

DANTE

24 • Black • He/Him • New Orleans

Femme is more than just a physical expression, it's much more than putting on make-up and painting your nails, looking pretty and cute in the normative senses of the words. Femme is an energy, it's a way you conduct yourself, the way you carry yourself, and it manifests itself in more than just putting on a skirt and a dress. **My femme is real even when I'm giving butch realness.** My femme is always with me, just like my masculinity is carried with me too. **There's so much more fluidity in the idea of femme gender expression that's devalued and trivialized into a physical component.** It's such a lazy way of understanding ourselves and our bodies and the way we express our energies to the world. **Femme is definitely an energy first and foremost.** It's an expression, it's a concept, an idea, a claiming of a certain energy that exists in the world. It's the ultimate idea of the power in the softness of the world, power in beauty, power in strength. Femme is honesty, it's power, it's love, it's acceptance, and it's strength.

Masculinity often has this simplicity attached to it, while femme has so much more room for interpretation and expression. **It's like being on a playground versus playing tic-tac-toe, it's so much more fun and exciting.** The community behind femme is like, they're the real ones, the ones that deal with the most shit. Femme folks have to confront their emotions from the get-go and have so much to deal with, so much on their plates. A lot of masculine type folks take advantage of that energy and exploit it, without doing any of the work or the processing to get from A to Z. Meanwhile this femme person went from A to Z on their own and got flack from every letter in-between. That's when I think of the resilience of femme folks, who are always deemed second best because femme is still seen as an expression of inferiority, of stupidity, lack of intelligence. There's so much entitlement to that femme energy from outsiders.

Being a femme person, especially a femme person of color, you're like a joke in society. You don't have any clout, you don't have any power, which is ironic because the most powerful people are femme people, the ones that have been through the most shit. The entitlement to our energies, our bodies, our work, is a big problem. Violence, especially towards queer bodies that express femininity, is so real. **The status quo is very protective of its power** and it's sense of normalizing what we see and what we consume, so in expressing ourselves in a way that goes against the dominant culture puts us in a lot of violent situations.

There's so much fear that's attached to being femme, especially in a body that's perceived as male, and all the glares and stares. But it also builds that sense of strength, that sense that nothing you can do or say can harm me. I'm already in god mode. I'm untouchable, and even if you touch me I'm untouchable. People really see that and get attacked by it and threatened and lash out, which is by no means an excuse, but that's exactly what it is! Like, the girls out here are jealous and bland as fuck, and it's not my fault y'all are basic and insecure. **A lot of femme people finally find security in themselves and that's when we get all this backlash.** It's shitty.

A lot of times femmes, especially marginalized femmes, give grace to people who aren't like us. We give grace to the people who come from more privileged identities and environments before we give grace to people who look like us or come from similar backgrounds. If we're ten times harder on ourselves than we are on other people, that's something to notice and work on. At the end of the day we have to uplift each other and lead with humility and grace. We can all have a seat at the table. **There can be more than one femme at the top so let's help each other grow.**