

SHAYNA

24•Black with Indigenous Roots•She/Her/They/Them•Brooklyn

Femme to me is a verb. Femme is a verb because it's something that's actively growing. We're actively portraying **ourselves by ourselves** outside of mainstream definitions. I think with that inclusivity, Femme is a sisterhood that's growing and that's accepting of Femmeness outside of traditional bodies and what that means. **It's us staking claim to who we are in our own definition.** It's us saying that we're beautiful despite what you might think. **It's us not being afraid** to show our bodies and loving our bodies, embracing them for all their pureness and accepting our beauty, our ugliness, our sorrows, our happiness. And saying this is me, I'm beautiful. Fuck you. I'm Femme. I'm fabulous. I'm doing it.

Femme for me is about embracing creativity and having fun. It's putting on the perfume and the makeup and the eyeliner and the mascara and the hair. I feel like hair is a big part of it. Because one day you see me and the hair is natural the next day it's straight and sleek. The day after that it's twisted out. **Femme is about embracing your fun, flirty side, the creativity that comes with it.** And you do it for yourself, you know? It's not to impress anybody else, it's that I like this. I like having fun, I like putting this on, or taking this off and showing this part. It's about embracing yourself. We are creative beings naturally, but we're so limited as we grow up-it becomes "No this isn't for you, you do that," or "You're at this age, you're too old for this." No. **You're not too old. You're not too black. You're not too fat. If you like doing something, you do it.** Souls have none of those constrictions or limitations. And that's why Femme is about sisterhood and accepting people for their souls and their spirits. That's why I say it's a verb. It's actively progressing, even with myself. **I have to challenge what Femmeness looks like** and what it feels like. And if somebody's rocking it and doing their thing, that's my sister right there. That's my Femme.

What I enjoy about being Femme is embracing my sexuality, which is supposed to be something so vulgar but comes so naturally to us. Making other people feel comfortable in that sense. Because I'm not the "traditionally" sexy girl you know what I mean? Boldly Black, I'm definitely a curvy girl, plus size, big and love in it! Thick thighs and all. And that to me is beautiful.

Everything that I love and embrace about **being Femme is a challenge for me.** Sexuality is something that's very raw and very real, and that's why I think it scares people to be true to themselves. For so many of us, **we're marginalized to the point of hating ourselves, hating who we are.** Our natural hair, our brown skin, our thick lips, our thick hips. But look at these girls buying it, and we get it for free. I think it's hard because when you have families who are so rooted in being respectable, despite casting those sounds out, you still hear it. That's why I say Femme is a verb because you have to actively teach yourself that you're beautiful and that you're desirable for yourself and for others. And even to your families you have to actively show them that no, **I'm not this girl, I'm me, and this is great just how I am.** I'm guava.

Femmes are not invisible. Our voices are powerful and we contribute a lot. We're not here to do the work for you. Especially within the community, being marginalized yourself and being discriminated against, you need to see us too. **We're constantly uplifting the more masculine narrative.** We're always holding our bois down and it's sad when we need someone to be there, we don't have that. It's not our job to do the work, just like we're not here as brown and black folks to do the work for white people when they see the fucked up shit that we have to go through on the daily. We're here, support us. Because we support you and we love you down and that's what makes us stronger as a community and as individuals-reciprocity.