ISAKE

26•Black•She/Her•Harlem

Femme for me is not only a way of presenting yourself but, a way of thinking about the world around you. Femme is an idea and image that people present, but it's also a way of thinking about who you are, what you want to represent, and what you bring to the table in any sort of relationship be it romantic or platonic or familial. Femme is something that really allows you to grow and stretch, and say this is where I am and this is who I am, and people will mold themselves around that, instead of the other way around. I think a lot of people think that Femme is in reaction to, and for me Femme is a presentation and other people will respond to that.

It was always really apparent to me that I was Femme, but to other people it was confusing. When I was very young, I loved dressing up I loved wearing pretty dresses and I loved doing my hair and my nails, but I also loved climbing trees and playing in the dirt and wanted to run around and do stuff. I learned fairly quickly that **most Femme presenting things weren't built for me to do the things that I wanted to do, but I didn't care** so I'd just keep wearing them, and keep ripping my stockings and my dresses, keep ripping through my clothes. I was like well I wish these things that I like to wear were more functional. But that is a wish that still hasn't come true. That was always very confusing to the people around me, they were like but you're wearing a dress, and you want to climb a tree? Like you're wearing a dress and you want to play this runaround game? And as I got older that still kept being the case. I was in science classes and doing things like rowing, but I also wanted to make sure that my manicure was on point and that my hair looked really good, and that my eyeliner wasn't smudged, and people were confused! And so for me I'm not willing to compromise that to do the things that I want to do.

Most of the challenges I face in relation to my Femme identity are other people imposing whatever it is that they feel about Femme on me when I walk into a room. My whole identity isn't presented as soon as I walk through the door so hearing from someone "I wouldn't expect that from someone who looks like you." Those limitations are **imposed on me because of how I present and that's really frustrating.** A lot of times this creates invisibility. I'm a Femme woman of color and when I walk into a space a lot of times people don't see that I'm a queer woman of color. **Femme invisibility is still a real thing.** Someone said to me "You're just a straight queer girl," and I'm like what does that even mean?? You don't have a typical lesbian haircut or you don't have tons and tons of visible tattoos and you don't have tons and tons of visible piercings, you don't embody a lot of those stereotypes that people put on queer women and you're black. So that in and of itself means that you wont get visibly identified as queer unless you're wearing a thousand rainbows.

I think that there is **no one way to be Femme.** Like there's no checklist. Lipstick. Heels. Long hair. Dress. There is no prescribed "Femme in A Box" kit. You can't order that online. It's something that everyone gets to be for themselves, to define for themselves. Everyone gets to build for themselves. It grows and it changes and it expands.It's constantly growing. It's dynamic. Femme for me is dynamic, it means something different now than it did in 1960, than it did in 1840, than it did in the 1600s. those things that create what it is to be Femme are growing and changing and that presentation grows and changes with it. And I think so often people get lost in that "well Femme is someone who exhibits traditionally feminine characteristics in a queer relationship" nahh! That's actually not true. It is so much more than that. To have to fight that battle in the community sucks.