

ANGIE

21•Asian/Pacific Islander•She/Her•Providence, RI

Femme is important to me because it counteracts everything that seems tainted about womanhood and queerness. When I was younger, I was always excited and in a rush to become a woman, but I was a late bloomer. I really liked heels and things like that, and I learned what kinds of things or bodies were sexy. I was conditioned to believe in this hierarchy of values pertaining to womanhood and their use in obtaining this ultimate goal of heterosexual marriage. I think that's something that a lot of girls learn early on. I think being told that I'm a particular kind of woman, for example, weak or incapable of having my own sexual agency through various languages like violence, trauma, assault, exclusion, or lack of representation, can make me feel like I'm no longer interested in being a Femme. But despite this I feel like I hold on to performing and presenting as Femme, because **it's about reclaiming what I've learned to be Femme outside of** the patriarchy, outside of racism, and it's still something I'm learning and deciding on every day. Also something that's really important is allowing myself to be high maintenance. Allowing ritual, allowing myself to own years of observation of other Femme people I look up to, and own watching makeup tutorials. Rejecting the whiteness of natural beauty, rejecting the concepts of "natural" and "real" beauty within a Eurocentric standard.

The sex positive and sex normative narrative that's really dominant in all cultures makes it so that sometimes **presenting as Femme or choosing to perform femininity is seen as a method or a means of obtaining sex or something sexual**, and it's really important to remember that's not always the goal. I'm definitely unlearning a lot of things and unlearning male approval, while also trying to reconcile how I feel about women in my family too. A lot of things that I feel like we are taught or we're conditioned to do are definitely passed down, almost like survival or defense mechanisms, but learning to reevaluate or reown what all that training means in a different way for different purposes is something I'm contending with. I also think that there's a lot of power in the word Femme, and owning the word. I think **that traditional strength, traditional power, seems to be assigned to masculine traits and presentations**, and by embedding power in the word Femme, we find strength in vulnerability, weakness, softness, gentleness.

I like knowing a lot about beauty products and ingredients and things like that. It makes me feel within a Femme dialogue or Femme community, those things are taken seriously in a research way, the same way that science and computer people talking about that stuff are nerding out seems to be admired. I think it's really cool to be admired for having a lot of info about beauty. I think that we're taught to be shameful of that, which goes back to the whole 'natural beauty' thing, as if being high maintenance is something to be ashamed of.

Everyone's agency should be valued. My presentation isn't always for whatever dominant society claims it to be. That works for capitalism right? The heterosexual experience being the pinnacle or the goal and if it works for capitalism, then it works for racism, classism, sexism, all those things. Our relationships are really important with each other. Femmes are the people who pick each other up when everyone else falls through. It's really important for us to see people who look like us, that present as Femme and are openly queer. I also think that it's really important for this sort of project to happen with the artist/organizer being someone who's from the community, because there's so much stuff that exists that seems valued because it's commodifiable when it's from the documentary perspective. You have a lot of photographers that come from a really privileged background documenting and archiving our lives or experiences that they find interesting. My intersectional oppressions are not interesting.