Redefining Gender
A Contextual Analysis of Fat Femininity, Visibility and Shame

Introduction
- The body is an important site in understanding how gender is constructed
- For fat women their bodies are the site of a troubled relationship with gender

Past Research
- Standards of Femininity or Womanhood
  - White
  - Able Bodied
  - Straight
  - Cisgender
  - Reproductive
  - Thin
- Fatness and Femininity
  - Fat women are thought of as without gender
  - Their bodies are “less than” and “too much” simultaneously.
    - Overtly sexualized and desexualized
  - Fatness is a failure at femininity
    - Needing to be hidden or minimized
- The intersection of fatness and gender create double binds on the lives of fat women
  - Less likely to be promoted or hired.
  - Paid less than their thinner counterparts

Research Questions
- How do fat bodies on social media challenge normative performances or displays of gender?
- How do those spaces deconstruct hegemonic masculinity and femininity?

Results
- Posture
  - Bodies photographed as vulnerable and assertive
  - Playing with gendered fat performance
- Makeup / Clothes
  - Used to challenge the construction of femininity
  - Hyper feminine
    - Very little masculine dress
  - Reinforcing / appropriating thin ideals
    - Rejecting limitations on fat gendered performance
  - Referencing the body
    - Clothes used to control or hide the body
    - Conversely, used to make it more visible
- Negotiating Shame
  - Directly challenging negative beliefs about fatness

Methods
- Content analysis
- Data source – Tumblr
  - 100 posts - photographs and text
- Hashtags used to find data
  - #FatVanity
    - Used by activists / fat positive people
  - #HonorMyCurves
    - Used by body or fat positive people
  - #OOTDPlusSize
    - Outfit of the day plus size fashion bloggers
  - #PlusSizeBloggers
    - Plus size fashion bloggers

Conclusion
- Repurposing and/or rejecting a thin ideal to assert control over the body
  - Fashion as a venue to autonomy and gender as a performance
- Many frame their bodies as “a project” attempting to become or appear smaller
  - Hiding bellies, emphasizing curves
- The fat body is photographed in contradictory ways that disturb hegemonic femininity
- Rejection of the male-centric power relationship by framing their femininity as a performance of personal autonomy