation to thank the WorldPride coordinators. The highest frequency of tweeting was concentrated over Pride Week, commencing with the opening ceremony on June 20 and reaching an all-time high on June 29 with the parade and closing ceremony. Since Twitter users are more likely to see a topic or event that is tweeted at high volume, these surges increased the festival’s visibility.



Figure 2. Bernie Matthew's tweet.

Figure 1 also shows the frequency of each type of tweet, providing an indication of WorldPride's visibility since some types circulate more widely than others (Halavais, 2014). In the chart, blue indicates @mentions, users referring to each other; orange indicates a "modified tweet," "hat tip," or "via," signaling that the tweet is based on another but has been changed; green indicates a plain tweet consisting of user-generated content; red indicates an @reply in a conversation; and purple indicates a retweet, a replica of another tweet. Many surges in Twitter activity were characterized by numerous retweets, whereby users increased WorldPride's visibility by broadcasting festival tweets throughout their networks. Pride Week also saw an increase in the number of @mentions, which can draw the attention of the mentioned user and their followers.

The prominence of celebrities, mainstream media, businesses, and politicians on Twitter throughout the festival also increased WorldPride's visibility. When users were sorted to identify the top 25 with the highest in-degree (the most retweets, @replies, and @mentions), 28% belonged to media outlets, 24% to celebrities, and 24% to politicians. The remaining accounts included businesses, nonprofits, and official WorldPride accounts. This mixture included celebrities who performed during WorldPride, such as Melissa Etheridge, as well as large corporate sponsors like TD Bank and national media outlets like *The Globe and Mail*. As indicated by the numerous retweets of Bernie Matthew's tweet, these popular accounts have large numbers of followers who both view and amplify tweets.

Content included in users' tweets also contributed to WorldPride's visibility. About 75% contained links, much like other event-specific activity on Twitter (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014) in which users participate in *gatematching* (Bruns, 2005)—finding, sharing, and resharing relevant information. This activity invited others into the WorldPride public and connected sites to access further information about the festival, related events, and LGBTQ topics. Among the most tweeted were links to the Pride Toronto website, Facebook pages for WorldPride events, and a *Globe and Mail* article about WorldPride. Users introduced WorldPride tweets into other Twitter publics by adding hashtags not specific to WorldPride, including #LGBT in 2,351 tweets and #canqueer in 1,109 tweets. Users following #Toronto would have been able to see 10,739 WorldPride tweets containing this hashtag. WorldPride messages also reached politically focused Twitter publics through the use of #TOPoli (Toronto politics), #ONpoli (Ontario politics), or

#cdnpoli (Canadian politics) in 2,676 tweets. Co-usage of hashtags indicates that WorldPride was not simply contained within one Twitter public but was also visible in several publics across Twitter.

Although activity surges, the participation of popular accounts, and tweet content leading to overlapping publics made WorldPride visible to many Twitter users, understanding what, and to whom, this visibility communicated requires further exploration of the data and the platform's influence.

Connections

Examining the conversation network for the entire dataset allowed for detection of communities—groups of more closely connected users—throughout the WorldPride Twitter public. Figure 3 shows that 73% of accounts (green) were connected in one community including politicians, celebrities, media outlets, individuals, and WorldPride's official accounts. A smaller but similar community consisted of 13% of users (light blue) with more commercial accounts, such as LGBTQ tourism agencies and well-known businesses like Prada and Absolut Vodka. Smaller communities like those appearing in red, orange, and teal were characterized by municipal, educational, and nonprofit accounts, divided into communities based on their location in different Toronto suburbs. About 4% of accounts (yellow) formed a community of porn and spam accounts.

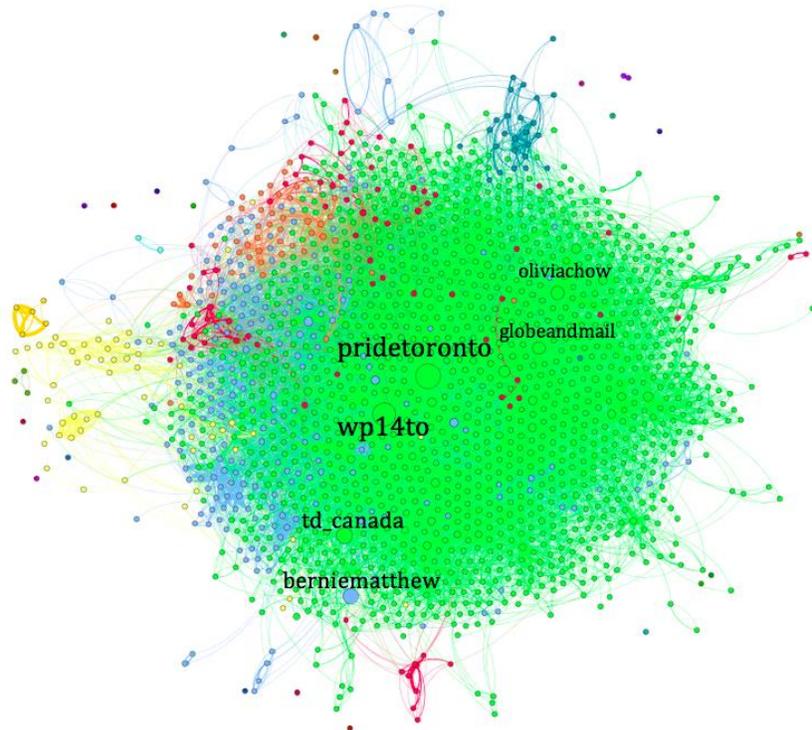


Figure 3. Communities in the WorldPride network (resolution 2).

The absence of many fragmented communities indicates that the overall WorldPride dialogue was not divided along lines of politics or sexuality. Unlike Pride parades with the capacity to segment people according to gender and sexual identity (Frolic, 2001), there were no distinct Twitter communities of gays, lesbians, or others who maintained dialogue only among themselves. However, a lack of fragmentation does not necessarily suggest the formation of a WorldPride public unified around a particular dialogue. Figure 3 shows the usernames of those with the highest in-degree, the greatest being the official WorldPride accounts (@WP14TO and @PrideToronto), followed by WorldPride's largest sponsor, TD Bank; actor Bernie Matthews; mayoral candidate Olivia Chow; and the national news outlet *The Globe and Mail*. Since many accounts directed tweets to or retweeted these users, this network may simply reflect activity passing along information, articles, or fan messages instead of generating meaningful connections around LGBTQ issues. This is congruent with WorldPride's official accounts having the highest betweenness, which indicates that they were the festival's main brokers connecting participants on Twitter.

This trend of retweeting, focused on popular accounts, changed on June 29 with the parade and closing ceremony. Users greatly increased their activity that day (Figure 1), generating more than 10,000 tweets, including a large number of original tweets as well as retweets, @mentions, and @replies. Dialogue transitioned from being dominated by popular accounts to consisting of exchanges among politicians and individuals.³ Throughout the festival, individuals constituted only 20% of the top 25 accounts with the highest out-degree (tweeting to/at others), but this rose to 64% on June 29. Similarly, individuals had not featured among the festival's top 25 accounts with the highest in-degree but comprised 32% on June 29. This shift in activity indicated that the June 29 network differed from the overall festival network.

Figure 4 shows that more distinct communities emerged on June 29. About 27% of accounts (orange) formed connections and shared a common affiliation with the New Democratic Party. This community included party leader Thomas Mulcair and Olivia Chow, widow of the previous party leader Jack Layton and a mayoral candidate in the Toronto 2014 municipal election. In contrast, 23% of accounts (red) were closely connected with each other and had in common an affiliation with the Liberal Party, forming a community that included party leader Justin Trudeau and the Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne. Both political parties have expressed support for LGBTQ rights (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013; New Democratic Party of Canada, 2015). Their visibility at Pride contrasts with the scarcity of representatives from the incumbent party, the Conservatives, who have reportedly become more supportive of LGBTQ people over the past decade but do not address LGBTQ issues in their platform (Hopper, 2012; Radia, 2013). The remaining accounts in this network form small communities of celebrities and commercial accounts (blue), tourism and municipal services (pink), sports organizations (purple), and nonprofits (green).

³ *Individuals* were identified as users whose profiles did not indicate that they were politicians, celebrities, or representatives of organizations.

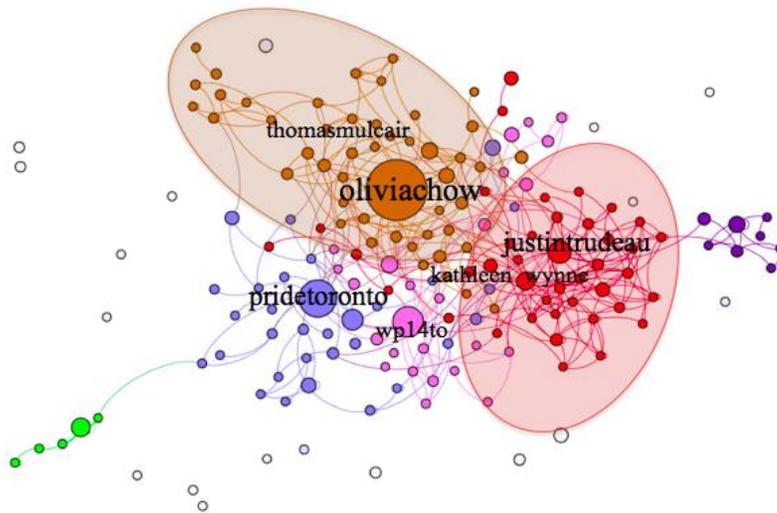


Figure 4. Communities on June 29 (resolution 2, sized by degree).

These network measures indicate that no boundaries arose between LGBTQ-related identity groups on Twitter during WorldPride and that some political connections existed. The larger network shows that Twitter engagement with WorldPride spanned various types of participants brought together through popular and official accounts, while the June 29 network illustrates that dialogue occurred among users with particular political affiliations. However, it cannot be concluded that these politically based communities were specific to WorldPride. Studies of political activity in different countries have acknowledged a political Twitter elite (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014) that discusses domestic politics daily. Therefore, political connections identifiable on June 29 likely already existed but became more active on that day. It may be tempting to assume that these communities, reflecting affiliations with political parties whose platforms claim they support LGBTQ people, constituted counterpublics with strong messages challenging heteronormativity. However, the content of popular tweets indicates that these connections appear to be more about winning votes than rallying around LGBTQ issues.

Affective and Common Expressions

Analysis of WorldPride's most retweeted content indicated that much of the dialogue included emotional and personal expressions alongside common symbols. After Bernie Matthew's tweet, the most retweeted message was from Canadian media personality Jian Ghomeshi (Figure 5). In a modified tweet of CBC's photo, Ghomeshi criticized Ford for remaining seated during a standing ovation thanking WorldPride's coordinators (CBC News, 2014). At the same council meeting, Ford cast the only vote against investigating the need for an LGBT homeless shelter in Toronto (CBC News, 2014). Ghomeshi's tweet, retweeted 305 times, was followed by mayoral candidate John Tory's criticism of Ford's vote, which received 212 retweets. Since Ford was already infamous for a series of drug scandals (McCarthy, 2014), Ghomeshi's tweet evoked emotion in his followers who expressed their disdain for the mayor through retweets.



Figure 5. Jian Ghomeshi's tweet.

Affect also appeared in users' widespread interaction with one of Ford's rivals, Olivia Chow, during the festival. Chow was among the top 25 accounts with the highest in-degree and, despite the drop in retweeting on June 29, her photo at the Pride Parade (Figure 6) garnered 102 retweets that day. A range of users responded to the image, including one who declared, "I don't know who I'll be voting for... But this is an amazing pic." Chow's photo, as an affect-laden self-portrait of participation, aptly represented a *party with politics* (Browne, 2007). Similarly, on June 20, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau tweeted a photo in anticipation of WorldPride displaying his enthusiastic participation in the previous year's parade. The image, which was the third most retweeted throughout the festival, depicted Trudeau waving his hands, wearing purple Mardi Gras beads over his collared shirt, and marching among a mix of Liberal supporters and parade goers. These affective, self-expressive images resonated with others, as evidenced by the 273 and 385 "favorites" that Chow's and Trudeau's tweets received respectively.



Figure 6. Olivia Chow's tweet.

Chow's and Trudeau's photos resembled content generated by individuals during WorldPride. In the surge of plain tweets on June 29, many users tweeted their experiences of the Pride Parade and closing ceremony from mobile devices, causing a spike in visual content sharing on Instagram and through Twitter's photo functionality. This sharing included many selfies with WorldPride crowds in the background and photos of general celebration instead of specific celebrities, such as one user's aerial snapshot of the parade, captioned "From the 21st floor, Toronto celebrates!"

Common symbols were among the top retweeted parade content. A photo of the rainbow that appeared over the closing ceremony (Figure 7) received 82 retweets, with others sharing their own photos of the same rainbow, associating it with themes of love and acceptance. Distant participants on Twitter supported these representations, such as one user's tweet: "I'm hearing that #worldpride ended with a rainbow over #Toronto. How absolutely perfect." Although this common symbol brought users together, it also reflects the lack of confrontational messages among the most retweeted content. One exception was a tweet from a pro-Palestine group that appeared in the top 25 most retweeted messages on June 29. It included a photo of the group's parade banner and read: "Queers against Israeli #Apartheid marching @ #torontopride now Map showing Palestine loss of land. #CantPinkWashThis." While this message

challenged others to think about how sexuality, marginalization, and colonization are tied together on a global scale, rainbow imagery and celebratory messages were the norm in popular tweets. Prominent among these were commercial messages targeting the LGBTQ market. For example, @TargetCanada's declaration "People are showing their pride the world over and Toronto is the host city. We couldn't be more proud. #WorldPride" was retweeted 144 times.

The official rainbow of #WorldPride
#WP14TO #WPTO14 #worldpridetoronto



Figure 7. Tweet of the rainbow over WorldPride's closing ceremony.

This analysis indicates that the WorldPride Twitter public was formed through expressions of Pride leading to the festival's high visibility; connections between people without fragmentation into LGBTQ identity-based groups; and individual tweets circulating personal, emotional, and common identity expressions. These expressions reflected elements of Pride with the potential to challenge the assumed heterosexuality of public space. However, visibility, connections, and identity expressions took shape through the involvement of popular, political, and commercial accounts, many of which perpetuated local, self-promotional, and marketing messages. Therefore, WorldPride's reflection on Twitter was a contested

public where participants were not united in dialogue around a specific discourse of sexuality. Although individuals engaged in elevating LGBTQ visibility through emotive retweets, political discussion, and their experiences of Pride, Twitter's influence in shaping these expressions shows why the most visible aspects of WorldPride were not strong counterpublic critiques or alternative discourses across queer publics but instead perpetuated the status quo through political co-optation and banal messages.

Twitter's WorldPride Public

The remainder of this article identifies Twitter's role in shaping WorldPride's reflection on this platform. This discussion is scaffolded using Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) framework of social media logic, defined as "the processes, principles, and practices through which [social media] platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic" (p. 5). This framework allows theories and previous research to be combined with this study's findings to identify tangible ways that platforms and users influence each other. The framework helps to identify aspects of the WorldPride Twitter public that constitute a *calculated* public, structured and largely produced by the platform's algorithms (Gillespie, 2012). Four key elements of social media logic—programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datification—are examined to identify Twitter's constraints and affordances for expressions of Pride.

Programmability

Van Dijck and Poell describe programmability as a two-way process by which platforms and users can steer the flow of communication. This involves a combination of technological components and human agency. Within the WorldPride Twitter public, users applied their agency to Twitter's affordances to make personal and affective expressions. These types of expressions can help to form connections and challenge understandings of sexuality through *networked identity work* (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012)—the negotiation of privacy and publicness in identity representations so as to generate intimacy with others. Networked identity work is discernible in the WorldPride tweets of individuals sharing personal experiences of an LGBTQ festival while using Twitter's affordances to amplify these self-representations for many audiences, for instance through the use of multiple hashtags. Twitter's affordances can also help users feel as though they are retaining an element of privacy. By accumulating audiences that differ from their more personal Facebook followers and deploying tweets among a large volume of daily content, some users experience tweeting as subtler and less reflective of identity than posting on Facebook (Duguay, 2014). During the hours of WorldPride Twitter activity's highest frequency on June 29, beginning with the parade at 1:00 p.m. and finishing after the closing ceremony at 9:30 p.m., users generated 7,889 tweets, averaging approximately 15.5 tweets per minute. This volume of activity on event-specific hashtags can provide security through obscurity, but it can also lead to individual messages becoming lost in the noise.

Along with balancing privacy and publicness, the ability to disseminate personal expressions on social media may allow users to form connections and circulate new understandings about identity. Self-portraits can help their viewers feel personally addressed and can foster affective engagement (Hayward, 2013). WorldPride participants' parade selfies, crowd selfies, and other self-representations personally addressed their followers. When paired with common symbols or activities, self-portraits can open

dialogue among diverse audiences, as Piela (2013) found in her study of Muslim women's selfies taken while wearing niqabs and engaging in everyday activities. In certain instances, the inclusion of common symbols in WorldPride tweets served similar purposes: by designating the closing ceremony rainbow the "official rainbow of #WorldPride," users identified a common symbol that did not elevate any particular identity group, politician, or corporate sponsor. Ritualized sharing of common symbols and experiences on Twitter can contribute to 'communal sense-making' about a specific event (Shaw, Burgess, Crawford, & Bruns, 2013). Users' ability to harness Twitter's features to circulate this personal yet public expression of a common symbol increased the visibility of challenges to heteronormative discourses. Specifically, they communicated opposition to discourses that view LGBTQ people as unnatural and immoral by retweeting the rainbow photo and responding to it with messages such as "Mother nature celebrates #WORLDPRIDE" and "Just in case you were still wondering whose side God is on."

However, social media are designed to elicit personal and affective information as part of their profit-making strategy (Gehl, 2014). Platforms invite users to share narratives that generate connective activity, increasing the production of data and the ability to target users through personalized advertising (Van Dijck, 2013b). Therefore, users may not be performing networked identity work with the intention of making new connections so much as simply responding to the platform's invitation to share a certain type of data. Platforms require this data to be expressed in standardized ways that are datafiable (Gehl, 2014; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), which also constrains the amount of negotiation that can be conducted through networked identity work. WorldPride messages were largely homogenized by the 140-character tweet format, limiting expression to emojis, links, and photos without room for customized creativity. Since marketers prefer to associate data with *real* identities (Gehl, 2014), Twitter's real-name norms (reinforced by the verification process for high-profile accounts) may also have influenced users to make less personal and confrontational tweets than they would under a pseudonym. Common symbols were also largely appropriated by politicians and businesses, which inhibited meaningful dialogue about discourses of sexuality by placing the focus on politics and products.

Popularity

Social media platforms have mechanisms for privileging particular topics and users (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), and Twitter specifically allows for the high visibility of a small number of users with many followers (Van Dijck, 2011). As demonstrated in the network and retweet data, popular users' participation in WorldPride increased its visibility, connected a range of users to the WorldPride Twitter public, and garnered attention through celebrities' and politicians' affective expressions. When popular users tweeted about the festival to their followers, their messages appeared in thousands of users' feeds. Moreover, tweets by mainstream celebrities, companies, or news outlets had a chance of reaching people not often confronted with LGBTQ-related topics.

As self-expression on social media has become inherently linked to self-branding (Van Dijck, 2013b), popular accounts can also overshadow more diverse viewpoints and co-opt events like WorldPride in attempts to boost their status. Without large follower networks, groups such as Queers Against Israeli Apartheid must rely on popular users' retweeting of their messages. However, as was evident in celebrities' and politicians' avoidance of tweets critical of laws, policies, or homophobic attitudes, popular

users maintain followers by avoiding messages that appear too personal or controversial (Marwick & boyd, 2011). High-profile accounts' popularity allowed them to take an agenda-setting role regarding the tone and range of topics addressed, with official WorldPride accounts steering dialogue toward celebratory messages, information exchange, and a focus on Toronto. Supporting other findings that politicians' Twitter use tends to be self-interested (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010), politicians at WorldPride infused the Twitter public with self-promotional tweets or general discussion of local and national politics rather than addressing policies concerning LGBTQ people or international LGBTQ issues, despite the global mandate of WorldPride.

While corporate declarations of "Happy Pride!" helped to circulate commercial brands through the WorldPride Twitter public, politicians more prominently used WorldPride as a forum to boost their popularity. Carah (2014) identifies *brand activations* as the way brands integrate themselves into a festival by adopting its aesthetics and mood. Individuals are then encouraged to interact with brands as they experience the festival and to circulate their interactions online. Chow's active Pride persona, glittery purple dress, and flamboyant choreography can be read as a brand activation that Twitter users engaged with and disseminated as part of their participation in WorldPride. Her Twitter presence showed she was not shy about using WorldPride as a stage for publicity, declaring: "Happy Pride! We've come so far together. Ford hasn't been along for the ride. His loss, not ours. #equality #WP14TO." With over 61,000 followers, Chow's messages were widely retweeted within the WorldPride Twitter public and across other publics. Therefore, popularity also influenced platform connections, as communities that formed around political affiliations were mainly in response to charismatic personas and political brands.

Connectivity

Social media have become less focused on forming social connections and more characterized by automated *connectivity* that links content, users, and advertisers (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Algorithms and platform designs are geared toward automated personalization that increases connections. The retweet feature, now reduced to the tap of a button (Halavais, 2014), makes it easy for users to declare a connection with others or their content. In some cases, such as users' retweeting of Ghomeshi's criticism of Ford, retweeting may signify endorsement of certain ideas. A large volume of retweets can make an issue more visible or even accentuate it as a *trending topic*, and can circulate content through multiple user networks. Retweeting constitutes active participation in Twitter conversations (boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010) and may include networked identity work by allowing individuals to support a particular stance while placing another user (e.g., Ghomeshi), rather than themselves, at the forefront of the conversation. This may be a particularly important affordance for LGBTQ users who have not disclosed their sexual identity to all their acquaintances but wish to participate in dialogue about such topics. Like some LGBTQ users who post ambiguous political content on Facebook (Duguay, 2014), this allows users to reinforce a statement without posting personal content that may out them to others. Chow's supporters may also have been endorsing an LGBTQ-friendly political platform through their retweets about her campaign. In other instances, such as users' retweeting of Target's Pride message, retweets may connect unwitting users with advertisers, signaling tastes for future targeted marketing.

Platform conventions that foster connectivity can quickly generate both connections over shared experiences and data for advertisers (Gehl, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013a). When individuals increased their activity on June 29, they created a backchannel for the parade and closing ceremony. Commonly occurring during real-time television broadcasts and spectator events (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014), backchannels provide a space for running commentary of an event as users are viewing it. Though backchannels can be dominated by elite fans who reinforce community boundaries through shorthand references or jargon (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013), the WorldPride backchannel harnessed platform features and sharing conventions to invite further participation. Unlike spectator backchannels that contain few links (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014), parade tweets included numerous links to photos and videos through which users shared their experiences. As these were often personal and affective images containing common expressions, such as rainbow-infused crowd selfies, they communicated a collective experience of the day across the WorldPride Twitter public. However, these tweets were mostly plain tweets without connections to others in the form of @replies or @mentions (Figure 1) and, as demonstrated in WorldPride conversation networks (Figures 3 and 4), they did not lead to the emergence of close-knit communities other than those connected through political affiliation. This indicates that WorldPride's backchannel expressions were limited in their capacity to generate discussion, due to low visibility from lack of retweets, and to form interpersonal connections, due to low numbers of @replies and @mentions. Such a large amount of tagged visual content is, however, easily processed by platforms' algorithms (Carah, 2014) and therefore serves to connect users more closely with advertisers.

Datafication

Datification has been apparent throughout this discussion, which has already noted how platforms elicit specific types of personal data in standard formats so as to store, analyze, and sell it. Users' WorldPride tweets throughout the festival indicated personal tastes, affiliations, and activities that were stored in quantifiable, analyzable formats in Twitter's databases. While datafication allowed WorldPride expressions to be repurposed by data miners and advertising agencies, it also kept the WorldPride Twitter public from disappearing into ever-increasing volumes of tweets. Twitter's architecture presents only the most recent tweets at the top of a user's feed. Though users can still search for tweets with WorldPride hashtags, it is impossible to get a sense of what the WorldPride public was like by engaging with Twitter today. Datafication made it possible to obtain WorldPride tweets and metadata, which permitted some re-creation and interpretation of the WorldPride Twitter public in this article. However, it is increasingly difficult to access Twitter data, as the company favors partnerships with data retailers over open access arrangements (Burgess & Bruns, 2015). Thus, neither activists nor everyday users are able to access, control, or obtain an overview of the data they produce (Poell, 2013) and researchers face obstacles to acquiring the data necessary for understanding the role of Twitter participation in events like WorldPride.

Conclusion

This article examined the public formed on Twitter during Toronto's 2014 WorldPride festival. Close and distant readings of Twitter data enabled identification of reflections of WorldPride, including (a) WorldPride's high visibility through a hashtag-generated public and across publics; (b) connections across

the WorldPride Twitter public, marked by the absence of fragmentation into identity groups and the emergence of politically affiliated communities; and (c) users' personal, affective, and common expressions, some of which were shared widely. However, this study also found that the most visible users were politicians, celebrities, and commercial accounts that circulated self-promotional, local, and often banal content. Examining Twitter's social media logic in relation to this WorldPride public identified the nature of the platform's influence: even as it allowed users to share and connect over their collective experience of the festival, it constrained expressions to standardized, datafiable tweets serving to connect users to advertisers as well. Twitter further shaped the WorldPride public through its magnification of popular accounts and functionality for self-promotion, which invites users to tweet about personal but nonconfrontational topics. Therefore, the WorldPride Twitter public did not give rise to counterpublics with strong messages challenging heteronormativity, nor did it form queer publics where nonnormative discourses were discussed widely among mixed audiences.

This study's limitations include its focus on Twitter to the exclusion of other media. Understandings of present-day Pride expressions may benefit from future studies examining the entire media ecology of Pride festivals. This article also focused on the most popular content to identify what messages and accounts were most visible in relation to WorldPride's reflection on Twitter. Additional studies could address less popular content, for instance by examining the role of LGBTQ-specific spambots, or focus on individuals, interviewing them about the impact of their personal tweets and Instagram photos during Pride parades. This study, for its part, has presented an analysis of Twitter participation during a large-scale LGBTQ festival, which reinforces the notion that visibility is not always sufficient to challenge normative discourses. While WorldPride was visible within the public generated by its hashtags and across other publics, this visibility did not result in the equally visible circulation of discourses challenging heteronormativity. Recognition of Twitter's influence in shaping this public aligns with Bruns and Burgess' (in press) assessment that Twitter has become less a platform for self-organized ad hoc publics than a producer of calculated publics actively curated through the platform's design and algorithms. Therefore, this study makes way for future research into other platforms' capacity to foster publics that allow a greater diversity of individuals and their messages to become salient.

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