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24 • Filipina-American • She/They • Seattle, Washington

Femme means so many things to me. In the Philippines there's this huge, huge gender binary, you're either strictly a woman or strictly a man. That's it. They're opposite of each other. For me, Growing up in a Filipino family I feel like a lot of what my mom represented was this femininity that people didn't... They just regarded it as weak. And for me to reclaim that and show that **its a powerful, fierce thing** is really important. It makes me emotional. This white lady that I work with asked me the other day, “Do you know that Femme is like a lesbian term?” And I was like “Stop, no it's not. It's a lot more than that.” She was like what does it mean to you and I was like I mean it's how I look, it's how I identify, it's how I act, it's everything. And she was like wow that's so meaningful. She didn't get it [laughter].

In my family, the **women have been really put down for being Femme or feminine.** It just makes me want to be that person that they never could have been. You know? That they weren't given the chance to be. And I feel like a lot of what their Femme represents is not necessarily what they think to be strong. As in, my mom didn't always stick up for herself against my dad or verbal abuse like that, but **sometimes being strong means being silent** and keeping harmony in your family and taking care of your family and keeping it together. As much as I feel like I don't have a specific Femme role model, a lot of the women in my family, like my grandma and my mom, my aunts I feel like **they taught me how to be Femme without actually knowing the words for Femme.**

A lot of the Femmes that I know are very sassy, but not in a way that's rude. **The badass Femmes that I'm friends with command their presence.** You know what I mean? When they enter the room you can tell that they just steal the spotlight - or at least I feel like they do. Knowing this part of my identity, I feel like I'm really in control of who I am. I don't know how somebody can feel bratty and badass at the same time, but that's exactly how I feel most of the time.

The biggest thing that I always tell non-Femme people is that **we're not for your consumption.** I'm not doing Femme to be Femme for other people and we're not trying to impress other people. For me personally, I do everything for myself. I hear the whole “you're too vain” and “you're too into yourself”. I **feel like we live in a society where Femme people aren't taught to love themselves.** I feel like it's really powerful when I see other Femmes be really into themselves, that's really rad.

Femmes should be given more space to be there for each other and I don't see that a lot in the queer community, which is really hard for me to say, to be honest. But I just feel like... I guess even in terms of dating dynamics, and maybe it's different in other places but I feel like in Seattle a lot of Femme people don't date other Femmes or they won't be friends with other Femmes. I feel like a lot of that comes from our society which **pits Femmes against each other.** I don't want to compete with you, I want to get to know you!

There's so many different gender identities, and we should be given space to express that. Why do genderqueer people always have to be masculine presenting? **Why can't we be genderqueer and Femme at the same time?** Why does androgyny always look like white masculine queers? Genderqueer people who are masculine presenting get a lot of credit for things that Femmes have already been doing. It's just really hard to watch Femmes getting thrown under the bus and not getting the same spotlight. I feel like your Femme can be anything. Femme can look like so many different things. And even for me, a person who identifies as a Femme, even for me that's really hard to remember.