Fashion is often dismissed as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, downright counterproductive to the presumably more serious and high-minded business of political action. But is it possible to think of fashion not only as compatible with politics but also as a form of political engagement in its own right? This essay offers one possible answer to this question through a case study of a virtual fashion community that represents bodies typically excluded from participation in mainstream fashion—namely, fat, queer, and femme-identified bodies. This online community disrupts the politics of body size, gender, beauty, and consumerism that predominate in fashion as both an economic and a cultural economy, creating a virtual "counterdiscourse" (Deleuze and Foucault 1977) in the process. Exploring how this counterdiscourse was constructed, contained, and challenged, this essay demonstrates the very real potential of fashion as a site of political action and contestation even as it also reveals formidable limitations to this potential.

Sociological considerations of fashion commonly characterize it as a key marker of social distance and distinction (Bourdieu 1984; Simmel [1911] 1984). According to this literature, fashion is a vehicle for conspicuous consumption (Veblen [1899] 2007) and the accrual of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). While these definitions of fashion capture its ability to produce social distinctions, they do not, on the whole, attend to ways that fashion's meanings are mediated by bodies (Entwistle 2000). As Crane (2000) points out, part of the function of fashion is to produce bodies that are easily distinguishable by sex, race, and class. Particularly because the case study at hand attempts to disrupt this sorting process, it
is appropriate to instead draw primarily on Entwistle's (2000) definition of fashion as a “situated bodily practice.” This definition brings the importance of embodiment to the fore, which shifts the unit of analysis from fashion as cultural artifacts to fashion as styled bodies.

Further, there is a tendency in sociology to characterize fashion as a strictly constraining and regulating social process, thereby ignoring or dismissing the pleasure of fashion. Yet there is reason to suggest that fashion can be more than just a source of oppression. Chittenden (2010) examined the phenomenon of fashion blogging and found that it can mitigate social isolation and create a sense of community that goes far beyond displays of conspicuous consumption. Pham’s (2011) analysis of fashion blogging done by Asian Americans argues that it also has the potential to disrupt racist hierarchies of beauty, authority, and knowledge production. In light of such analyses, this essay defines fashion not only as a situated bodily practice (Entwistle 2000), but also as one that produces unique pleasures—and pains—with respect to gender, race, class, and sexual identities.

Fa(t)shion February for Femmes and Friends: A Sociological Case Study

Chittenden’s (2010) and Pham’s (2011) works suggest that online fashion communities might be an especially promising venue for assessing fashion’s potential as a tool of resistance and social justice. New media scholars argue that the Internet is, by its very nature, a form of participatory culture (Shirky 2010) where ideas and language provide the grounds for community (Lehdonvirta 2010). Crane’s (2000) historical analysis of fashion and identity shows that the Internet has increased both the diffusion and the democracy of fashion discourse. The extent to which the Internet can facilitate a freer exchange of ideas remains hotly debated within media studies (Pham 2011), but the increased ability of former fashion “outsiders” to participate in the production of fashion discourse through the medium of the Internet has been persuasively documented (Pham 2011; Rocamora 2012). The proliferation and popularity of virtual “taste communities” (Blakley 2001) through fashion blogging has diluted the power of mainstream fashion tastemakers and created a symbiotic relationship between mainstream and virtual fashion communities (Rocamora 2012). It stands to reason, then, that the possibility of disrupting normative fashion discourse through online fashion projects is a real one.
Fa(t)shion February for Femmes and Friends, or Fa(t)shion February for short, is one such project. Fa(t)shion February makes for an apt case study for a number of reasons. Fashion blogs are myriad—at least two million by some counts (Rocamora 2012); fat fashion, or “fatshion” blogs are a small but considerable subset of these. Another subset of fashion blogs focuses on fashion for queer people, and yet another even smaller subset focuses specifically on fashion for femme-identified queers, meaning those who claim a feminine gender identity or expression. Fa(t)shion February lies at the intersection of these fashion identity politics—it is a virtual community for privileging fat, queer, femme fashion. It also intends to privilege the perspectives of people of color and disabled people, who are also often excluded or Otherized in fashion discourse. This multidimensional challenge to mainstream fashion politics, which tend to privilege thin, white, heteronormative and gender normative, able bodies, uniquely positions Fa(t)shion February as a site of opposition and resistance.

Fa(t)shion February is, as the name suggests, also different from other fashion blogs in that it is active only one month of the year. In February, users post images of “Outfits of the Day,” which usually include full-body snapshots of users wearing their fashions. In addition to these mostly image-driven posts, also sometimes write text posts musing on fashion, bodies, politics, and self-image. The bounded nature of the project facilitates a comprehensive review of website’s content; accordingly, I analyzed all image and text posts that were posted directly to the Fa(t)shion February website. As a function of the formatting style of its web host (tumblr.com), Fa(t)shion February users are able to “reblog” Fa(t)shion February posts to their personal blogs and include commentary on the reblogged post. While it was not possible to catch every reblog from Fa(t)shion February, I did endeavor to track and analyze as many as possible using the search tag “Fatshion February” and by clicking through to the personal blogs of Fa(t)shion February users.

Producing a Fashion Counterdiscourse

As mentioned above, much of the sociological discussion of fashion has focused on the ways that it produces and upholds hegemonic discourses (Foucault 1982; Gramsci 2000) of beauty, consumption, and bodily discipline that maintain oppressive race, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies (Barthel 1989; Bartky 1988; Bordo 2004; Crane 2000; Wolf 1992). Dis-
courses (Foucault 1982), or formalized ways of thinking, knowing, and being that are recognized as legitimate truths, induce obedience to rigorous regimes of discipline and surveillance that privilege thin, white, upper-classed and heteronormative bodies and presentations of self over others (Dworkin and Wachs 2009). As a result, those who cannot—or will not—submit to this embodied ideal are denied cultural and institutional access and opportunity.

Fashion as a cultural production (Bourdieu 1984) is problematic, then, to the extent that it perpetuates systems of privilege and inequality. That said, the intention of this essay is to consider whether it is also possible that fashion can also serve as a site of resistance against these systems. While Foucault is largely cited for his critique of the productive power of discourse, it is crucial to note that he also wrote of the politically transformative possibility of “counterdiscourse” (Deleuze and Foucault 1977), or the opportunity for the “formerly voiceless to begin to articulate their desires—to counter the domination of prevailing authoritative discourses” (Moussa and Scapp 1996, 88).

The concept of counterdiscourse moves beyond the characterization of Foucault’s work as an altogether bleak account of productive power to considering the possibility that voices from “below” (hooks 1989; Spivak 1988) can change discourse through the circulation of what Foucault calls “subjugated knowledges.” Thus, we might think of the Fa(t)shion February project as a possible site of production for counterdiscourse about what fashion means and who can legitimately participate in it. These counterdiscursive formations pertain to three overlapping political domains: size politics, gender politics, and the politics of consumption. In each domain, the stated goals of the project reject hegemonic ideals of size, gender, and consumption; rather than contribute to the production of “docile bodies” (Foucault 1995), Fa(t)shion February celebrates and proliferates images of unruly bodies.

Mainstream fashion imagery focuses almost exclusively on thin bodies, despite the oft-noted dissonance between the ideal “model” body and the bodies of fashion consumers. Fashion magazines (Hesse-Biber 2006) as well as health and fitness magazines (Dworkin and Wachs 2009) include extensive content instructing readers on the pursuit and maintenance of thinness as the fashion ideal (Bordo 2004). In the United States, this “cult of thinness” (Hesse-Biber 2006) is increasingly legitimized as not
just an aesthetic ideal but also a health mandate as fear of a so-called obesity epidemic have come to predominate national discourses of health and wellness (Gard and Wright 2005).

In striking contrast to these forms of media, Fa(t)shion February is explicitly marked as a space that privileges fat bodies and experiences. In the enactment of this ideal, the site goes beyond simply displaying fat bodies and fashions, a radical act in and of itself, but in fact engages in a direct reversal of typical fashion discourse in its written content. For instance, users rarely used the language of “flattering” to describe their fashion, which would imply that fat fashion should disguise or minimize fatness. Rather, users complement each other on how their outfits highlighted fatness; comments regularly included direct references to visible fatness as cute, sexy, and enviable. Similarly, some users chose outfits specifically for their ability to accentuate their fat. One user mused,

I look back on myself a year ago, and remember a time when I was terrified of my own visibility. I remember wearing jeans, t-shirts, and hoodies in the middle of July. I remember shoving myself into spanx, adhering to a wardrobe of “slimming colors,” and raging against my own image in the mirror. It was a time when I followed the artificially imposed “rules”—No horizontal stripes, no sundresses, no leggings, no prints, no bright colors, no swimsuits, no tank tops—and ignored my own aesthetic. Now, I say fuck that [emphasis in original]. I’ve found my happiness, and I’m not about to hide it.

In the context of Fa(t)shion February, fat bodies were not merely legitimized as participants in fashion but actively celebrated as purveyors of fashionable and desirable aesthetics.

In addition to counterhegemonic size politics, Fa(t)shion February is intended to subvert gendered and sexualized fashion norms. As the full title of the website suggests, part of this privileging was intended to focus on “femme” fashion. While “femme” is often defined in relation to “butch” as a kind of complementary gender politics engaged in by lesbian women, Fa(t)shion February participants defined femme as a queer gender identity, one that hinges on a subversive and playful engagement with traditional or emphasized femininity (Connell 2005) as a way of critiquing and challenging gender and sexuality expectations. The site’s creator explains, “Femme looks all kinds of ways, and it’s not about capitalism, and it’s not about turning you on (unless we want it to be); femme is hot as fuck, and
queer as hell. And different for everyone.” This definition of femme fashion counters mainstream fashion discourse on a number of fronts.

First, it challenges heteronormativity by emphasizing the fashion of queer people, femme women in particular. Second, in defining femme fashion in such an open-ended way, it defies constraints on what clothing is acceptably “fashionable.” It also counters the assumption that fashion is about sexual objectification and display without disregarding femmes’ agency to engage in fashion as sexual. Finally, while femme is often associated with feminine-presenting ciswomen, or self-identified women who were designated female at birth, Fa(t)shion February defines femme as a possibility for anyone, regardless of sex, gender, sexual identity, or embodiment. As such, it challenges heteronormative and cissexist assumptions about acceptable fashion participation.

While Fa(t)shion February was ostensibly created to challenge size and gender politics, it also includes a less overt and yet equally significant critique of the politics of consumerism within fashion discourse. In reflecting on the project, Fa(t)shion February’s creator explained that “queering fashion has drawn attention to ways to dress your body that aren’t super capitalist or expensive.” User posts mimic the typical format of online “Outfit of the Day” posts, which usually include a list of sources with pictures, which tell the reader where the poster purchased the various items of their outfit. While mainstream fashion bloggers have been critiqued for sourcing most of their outfits from expensive designer fashion houses (e.g., Oxford 2011), Fa(t)shion February source lists show how many users are recycling, remixing, thrifting, and creating their own fashion. Alongside outfit posts, users also discussed how to participate in fashion without capitulating to discursive demands to spend large amounts of money. For example, one user commented:

I am also concerned at the propensity of (radical) fashion blogs to be reduced to the ever-present imperative to shop, to fall to the inevitable model of: Here is a picture of what I wore. Here is where you can buy it. Understanding that within a neo-liberal framework, it is difficult to divorce embodied resistance from capital (and understanding my own complicity in consumerism), I wonder if fashion can move beyond industry. Is the fa(t)shion revolution waiting for us in the plus-size section of Target and WalMart? Can we divorce our sartorial resistance from the psychological rush of finding the one cute dress on the rack that zips or even an entire store of clothes in your size (and conversely,
the psychological crash of searching fruitlessly for a single item that fits),
no matter what the social, political, or environmental implications of
our consumption?

Difficult discussions like the one began in this post, alongside the prev-
ance of DIY fashion, reflect the site’s intention to counter the hypercon-
sumerist demands of mainstream fashion.

In addition, I would argue that the fundamental aesthetic of Fa(t)shion
February is one of camp (Sontag 1966), the acknowledgment and even
celebration of artifice and outlandishness. Users camp size politics, wear-
ing clothes that exaggerate their fat bodies, call attention to them, bring
humor to them—for example, tight-fitting T-shirts that read, “I’m not fat,
I’m just fluffy” or decorative necklaces in a girlish cursive that identify the
wearers as “fat” or a “slut.” Camp also informs the gendered dimensions of
users’ fashions, from wearing bright pink lipsticks with mustaches to nos-
talgic, tongue-in-cheek references to 1950s housewife chic. Finally, camp
also infuses the consumerist critique of users’ fashions. For example, by
mimicking the form of traditional fashion blogs, but replacing designers
and dollar tags with references that explain that the clothes were self-sewn
or found in bargain bins and clearance racks, users offer a send up tradi-
tional prestige systems. In these moments, the elitist, label-conscious val-
ues of hegemonic discourse are reversed, and the extent to which one can
thrift, remix, and self-create become the predominant markers of status.

Fa(t)shion February as a Virtual Boundary Public

In a critical rethinking of Habermas’s notion of the “public sphere” as the
heart of political life, Nancy Fraser (1992, 67) developed the concept of
the “subaltern counterpublic” to account for the “parallel discursive are-
nas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate
counterdiscourses.” These counterpublics exist not only to validate mar-
ginalized identities but also as a place to strategize collective action that
might widen the ways in which nonhegemonic identities can be expressed
in society. Fraser envisioned counterpublics as physical spaces such as
feminist bookstores or festivals, where feminists could convene to rest,
regroup, and strategize new interventions into mainstream discourse.

In contrast to this emphasis on physical space, Gray (2009) expands
Fraser’s concept to include more liminal and virtual spaces. Gray’s analysis
of queer rural youth suggests that in the absence of stable counterpublic spaces (in this case, LGBT resource centers), marginalized people create “boundary publics”; for example, in Gray’s study, queer youth turn Wal-Mart, a site typically marked by conservative and consumerist politics, into a temporary counterpublic of queer resistance when they perform pop-up drag shows in the aisles of local stores. Similarly, these youth take advantage of Internet access to create virtual boundary publics in websites and chat rooms and on message boards. Gray defines boundary publics, then, as “iterative, ephemeral experiences of belonging that circulate across the outskirts and through the center(s) of a more recognized and validated public sphere” (93).

In keeping with this definition, I would argue that Fa(t)shion February is a virtual boundary public, one that creates a community of belonging through both the co-optation and the countering of predominant understandings of fashion and fashionability. This is achieved through the discursive disruptions with respect to the politics of size, gender, and consumerism, but also through the unique attributes of the site’s platform, Tumblr.com. In a traditional blog format, the author writes a post and then includes space for comments, where readers can respond to the post, the author, and one another. Typically, the post—the original text—is primary, and comments, often relegated to a click-through link at the end of a post, are secondary. In this formulation, the person who wrote the original post is the authoritative voice; commenters are similar to an audience in a lecture.

In contrast, posts on Tumblr are produced as blogs and reblogs—an original author posts a blog, but instead of commenting, other users reblog the original text and add their commentary. Often, this reblog is again reblogged, and so on, creating a multi-iterative, multiauthored text that proliferates in multiple directions at once. This format produces what I would argue is a more thoroughly democratic form of public participation; texts are hybrid, authors are multiple, and knowledge is generated collaboratively. The dissemination of this “wiki knowledge” is less like the metaphor of lecture and audience response than like a roundtable discussion. As a result, it is closer to Habermas’s and Fraser’s visions of participatory democracy than traditional blogging can offer.

The wiki knowledge being produced through the multiauthored, counterdiscursive formulation of Fa(t)shion February can be categorized into two, somewhat paradoxical intentions—inclusion and subversion. In one
respect, Fa(t)shion February demands inclusion into mainstream fashion space, specifically the realm of fashion blogging. It encourages inclusion by defining participant criteria as broadly as possible, by actively encouraging those typically excluded from fashion to consider themselves legitimate constituents, and through the collaborative generation of discourse that Tumblr provides. At the same time, though, it subverts the very space it seeks access to by critiquing the discourses that sustain it—exclusivity, consumerism, and conformity to hegemonic gender performance.

Fa(t)shion February challenges boundaries about who may legitimately participate in fashion as a cultural practice and subverts traditional notions of how this participation takes form. Many users spoke of feeling shy about posting, doubting that their display work (Mears 2011) could truly count as "fashion." For example, one user blogged, "In the first couple days, I was sort of dubious. I felt like my pictures weren’t high-quality enough, that my outfits weren’t put-together enough, or not the right style." Even once she was comfortable participating, she found herself fighting judgmental thoughts about other users and herself, saying: "I find that I feel a flicker of the neural habit to criticize—my brain runs quickly through a list of rules and regulations for body types. More alarming are the times I see a picture of a thin body in the feed, or a fat one with a flatter stomach or smoother skin or some other trigger, and I feel the criticism turn inward."

The deeply ingrained and internalized "fashion rules" that exclude fat bodies continued to plague this participant, even as she participated in the boundary public that flouted such conventions, showing how difficult it can be to escape hegemonic fashion discourse. Ultimately, though, her participation was personally transformative with respect to this discourse. She explained, “Visibility normalizes; it makes people of ‘problems.’ It allows beauty room to flow into ‘oddity’ and ‘wrongness.’ Visibility turns ‘unnatural’ and ‘extreme’ into real, and human, and unremarkable if not perfect.”

This user’s journey, from exclusion to inclusion and from conformity to subversion, exemplifies the dual levels of Fa(t)shion February as a boundary public. It creates a space of belonging on the margins at the same time that it directly engages the mainstream in a public critique. In this way, Fa(t)shion February is exemplary of Fraser’s (1992) vision of a successful subaltern counterpublic. Nonetheless, the question remains: what happens when that counterpublic goes public, or engages in what Fraser calls “interpublic relations”? Can the counterdiscursive constructions of this
space actually transform the hegemonic discourse in any way? The public “outing” of the Fa(t)shion February project on the blog Sociological Images demonstrates the significant limitations in translating counterdiscourses into a public critique.

From Margin to Center: Public Engagement with Fa(t)shion February

In March 2011, I posted a guest blog (Connell 2011) to the website Sociological Images, a blog of sociologically compelling images and analysis, which has a broad readership of not just professional sociologists but also a host of others interested in the social impact of media. With the site having over five hundred thousand unique visits per month (McCormack 2011), a post on Sociological Images offers the opportunity for significant exposure to a project like Fa(t)shion February. My intention in writing the article was not only to analyze the sociological significance of the project but also to offer a form of public sociology, with the intention of ultimately increasing the project’s visibility and benefitting potential participants.

Unfortunately, this proved to be a rather naive expectation on my part. Within an hour of the article’s publication, it became apparent that the readership response was not, by and large, going to be a positive or even receptive one. Readers posted comments not only dismissing the project but outright objecting to it and, worse, attacking its participants. Objections were framed mostly around a discourse of concern, specifically concern that the project was glamorizing obesity—which was being framed as both a disease and a lifestyle choice—and was thereby perpetuating harm with respect to public health. One comment, which I quote at length here, is illustrative of this kind of response:

Wait a second here, so we've now got a movement that is celebrating the physical consequences of food-addiction and trying to paint the disease of obesity as beautiful? You know a group of people that are even more marginalized than fat people? Methamphetamine users. Maybe they should start their own fashion movement that celebrates rotting teeth and emaciated, track-marked arms. . . . Gluttony is a deadly sin for a reason. Obesity kills. Celebrating a lifestyle that is unhealthy is unwise and irresponsible. The super skinny models on our catwalks are no exception; doing so much blow that you turn into a walking skeleton is not something that our magazines and tv programs should celebrate. But that doesn't mean celebrating obese bodies when we're in the middle of
a health epidemic is a good idea. Most fat people in this country are fat because of food addiction, not because of thyroid problems or anything else (if you have medical reasons for being fat that’s a totally different story). This isn’t much better than creating a movement that celebrates alcoholism or addiction to heroin by fetishizing jaundiced skin and glazed over, pin-point pupiled eyes.

This comment pathologizes fatness as a “disease of obesity” and a consequence of “food addiction,” which allows the commenter discursive inroads to critique Fa(t)shion February as irresponsible to public health. By framing fatness as an epidemic, the user is able to argue that the celebration of fatness does a public disservice, to fat people and to others around them. Another commenter explains, “If you give fat people the incentive to be fat (nice looking clothes, total acceptance, someone else to pay for their medical treatment when they have a heart attack), then they have every reason to pursue this course of action. . . . Your illogical method of embracing them will have no shot at getting them to change. This method, cruel though it may be, has a shot at working.”

While other commenters attempted to challenge such comments, the disease and addiction frames set the terms of the debate and made it difficult for commenters to move the discussion beyond comparisons of fat people to methamphetamine users, alcoholics, and pedophiles. This public discussion illustrates the difficulties of unseating hegemonic discourse—the more meaningful critiques of fashion that Fa(t)shion February engaged in was all but lost under the cacophony of “concern” for public health. Unfortunately, the responses to the blog did not stop at impassioned responses to the so-called obesity epidemic; the gender nonnormativity of the Fa(t)shion February’s counterdiscourse also came under fire, largely through personal attacks of users’ gender presentations.

These comments at once revealed how deeply radical the tenets of Fa(t)shion February are and how difficult it is to have tenets understood by a larger audience. For example, although the article explained that “femme” as a gender identity is not exclusive to ciswomen and transwomen, and that cismen and transmen can also participate, commenters doubted the participation of one man I featured in the article, making comments like “dude’s just feminine” and “I don’t think he’s dressing femme at all.” Similarly, a genderqueer-identified participant was taken to task in the comments for not being femme or fashionable enough for inclusion in the
project. Although commenters attempted to point out that such comments misunderstood the definitions of femme and fashion being put forth by the project, these interventions didn't seem to lead improve the quality of the discussion. After vigilantly moderating and deleting attacking comments for several days, the co-moderator of Sociological Images made a rare decision to close comments, noting in her final comment that “I have a suspicion the conversation will continue like this as long as I let it.”

Other Limitations: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Counterpublic

As this brief review of the Sociological Images response suggests, the obstacles to changing hegemonic discourse through the circulation of counterdiscourses are formidable. It is also important to note that these challenges were not strictly external to the counterpublic but rather arose from within as well, particularly around issues of racial exclusion and internal skirmishes about size and body politics. Early on, a number of users raised questions about the legitimacy of thin people's participation in the project. Some of these questions came from thin people themselves, who were wary of taking up space in a site specifically created to privilege fat bodies. Indeed, this concern was legitimate, as other, fat-identified users did grapple publicly in blogs and reblogs with their discomfort with the kinds of bodies that at times predominated the site.

More troubling was the limited representation of people of color in the project. One possible barrier to participation may be an issue of access; media scholars and pundits often speak of the “digital divide,” separating people of color from Internet access. However, recent research (Daniels 2011) suggests that concern over the digital divide may be overblown and that in fact, most poor youth and youth of color use new media on a daily basis. The more likely culprit is a social barrier—symbolic color lines in spaces of social media participation that create racially homogeneous community clusters in virtual space (Burkhalter 1999).

In the second year of the project, the organizers endeavored to make the space more friendly to participants of color, both through written encouragement on the site and by adding a co-moderator of color to the project. A comparison of February 2011’s and 2012’s images suggests that this strategy was somewhat successful. Nonetheless, people of color continue to be underrepresented in the site’s images and contributors.
Conclusion

To what extent, then, can fashion be used as a tool for social justice and social change? This case study of Fa(t)shion February offers some interesting answers to this question. To the extent that the site can be thought of as a boundary public, or a virtual counterpublic, it offers users a respite and a place of belonging in the context of the exclusive, elitist, and oppressive confines of mainstream fashion. It also empowers users to critique hegemonic fashion discourses and to publicly imagine more egalitarian and radical alternatives.

At the same time, though, the debut of Fa(t)shion February on the Sociological Images blog reveals how effective hegemonic discourses are at silencing such challenges. Users reframed the project as a dangerous contributor to the “obesity epidemic” and belittled nonnormative gender presentations as childish, ridiculous, weird, and unfashionable. This reframing stalled any transformative potential Fa(t)shion February might have had for much of the blog’s readership. Perhaps this response is specific to the readership of Sociological Images and the project might have been received more positively in other virtual spaces. However, given the ubiquity and persuasiveness of the moral panic over obesity in the contemporary United States, I have reason to believe that this response is fairly typical, if not even less virulent than it would be in other venues.

Additionally, this close examination of a virtual “subaltern counterpublic” (Fraser 1992) reveals how counterpublics themselves are not immune to the racial, gendered, and size oppression they may be trying to subvert. The dominant depiction of the average Fa(t)shion February user did not, ultimately, stray too far from hegemonic norms—that is, the average poster was still a young white, middle-class, feminine-presenting ciswoman who was, by fashion’s standards, unacceptably overweight, but not far from the national average for young women. The privileging of “bigger fats” that the project intended was limited by a dearth of participation by women over a size US 22.

Ultimately, Fa(t)shion February, and the broader project of fashion as a site of liberation and resistance, have significant transformative potential, though tempered by the powerful and insidious dynamics that maintain uneven regimes of power. As a part of a broader fat acceptance movement, which is gaining both academic momentum through the emergence of fat...
studies programs and activist momentum through movements like Health at Any Size, Fa(t)shion February and subversive fashion are a meaningful component to challenging sizeist politics. Similarly, as part of a broader project of queerness, it also shows how fashion—a primary marker of gender distinctions—can potentially undo gender (Connell 2010; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009) as a binary structure. This suggests that scholars should take seriously the possibility of fashion as a medium of political resistance rather than just a way of reproducing social inequalities.

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