

The Femme Guild of Sydney Presents:

THE INAUGRAL SYDNEY
FEMME CONFERENCE

FEMME IN THE FRAME

A Supplementary Reader

This reader has been compiled with the intention of being a supplement to the content presented at 'Femme in the Frame' but should not be considered a complete resource.

A 'recommended reading' list of websites and blogs have been provided at the end of this booklet. Femmes from around the world engage in powerful dialogues around femme identity and its intersection with race, ability, status, class, body, age and sexuality, utilising the internet to sustain an ongoing interaction.

Any femme with an interest in the construction and nature of femme identity will find a fascinating and rich culture of femme-inism online, created and celebrated by everyday femmes from all walks of life. Pursuing further investigation is highly recommended!

In the meantime, enjoy the readings contained within and consider visiting the blogs of the authors for even further femme-centric manifestos and musings.

The Femme Guild hopes this collection of writings may inspire more femmes of all backgrounds to get online and begin sharing their own experiences of their identity. To aid this, a list of free blogging platforms has also been provided.

Reclaiming Femme: Queer Women of Colour and Femme Identity

By Vanessa Shanti Fernando

SOURCE: <http://writingforstrangers.com/writing/reclaiming-femme-queer-women-of-colour-and-femme-identity/>

Members of queer and feminist communities often associate femme identity with subordination. Even within progressive circles, femininity is devalued due to its association with repressive heterosexual sex roles.[1] In her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich argues for a rejection of sex roles, and she differentiates between male-identified and woman-identified women. The male-identified woman is socially, politically, and intellectually attached to men, whereas the woman-identified woman directs her nurturing and emotional energies towards other women.[2] Rich commends the latter, while criticizing the former. In a patriarchal society, she argues, women who ally themselves with men are complicit in maintaining the hetero-patriarchy. For Rich, the ultimate embodiment of woman-identification is lesbianism, feminism’s natural extension.[3] This form of lesbianism—often based on politics rather than desire—sets up an androgynous, egalitarian ideal of lesbian sexuality, which reflects particular white, middle-class feminist values.

Because they have rejected sex roles, second-wave lesbian feminists perceive butch/femme roles to be oppressive imitations of heterosexuality.[4] Lesbian feminists of the 1970s and 1980s link butches’ masculine gender expression to patriarchal power and femmes’ feminine presentation to artificiality and frivolity. Such feminists dismiss butch/femme roles as anachronistic, even when the individuals in question report feeling empowered and satisfied with their masculine and/or feminine gender presentations.[5] Defining butches as male-identified imposters and femmes as subordinate throwbacks imposes a singular standard of (white) lesbian authenticity, ignores the rich history of butch/femme resistance, and disregards the ways in which butch and femme women successfully create alternative gender identities that subvert the dominant sex/gender system.

Assuming androgyny to be a more radical and empowering gender expression in all cases fails to recognize the multi-faceted identities of femmes of colour, whose specific position within queer and feminist communities invites a racial analysis that exposes issues of authenticity. Far from being passive victims of butch supremacy, femme women of colour challenge, empower, and transform femininity. Whereas heterosexual femininity is associated with artificiality and passivity, femme identity is a unique gender expression that enables self-acceptance and resistance to white, heterosexist, and patriarchal control.

Prominent feminists have dismissed femininity as artificial and instead praised the development of traditionally masculine characteristics. This dismissal conflates femme and passivity. In her 1952 work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir seeks to define what it means to be a woman. She argues that constructed ideals of femininity lie at the root of sex difference, and transform women into submissive prey, fixated on ensnaring men.[6] To counteract this subordinate status, de Beauvoir encourages women to become emancipated by “[refusing] the passivity man means to impose on her.”[7] Women achieve this emancipation by taking on “masculine values”: pursuing intellectual study, actively engaging with the world, entering the workforce, and competing in the capitalist system.[8] Embodying aspects of traditional masculinity, with its associations of power and legitimacy, allows women to challenge and expand their self-image and social role. However, feminism’s encouragement of masculinity comes at the expense of trivializing feminine expressions and roles, to damaging effect. In *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, scholar and gender activist Julia Serano criticizes the feminist movement (specifically that of the 1970s and 1980s) for encouraging women to become more masculine or androgynous. Certain second-wave feminists believe that femininity is intrinsically linked to heterosexual indoctrination; it is nothing but an artificial performance designed to attract men.[9] However, in seeking to criticize sex-based oppression, these feminists replace the feminine-woman ideal with the androgynous-feminist ideal, itself a restrictive identity that does not leave space for

many women to express their preferred gender(s).[10] Second-wave feminists fail to address the fact that gender itself is not oppressive; rather, it is the belief in binary gender and the disregard for gender variance that are the problem.[11] Further, the assumption that femininity is a heterosexual, socialized performance rather than an innate trait ignores the lived experiences of femme women. For femmes, femininity is an empowering, subversive, and intrinsically queer gender identity. It may be aesthetically pleasing to heterosexual males, but this fact does not invalidate femme identity's potential for resistance. Paula Austin, a working-class African-Caribbean lesbian femme, echoes this sentiment in her statement that "looking like a proper woman can provide cover for far deeper survivals . . . [providing] both a safe disguise and secret nourishment." [12] Taking on a femme identity does not relegate women to a subordinate status; rather, it allows for the queering of femininity itself.

Identifying as femme is a way of embracing and reclaiming femininity on one's own terms. As such, personal definitions and experiences of femme vary. Performance artist Leah Lilith Albrecht-Samarasinha describes femme as "queer. . . brassy, ballsy, loud, obnoxious . . . [i]t goes far beyond the standards of whitemiddleclass feminine propriety." [13] Albrecht-Samarasinha performs femme style to reject conventional notions of femininity as passive, demure, and controlled. Moreover, she rejects the idea that white womanhood should be the universal ideal. She creates a new version of femininity, one that includes and values outspoken, politicized women of colour. Karen Bullock-Jordan, a "thirty-one-year old Midwestern black, single, SM/leatherdyke polyamorous Scorpio femme," describes femme identity as

[C]omplex . . . [s]ome days I feel like a housewife, others like an Amazon warrior; some days like a bimbo, others like an earth mother; some days like a grand diva, others like a quintessential femme fatale.[14]

For Bullock-Jordan, femme identity implies fluidity. Her femme style allows for the expression of multiple identities. Even the bimbo is a choice and therefore a subversion of the conventional female stereotype. Further, the femme's implicit love and lust for

butch-identified women signifies a rejection of conformity, and a commitment to queer sexuality. Within working-class communities and communities of colour, the butch/femme relationship is often more radical and shocking than the white “uniform standard” of androgyny. Butches and femmes of colour “are queer and . . . come from home, at the same time.”[15] Queer femininity is outspoken, fluid, subversive— anything but passive.

Although femmes define themselves as active agents, they are nevertheless rendered invisible, as the queer and straight community often perceive them to be heterosexual. The femme’s learned talents of receptivity, vulnerability, openness and communication require strength and active participation.[16] However, members of the queer community do not always recognize or appreciate these talents. In the 1950s lesbian bar culture, certain butches simultaneously valued and mocked femmes for being flighty—a display of their internalized misogyny.[17] Often, other queers only recognize femmes as lesbians when they are accompanied by a butch partner.[18] Despite femmes of colours’ radical gender expression, queer and feminist communities often value a white, androgynous/masculine aesthetic that does not recognize the multi-faceted and intersecting aspects of femmes’ identities. The poet Chrystos writes,

I felt so much stricture & censorship from lesbians/I was supposed to be a carpenter to prove I was a real dyke/My differences were sloughed over/None of them came to a pow wow or an AIM fundraiser to see about me.][19]

Within her particular lesbian community, Chrystos is only recognized if she conforms to white, masculine standards of gender presentation that bear no relation to her own experiences as an indigenous woman. The conflation of lesbianism with Western notions of masculinity is widespread. In “Dresses for My Round Brown Body,” Lisa Ortiz describes initially identifying as butch because she believed that being a lesbian meant “blue jeans, black bra, T-shirts, big boots, no more make-up, and whack off that hair.”[20] Other lesbians choose to identify as

butch because their communities may assign femme women oppressive subordinate roles.[21] Puerto Rican lesbian Juanita Ramos describes choosing to define herself as butch because “[it allows her] the greatest amount of independence and control over [her] own life and that of other women.”[22] Although butch identification is a valid and potentially empowering choice, compulsory masculine identification comes at the expense of feminine queers’ multi-faceted selves, identities, and backgrounds.

Learning from the experiences of queer femmes of colour is paramount to building an inclusive, anti-racist queer movement. Too often, femmes of colour find that only parts of their identities are recognized; they do not conform to acceptable standards of heterosexual femininity or androgynous/masculine lesbianism. Ortiz, for example, describes herself as existing in-between communities. Latina communities regularly perceive her to be white, and queer communities perceive her to be heterosexual. [23] Ortiz’s situation reflects Muñoz’s astute observation that queers of colour must face the barrier of white normativity as well as heteronormativity. Often, the queer community is not a place in which queers of colour have their identities affirmed and respected.[24] Amy André, a “mixed-race bisexual African American Jew,” echoes Ortiz’s sentiment of being rendered invisible within the queer community because of her feminine gender presentation. In addition to being perceived by straight men as sexually available, she must constantly re-assert her queer identity within the lesbian community.[25] As long as white, masculine gender presentation is seen as the queer body ideal, queer femmes of colour will continue to be invisible. Queers, as members of a community that places so much emphasis on deconstructing gender roles, must reject the sexist and racist notions that femininity is inferior to masculinity and that all queers have access to white privilege.

Queer women are drawn to a femme identity for a multitude of reasons. However, their choices may be qualified by particular race and/or class concerns or restrictions. For femmes of colour, femininity may be a necessary act of survival in a racist society that fears black masculinity.[26] If a black lesbian takes on a

butch identity, she risks being stereotyped as a sexually voracious “butch bulldagger” because of the historical racist stereotyping that links black women and excessive sexuality.[27] By presenting as femme, women of colour assume a more socially acceptable identity, one that appears to uphold white hetero-patriarchy while secretly subverting it. In a personal essay entitled “Femme-Inism,” Austin describes her experience being stranded in rural North Carolina with her butch lover. Austin’s race and her lover’s transgressive gender place both of them in danger. To counteract it, Austin flirts and feigns little-girl innocence with the men she encounters, performing an elaborate show of passive femininity that placates the white male mechanics.[28] This high-femme persona, though at surface an act of conformity, enables Austin and her butch lover to survive. Although Austin appears to be conforming to a white, heterosexual standard of femininity, she implicitly challenges it by refashioning femininity into something that enables her queer, racialized reality.

Femme identity can be a source of self-esteem, and a way to heal the negative messages that white, heterosexist, patriarchal society imposes on queer women of colour. Mykel Johnson, a radical activist and métis femme, defines the queer femme as “[displaying] the erotic power of her beauty. She is bold enough to claim that power in a culture that has maintained a tyranny of ‘beauty norms’ that may or may not include her.”[29] Although feminists might argue that a power based on physical appearance is shallow, reclaiming a love for your body can be empowering, especially for those who are faced with innumerable reminders that they do not conform to the white heterosexual ideal. For femmes of colour particularly, affirming one’s beauty in the face of colonization’s internalized hate has revolutionary potential. By reclaiming femininity on their own terms, femmes of colour redefine the concept into an affirming gender expression that rejects both compulsory heterosexuality and white supremacy.

Contemporary feminism seeks to interrogate and deconstruct traditional sex roles, empowering women to define femininity for themselves instead of being restricted by enforced domesticity

and motherhood. However, feminism risks substituting one standard of appropriately female behaviour for another. Women who pursue traditionally masculine fields and reject supposedly oppressive trappings like high heels and makeup are applauded, rendering strong, subversive femme women invisible. Feminism must expand to make room for individuals' complexities, chosen gender expressions (whether masculine, feminine, androgynous, or gender-variant), and identities. In order to be relevant to femmes of colour, feminist and queer activists must acknowledge their own complicity in perpetuating rigid notions of acceptable gender presentation, and make room for new voices.

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Queer Femmes of Colour: Multiple Burdens of Authenticity

By Ardhra

SOURCE: <http://ardhra.wordpress.com/2010/09/14/queer-femmes-of-colour-multiple-burdens-of-authenticity-2/>

There's been plenty written about how women within post-colonial societies are positioned as the bearers of cultural authenticity, and that deviating from a contrived model of authentically traditional behaviour is met with an intense backlash (violence, loss of livelihood, ostracism). Most of these focus on heterosexual societies, but I'm starting to feel like some women are subjected to it in western queer communities as well.

I think the dynamic is deeply conditioned by internalised queerphobia. Specifically, internalisation of the double standard that there's a threshold of queerness that someone has to prove in order to be 'really' queer (when there's no such threshold for heterosexuality).

Where you add some deeply racist ideologies about sexuality into the mix, it makes for a particularly marginalising position for queer people of colour*.

I think that the sexuality of people of colour is still very taboo, and incredibly unsettling for white people. There's an ideology of people of colour as being either animalistic or robotic in our sexuality, having sex purely for reproduction, without experiencing more civilised sexual feelings of desire, autonomy, the mutuality of a sexual relationship, love. And in this ideology, a strong sense that people of colour cannot be queer – i.e. have a non-reproductive sexuality.

Misogyny is then brought down on queer women of colour. Masculinity is assumed to be indicative of agency and action. The closer a woman appears to masculinity, the more serious her claims to a queer identity are seen. Not only is masculinity associated with agency and being able to assert identity rather than have it granted to you, but presenting as outside a

normative gender model is seen as risky in a way that justifies inclusion in queer communities.

On the other hand, the closer a woman appears to adhere to hegemonic femininity, the less queer she is assumed to be. Cue the litany of disempowering and dehumanising effects of misogyny and femmephobia. Why else would I be constantly assumed to be a man when talking with others on the internet? Because I assert my opinions, don't put statements as phrases, and I'm not afraid of conflict. I'm not-infrequently masculinised until people meet me.

I wouldn't describe the dance of queer authenticity to be a total picnic for men of colour. There are a whole range of other issues projected onto men of colour, too. But from friends and my own experiences in queer spaces, I don't think queer men of colour struggle for visibility in quite the same ways as women do. [And I'm specifically not talking about non-binary-gender and/or sex people; this is about the dynamics of a binary, and as a binary-identified person, it's not an experience I can speak to.]

I think this intersection of racism, misogyny/femmephobia, and internalised queerphobia places a unique burden on feminine-appearing queer women of colour to prove or display their queerness, usually through a butch partner. Every single femme or feminine queer woman of colour I've ever met has described having this experience. Of being told, to their face, that they can't possibly be queer. Of being asked "what are you doing here?" at queer events.

Feminine-appearing queer women of colour are positioned with the unique burden of disavowing our communities because of the queerphobia imputed to them by the white queer community. We bear the burden of the queer community's insecurity. We're called on to validate queerness itself, to prove that it can exist in the most hostile of conditions, to dispel heterosexism for the community at large.

The notion of queerness is still tied up with the western philosophical notion of an autonomous, self-contained, self-

aware agent. If that kind of subjectivity can spring up in a body, a subject, who is neither western nor a man, it vindicates the authenticity of queerness. Queerness wins its place in a hegemonic social order — wins rights and responsibilities — by way of its whiteness, whether that's embodied in pale skin and western culture, or in assertions of the centrality of white queerness to a queer life story.

I'm not suggesting that white queer communities are engaging in actual violence (perhaps symbolic violence) or destruction of livelihoods. Exclusion is often far more subtle than that in liberal democratic western societies which strongly assert their own moral rectitude. What I am saying is that, in a context of partly western-sponsored queerphobia in communities of colour and majority world societies, white queers' exclusionary practices towards queer women of colour are informed by racism. And it leaves queer women of colour in a double-bind, which sucks majorly.

* I'm being very loose here about what I mean by this term. I acknowledge that not everyone who I'm describing using this term identifies with it. However, as I've said in the past, I'm using it for lack of a better term, and because I dislike the potential alternatives pretty intensely.



The Femme Shark Manifesto
By Zuleikha Mahmood and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

SOURCE: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=118440840284>

FEMME SHARKS DON'T EAT OUR OWN.

FEMME SHARKS LIKE TO EAT THOUGH

FEMME SHARKS RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES COME IN ALL KINDS OF SIZES AND EACH KIND IS LUSCIOUS.

WE WORK TOWARDS LOVING OUR CURVY, FAT, SKINNY, SUPERSIZE, THICK, DISABLED, BLACK AND BROWN FINE-ASS BODIES EVERY DAY.

WE REALIZE THAT LOVING OURSELVES IN A RACIST/SEXIST/HOMO/TRANSPHOBIC/ABLIST/CLASSIST SYSTEM IS AN EVERY DAY ACT OF WAR AGAINST THAT SYSTEM.

FEMME SHARKS DON'T THINK ANOREXIA IS CUTE. WE THINK EATING A BIG-ASS MEAL IS SEXY.

WE SAY SCREW "HEIGHT WEIGHT PROPORTIONATE PLEASE" IN CRAIGSLIST WOMEN SEEKING WOMEN ADS AND IN LIFE.

WE HAVE BIG MOUTHS AND WE KNOW HOW TO USE THEM.

DON'T FUCK WITH US!

ASK US IF WE WANT TO FUCK THOUGH !

FEMME SHARKS WILL RECLAIM THE POWER AND DIGNITY OF FEMALENESS BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY WE'RE GIRLS BLOWN UP, TURNED INSIDE OUT AND REMIXED.

FEMME SHARKS ARE OVER WHITE QUEERS
OBLIVIOUSNESS TO QUEER OF COLOR, TWO SPIRIT AND
TRANS OF COLOR LIVES.

WE KNOW THAT WE ARE A CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

WE'RE OVER WHITE FEMMES AND BUTCHES WHO THINK
THAT FEMME ONLY COMES IN THE COLOR OF BARBIE.

WE'RE OVER BUTCHES AND BOYS AND OTHER FEMMES
TELLING US WHAT WE NEED TO DO, WEAR OR BE IN
ORDER TO BE "REALLY FEMME."

FEMME SHARKS RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES, BUTCHES,
GENDERQUEER AND TRANS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN IN
COMMUNITIES OF COLOR SINCE FOREVER.

THAT BEFORE COLONIZATION WE WERE SEEN AS SACRED
AND WE WERE SOME OF THE FIRST FOLKS MOST
VIOLENTLY ATTACKED WHEN OUR LANDS WERE INVADED
AND COLONIZED.

FEMME SHARKS WON'T REST UNTIL WE RECLAIM OUR
POSITIONS AS BELOVED FAMILY WITHIN OUR
COMMUNITIES.

FEMME SHARKS AREN'T JUST DIME PIECES AND TROPHY
WIVES. FUCK THAT!

WE MIGHT BE YOUR GIRL, BUT WE'RE OUR OWN FEMMES.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES ARE LEADERS OF OUR
COMMUNITIES.

WE HOLD IT DOWN, CALM YOUR TEARS, ORGANIZE THE
RALLY, VISIT YOU IN JAIL, GET CHILDCARE HOOKED UP,
LOAN YOU TWENTY DOLLARS.

FEMMES ARE WELDERS, AFTER SCHOOL TEACHERS,
ABORTION CLINIC WORKERS, STRIPPERS, WRITERS,

FACTORY WORKERS, MOMS, REVOLUTIONARIES
DEDICATED TO TAKING THE SYSTEM THE HELL DOWN SO
WE CAN BE FREE!

FEMMES ARE LEADERS IN TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS/
DEFENDING OUR QUEER AND TRANS OF COLOR
COMMUNITIES.

WE USED OUR STILETTOS AS WEAPONS AT STONEWALL

WE WERE THE TRANSWOMEN WHO FOUGHT BACK AT THE
COMPTON CAFETERIA

WE'RE THE GIRLS WHO STARE DOWN ASSHOLES STARING
AT OUR LOVERS AND FRIENDS ON THE SUBWAY.

WE WALK EACH OTHER HOME

ACT CRAZY ON THE BUS TO GET ASSHOLES TO MOVE
AWAY AND KNOW HOW TO BREAK SOMEONE'S LEGS

WE SHARE WHAT WE KNOW.

FEMME SHARKS STAND UP FOR THE NEW JERSEY FOUR
AND EVERY OTHER QUEER AND TRANS PERSON OF
COLOR IN THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX FOR
DEFENDING OUR LIVES.

WE BELIEVE IN SELF-DEFENSE AND SELF-
DETERMINATION.

WE BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE A RIGHT TO DEFEND
OURSELVES AND OUR COMMUNITIES AGAINST ANY KIND
OF ATTACK-FROM ASSHOLES ON THE STREET TO RACIST
WHITE CLUB OWNERS WHO WANT THREE PIECES OF ID
TO FOLKS WHO INSIST THAT WE'RE STRAIGHT, TO PEOPLE
WHO TAKE OUR LAND.

WE REMEMBER OUR DEAD- SAKIA GUNN, GWEN ARAUJO,
AND MANY OTHER QUEER AND TRANS POC WHO DIED

BECAUSE OF RACIST, HOMO/TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE.
NOT AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT BUT AS WOMEN WE
LOVED IN REAL LIFE WOMEN WHO COULD'VE BEEN US OR
OUR LOVES.

WE ARE NOT GOING TO BE LEFT OUT OF "THE STRUGGLE"
NOT THIS TIME

WE'RE NOT JUST A PRETTY FACE.

FEMMES GODDAMN WELL KNOW HOW TO STRAP IT ON,
CHANGE THE OIL IN THE CAR AND PUT UP SHELVES.

WE CAN DO ANY GODDAMN THING WE WANT!

THAT'S WHY WE'RE FEMME SHARKS!

FEMME IS NOT THE SAME THING AS BEING OUR MOMS

FEMMES ARE BEAUTIFUL AND STRONG WHEN WE
BOTTOM AND WE'RE HOT AS HELL WHEN WE TOP OUR
BOTTOMING AND TOPPING ARE BOTH GIFTS TO BE MET
WITH RESPECT.

WHEN WE TAKE OUR LOVERS FIST ALL THE WAY INSIDE;
ASK FOR WHAT WE WANT; BE THE BEST DIRTY GIRL; OR
MAKE OUR LOVERS FLIP; WE'RE A FUCKING MIRACLE.

IN THE WORDS OF JILL SCOTT, "YOU GOTTA DO RIGHT BY
ME. IT'S MANDATORY, BABY."

FEMME SHARKS SHOP AT ROSS, FOXY LADY, VALUE
VILLAGE, THE H&M \$5 RACK, TORRID AND THE DOLLAR
STORE , AND KNOW HOW TO SHOPLIFT

WE CONCOCT BRILLIANT STRATEGIES TO LOOK FINE ON
TEN DOLLARS OR LESS.

WE'RE ONLY "INVISIBLE" IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO
LOOK FOR US.

WE TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER RECOGNIZE THAT
FEMMES ARE EACH OTHERS' WEALTH

HOS BEFORE BROS, ALWAYS!

FEMME SOLIDARITY AND LOVE FOR EACH OTHER IS A
REVOLUTIONARY FORCE

WE BELIEVE IN GIRLS LOVING GIRLS, RESPECTING EACH
OTHER'S BRILLIANCE

NOT FIGHTING OVER BOIS OR BUTCHES

NOT TRYING TO BE THE ALPHA FEMME

WE'RE ANTI-DRAMA

BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES THAT HEAL
HURT, APOLOGIZE, LISTEN TO EACH OTHER AND MAKE
THINGS RIGHT.

WE BELIEVE IN BUILDING OUR QTPOC COMMUNITIES
STRONG FEMME SHARKS WERE THERE WHEN FRIDA
KAHLO HOOKED UP WITH HER GIRLFRIENDS

WHEN JOAN NESTLE, CHRYSTOS, JEWELLE GOMEZ,
ALEXIS DE VEUX, SYLVIA RIVERA, DOROTHY ALLISON,
MINNIE BRUCE PRATT AND AMBER HOLLIBAUGH MADE
QUEER FEMME HISTORY; WHEN ZAPATISTA WOMEN
HOOKED UP; WHEN AFRICAN QUEERS RESIST EVERY
DAY; WHEN OUR GRANDMAS AND QUEER AUNTIES SNUCK
OUT AT NIGHT DIDN'T GET MARRIED TIL LATE- OR AT ALL
HAS A BEST GIRLFRIEND AND STOOD UP FOR HER FEMME
SHARKS WERE THERE

FEMME SHARKS ARE IN THE BODIES OF COUNTLESS SEX
WORKERS, NEIGHBORS AND LADIES WAITING FOR THE
BUS AND IN THE LINEUP AT CENTURY 21.

AT RIIS BEACH, FUNKASIA, LOVERGIRL NYC, BUTTA,
MANGO, MANHATTAN'S, DESILICIOUS.

FEMME SHARKS LIVE ON THE REZ, IN CAPETOWN,
NEWARK, OAKLAND!!!!, THE SOUTH SIDE, NEW ORLEANS,
COLOMBO, JUAREZ AND BROOKLYN SUBURBIA, THE
FARM, AND LITTLE SMALL TOWNS.

WE'RE IN FOSTER CARE, THE PSYCH WARD, JUVIE, AND
ABOUT TO BE EVICTED.

WE ARE SURVIVORS WHO ARE MORE THAN WHAT WE
SURVIVED.

WE ARE FIGURING OUT HOW TO HEAL AND HOW TO MAKE
IT SO THAT NO ONE WILL HAVE TO SURVIVE SEXUAL
VIOLENCE EVER AGAIN.

WE BELIEVE IN THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE SYSTEM
AS WE KNOW IT TO MAKE SOMETHING MUCH MO BETTA
AND WE BELIEVE IN MAKING OUR OWN WAYS TO FIGHT
AND RESIST ON THE DAILY.

A FEMME SHARK IS ANY GIRL WHO IS TOUGH, HUNGRY,
FIGHTS FOR HERSELF AND HER FAM AND IS WORKING ON
BECOMING THE KIND OF GIRL WHO FINDS GOD IN
HERSELF AND LOVES HER FIERCELY

WE'RE YOUR BEST GIRLFRIEND AND YOUR WORST
NIGHTMARE

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FEMME SHARKS ARE ON PATROL!
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Catastrophe, Community, and Competition: On Creating Femme Shared Space

By Lola Sunshine

SOURCE: <http://femmesguide.com/2010/07/catastrophe-community-and-competitive-on-creating-femme-shared-space/>

It is often said that, “No man is an island,” but I’ve noticed that a lot of femmes seem to be lonely and solitary structures; islands inhabited by only one; or peacefully orbiting planets comfortable keeping just to themselves. I’ve come across a great number of reasons for this— all of them legitimate, most of them intensely painful. I’ve heard everything from femmes being kicked out of their lesbian communities for either being too “femmey” (don’t even get me started on that word) or not 100% homosexual (or both all at once) to femmes not feeling they are “femme enough” to compete with other femmes (or simply feeling sick of all the pressure, competition, and cattiness in general). Many of the femmes I know have grown content to be their own sphere of specifically branded queer femininity. They’ve grown thick skins by choice or by force and are used to walking in the world as if they are the last of their kinds... but others seek community and either find that it doesn’t readily exist in their area or are repeatedly rejected for not looking or acting enough of the prescribed part.

I have not always lived in the Bay Area. I come from small communities, small towns— I know what it’s like to be the only femme in an entire gay bar. I know what it’s like to spend a night only speaking to drag queens, because nobody else will even look at you. I know what it’s like to look for others who look like me and come up empty time and again. I know what kind of pressure it is to be told or, in so many ways, shown that if only I’d look and act differently, I’d be more attractive and more accepted. Conversely, having also lived in large cities for a many years, I know what it is to be given the stink eye from other femmes when you enter a room. I know what it is to be excluded from friendship with local femmes because you’re not _____ enough or far too _____ to be allowed into their inner femme circles. I know the pressure (and ultimately, the disappointment)

in knowing that some femmes will be competing with everything you do from your hair to your shoes even if you'd rather not play that game with them.

Even though I am now blessed and lucky enough to live in an amazing queer community with an astounding number of diverse, wonderful, beautiful, and amazing femmes, I still often find myself looking to the internet for solace and solidarity just as I did in my earlier femme days. It's amazing where I end up finding it some of the time. For example, very recently a large online community I belong to (FetLife, a kink-based social networking site) decided to add "butch" and "femme" as gender identities. When this decision was announced, there was an immediate public outcry complete with a full range of internet-based painful stupidity. New wounds were created by those who did not identify as butch or femme dismissively stating that femme and butch were not valid gender identities and then further complaining that adding them to the website as gender options was only serving to be divisive and confusing. Old wounds were reopened when friends of mine wanted to list the gender identity as "femme" but were hesitant, remembering all those times they'd been told they weren't queer enough or femme enough to claim such an identity. And many folks, myself included, were somewhat annoyed that "femme" had been randomly shortened to "FE" (as the abbreviation "F" had already been taken for "female") while "butch" was inexplicably shortened to "BU". In short, the entire affair very quickly turned into a hot mess. I was getting irritated, it was getting late, and the more reactions I read on the website, the more rapidly I began to lose my faith in queer community (again).

The things that settled me down in the end were so simple, and they were the following. First and foremost, I turned my computer off for the night. Yes, they have an off-switch, and I like to make use of it and be among real people for awhile when the electronic personalities of actual human beings are upsetting me. My girlfriend and I had a nice, intelligent chat and then went to bed. The second thing happened this afternoon when I was finally ready to turn the computer back on. I logged onto the site to re-read a post I'd made complaining about "FE" being the new

shorthand for “femme”, when I saw that a friend of mine had pointed out, in passing, that Fe is the symbol for iron on the periodic table. This stopped me dead in my tracks.

My brain started spinning in an entirely new series of directions. This statement knocked me out of the virtual and back into the literal. Femme is forged and tough like iron. Femme can be purified or left dirty; molded or natural; sculpted, shaped, re-shaped, made into art; used for tough mechanics; liquefied into something hot and fluid; formed into its own protecting locks and gates; a magnet; simple and useful; complex and decorous, necessary for health and wellness... and when mixed with carbon, the end-all, be-all, femme(FE) can be made into steel. Such a beautiful, but at the same time simple, redefinition of femme had never occurred to me and it all of a sudden made me very, very happy. Every time I am knocked back down to the brass (or in this case, iron!) tacks of things and go back to the basics, I always manage to learn something new. Femme is elemental. It's so simple, it's right there. We are a building block of queer life. Our element is iron(Fe), which can be just about anything it chooses, given the right circumstances.

Following this revelation, came another stunning comment from a different friend of mine. As a joke, she began to make light, science-based humor about my femme(FE) identity and ended up saying the following:

“I wish your outer electron shell happiness in attracting and combining with any other elements you desire.”

She meant it to be taken lightly, but I found it to be absolutely beautiful. She is absolutely right. Our outer shell, our femme presentation can be anything it likes, but it should be happy. We should be happy. We are allowed to be happy. And we are allowed to attract and combine with any other elements we desire. It's so easy. It's such a simple equation: femme = femme. The unknown is its own solution. We all know ourselves, we are all femme, if the specifics are unknown to others, that's fine. If we are each, every day, defining “femme” and femme always equals femme, then what is there left to argue about? How can you

create a fraction from that equation? Why would there need to be IF/THEN statements? What about femme = femme could ever be unclear?

The simple fact is, femme community shouldn't be complicated. Loving each other and enjoying each others presence shouldn't be hard. Planets in their own orbit can come together without colliding and form a entire solar system. Femme love for each other can be our iron-based, plasma sun; the peace of acceptance can be our slow-burning, glittering stars– one for every single one of us, with still an infinite number more that are yet to be named; and those constant, steady lights can guide all of us, new femmes and old, back home if ever we are lost. That is, if we let it.



Spotlight on Femmethology Contributor Leslie Freeman

SOURCE: <http://femmethology.com/2009/03/27/spotlight-on-femmethology-contributor-leslie-freeman/>

How do you define your femme identity?

I am a dis/abled femme and a femme crip.

I understand both femme and crip to be markers of conscious, critical engagement with difference. Femme, as I live it, represents a proactive choice to perform, push, and challenge my feminine gender orientation. Femme is independent of sex, of “biology”, but rather allows me to explore my singular embodiment as a source of explicitly feminine beauty, sexuality, and strength. Neither is femme equivalent to, nor merely qualifies, “woman” or “girl” identities; I have constructed and embraced my femme identity in defiance of such mainstream interpretations of femininity. It is an opportunity—maybe even a dare—to completely re-define femininity.

Similarly, my experiential knowledge of crip has gone beyond identification with my physical impairment, and, though I am most at home in dis/ability communities, beyond identification with dis/ability as a collective political identity or civil rights issue. Crip is a recognition of my scarred and anomalous body as a potential site for social transgression, and for new culture-building: ART. Free from mainstream social conventions, crip allows me to place my embodied experiences at the center of new concepts of beauty, power, and wholeness. Both femme and crip are about self-determination—and about solidarity with others who sought self-determination in opposition to oppressive normative forces.

Dear Internet, if I'm a cis-gendered woman, why does it turn me on to imagine I have a cock?

Sincerely, Alphafemme

By Alphafemme

SOURCE: <http://alphafemme.net/2009/09/15/dear-internet-if-im-a-cis-gendered-woman-why-does-it-turn-me-on-to-imagine-i-have-a-cock-sincerely-alphafemme/>

I've been thinking a lot about cocks lately.

And no, I'm not questioning my sexuality, haha, thanks for asking. But I am questioning, well, something. I'm just not sure exactly what it is I'm questioning. Mi'lady and I use cock play (for lack of anything better to call it... is there something better to call it?) a lot when we fuck, in various ways. For example: I strap on and fuck her. I strap on, and she gives me a blow job (SO HOT, oh my god I don't know if I can think of any image hotter than of my cock in her mouth, and her looking sweetly/seductively up at me). Occasionally, she straps on and fucks me. These are all ways that we use real fake cocks in our sex. (I know, real fake is contradictory, but what I mean is there's a real cock there, a non-flesh one, a dildo, but it's a real cock just the same.) These are the more straightforward ways of fucking with cocks, and these are the ways that don't make me think much beyond HOT! TURNED ON! HOT!

And then there are ways that are more psychological. One of my favorite ways to get off is orally — her tongue has insane endurance and is oh-my-god so so good. There are no words. She is truly the mistress of licking pussy. Except... sometimes (dare I even say often?), when she's between my legs licking my clit, I pretend she's sucking my cock. And something about that psychological trick just turns me on so much that I can come really, really fast after that.

And I'm not the only one who does this. The only way mi'lady gets off is with my fingers on her clit (mmmm I love the feeling of her slick hard clit under my fingers...). And one time last week, I was rubbing her clit and she said "how do I feel baby?" "Slick and

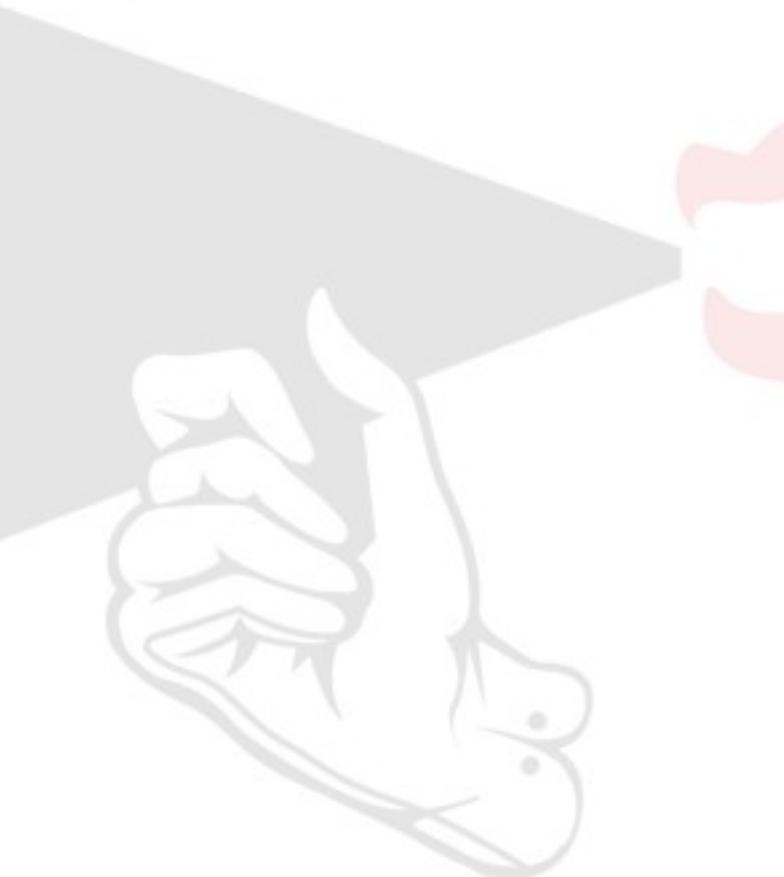
hard,” I said, “hard like a cock.” And she literally writhed in her sudden new arousal. “Oh baby yeah, jerk my cock,” she moaned, and for the remaining moments until she came, we dirty-talked cock imagery. Imagining that I was jerking her cock was a profound turn-on.

We talked about it afterwards. Though this kind of cock play is really hot and fun, it definitely brings stuff up for me (and for her as well, in similar ways, but I’m just going to speak for myself on my blog). For one thing, I’ve struggled quite a bit with the whole idea of Authenticity in the lesbian “community.” I’m sure I’ll write more about this at some point; I’ve touched on it a bit in my post “On Femininity” (see link under my Favorite Posts, over there on the left). It’s this whole idea that “gold star” lesbians are the most authentic lesbians, and on down the line until women who have sexual/romantic relationships with men as well as women are often peered at in suspicion, and lack total authenticity. (Along with that, I think, is the notion that women who present intentional or unintentional masculinity are automatically more authentic as lesbians, and women who present intentional or unintentional femininity are less authentic.) So, this whole thing of somehow liking cock in sex... especially as a femme-presenting dyke... brings up issues for me of “can I talk about this? will people doubt my sexuality?” And of course, it doesn’t matter whether other people doubt my sexuality. But it feels oppressive all the same.

But something that’s even more unsettling for me, I think, are questions of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Are we just buying into some sort of hetero-paradigm by including the cock in our own man-free sex? Are we in a way proving people right who think that the ultimate sex acts (“real sex”) have to involve a penis? (Clearly there are many things we do that do not involve the cock or any kind of cock play, but hey, those could be just foreplay!) And... do we have penis envy?? Are we proving Freud right? Women just spend our lives trying to make up for a gaping hole (to be utterly literal)? (It might be relevant to point out here that both of us do not identify as trans or genderqueer.)

As I sort of said above, strapping on by itself never raised these

questions for me. I've never been uncomfortable with the idea of using a cock. It seems so blatantly and purely not straight, so clearly not pretending to be a man — it's very much its own thing. So strapping on in itself has never seemed to me to be heteronormative or patriarchal. But somehow, imagining that my clit is my cock starts to make me think there's a line I might be crossing. I don't know. It's hard to articulate. And mostly, I still just think it's hot. But it makes me wriggle the tiniest bit just the same, in some sort of vague discomfort. Luckily, the vague discomfort isn't enough to make me want to stop.



Can Straight Women Be Femmes?

By Essin' Em

SOURCE: <http://essin-em.com/2010/02/can-straight-women-be-femmes/>

This post is based on thoughts I've been having for a long time, and then inspired by a post over at Alphafemme about the Markers of a Queer Femme.

She talks about goals she has that to her, seem very Femme. However, if taken out of the context of her being queer, would there be any difference between a queer woman (femme identified) and a straight woman writing it.

Q and I were having a similar discussion the other night when out with a straight friend. Q said something to her about being a Femme, and I took a little offense, but before speaking up, I asked our friend if she identified as a femme.

"Well, I like wearing heels sometimes, and make up, but it's not like I do it every day."

This then lead into a conversation of what does femme mean, and the different between femme and feminine. Etc. This discussion I've had a lot, both online and in real life. I myself had a lot of trouble choosing the femme identity at first; I had confused it with feminine, and at the time, I was very anti the concept of feminine. People talked to me about being a femme, and I'd answer with "but I don't wear heels or lipstick, and I hate pink. Ergo, I can't be a femme." Then, after much conversation, I realized that femme is not about skirts, or make-up, or shoes. It's about embodying an attitude.

Later that night, once our friend had gone home, Q and I were still talking about it. She asked me if straight woman could be femmes (similar to a convo had online with other as to whether straight women and men could be butch).

I don't have an answer. But I want to say no. Why? Because

my identity is developed around the concept of femme. About being a strong queer woman who has femme wiles, but isn't feminine per se. About being able to open the door but loving it when Q does it anyways. About being able to cook and then change a tire, all while wearing either jeans/t-shirt or heels and a pencil skirt. To me, femme has become an extension of my queer-ness, a bridge between my orientation and my gender.

And it's really hard for me to envision someone who hasn't go through some of the things queer folk go through (disbelief as really being queer, having to fight for our rights, having our emotional and physical safety challenged, having our partners made fun of, etc) still being able to understand and embody that identity. To me, being femme is when someone calls Q "lady" and I comfort her and assure her than she is really such a handsome boi. Being femme is when I can talk to people about gender who would never listen to someone who presents as gender queer. Femme is when someone says "that's so gay" about his friend at the grocery store, and I tap them on the shoulder and say "no....I'm gay. The end."

Am I being a gender hog? Perhaps. I *know* deep down that it shouldn't fucking matter. I've met queer men who identify as femme, and I don't have as much of an issue. Gender isn't a line or anything — it's a schmorgasboard, and you can pick and choose exactly how you identify. If you want to be a glitter slut tranny boi fag, you can do it. So I'm not sure why I have such issues with straight women identifying as Femmes, but it's totally a hang up for me.

Does it mean that straight women can't be femme? Of course not. I'm not the gender police. On the other hand, does it mean I'm uncomfortable with the terminology appropriation, just like I am when I cis-guy tells me he's "just like all the other dykes I know"? Yes. Very much so.

Thoughts?

-Essin' Em

No, I'm not a lipstick lesbian (I just look like one) By sublimefemme

SOURCE: <http://sublimefemme.wordpress.com/2008/08/23/no-im-not-a-lipstick-lesbian/>

Yes, I adore lipstick and never met a MAC lipglass I didn't like, but please, don't call me a lipstick lesbian! I'm a femme.

What's the difference, my pretty? Is there one? Clearly, it depends who you ask.

Here are my definitions of these terms, which are based on my own experience and how I have observed others using them. Obviously, much more could be (and has been) written about these categories—their subtleties, changes over time, regional differences, etc. What I've written is not intended as the last word! Please share your own thoughts on what these terms mean to you and how you use them (or don't use them). Feel free to add/suggest other words you think should be on this list.

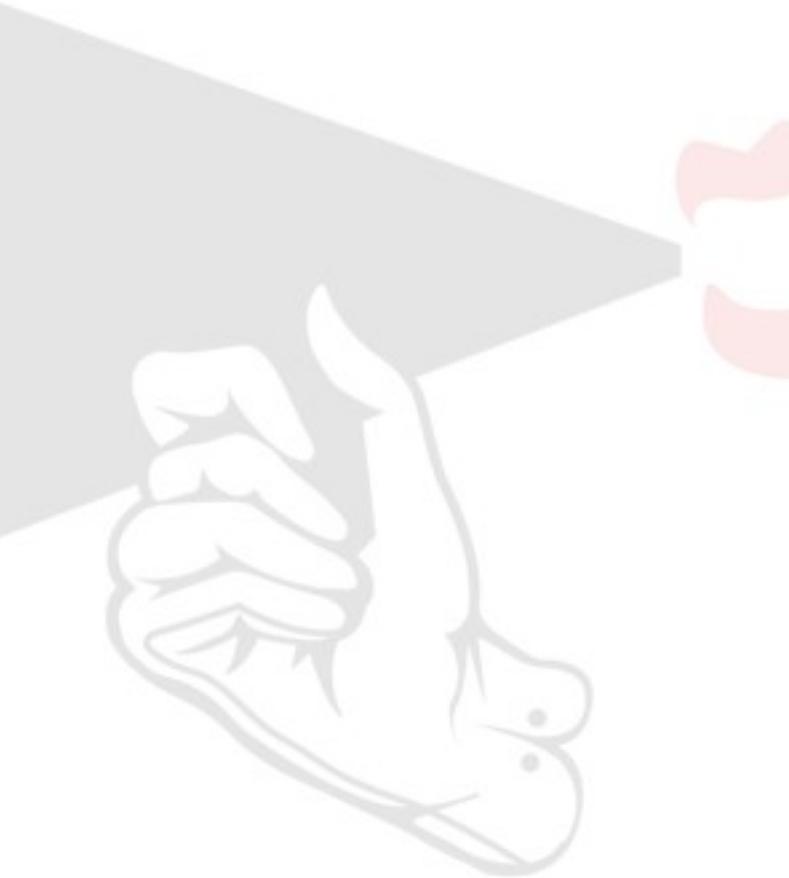
A Very Short Glossary of Queer Femininities

Lipstick lesbian—Media term used to describe feminine lesbians during the heyday of “lesbian chic” in the 90s. Some lesbian/bi/queer women have adopted the term, making it a part of gay/lesbian culture. Usually refers to stylish, feminine lesbians who are attracted to others who look like them. Separate from butch/femme dynamics. Sometimes emphasizes more naturalized notions of gender (e.g. “I like women to be women.”)

Femme—Lesbian gender marked by feminine gender expression or identity. Not dependent on dress or other external signifiers (E.g. you can wear a tuxedo and still be a femme.) May or may not be a “bottom” or a “top” in a sexual situation; may or may not partner with butches. For some, a form of queer gender performance. Spans from “high femme” to more androgynous forms of gender expression, such as tomboy/sporty femmes.

High Femme*— Typically, a highly stylized form of femme

identification (e.g. ultra femininity) performed in the context of butch/femme cultures and dynamics. May or may not wear dresses, heels, and/or makeup. No particular personality traits. May be passive and demure or confident, independent, strong, etc. Not necessarily a “pillow queen,” and not equivalent to lipstick lesbian.



Femmes, for your consideration. **by Asha Zappa (posted on facebook)**

With the inaugural Sydney Femme conference mere days away I wanted to write this as something for people to mull over/discuss and, hopefully, challenge this weekend. This is not meant as an attack on anyone, merely as a response to something that I've seen too many times.

Femme guild is an organisation that includes anyone who self-identifies as Femme, yet there is a section of the femme community that have felt mocked and vilified. I am referring to those femmes who are same same attracted, that is, attracted to other femmes.

We have been publicly mocked, laughed at, commented on. Our sexual attraction is a source of mirth for others who make fun of it. Frankly, it feels like homophobia.

Actions which would never be accepted, or quickly spoken out against, from the gaystream or straight communities, are performed against us regularly.

The idea that "FOFA" is a joke is hurtful. It is like footballers putting on tutus and playing at being "fags", because, let's face it, it's too hilarious to be anything other than a joke.

When you make fun of FOFA, that is how it feels. We feel as though our sexual attraction is no more than a joke to the "Proper Femmes".

I recognise that this is not necessarily how it is meant, but it is definitely how it comes across.

Imagine, if you will, that FOFA was common. Imagine that these Femmes made jokes, in your face, about femmes attracted to butches. Imagine telling a femme friend how hot you think a butch at the bar is, only to hear your friend look at you with utter derision and say "Butch on Femme? That's disgusting", and

walk away.

It would be humiliating and unacceptable, yet this is something we do actually face. Femmes DO say this to us. Many of us have heard variations on this idea, said directly to our faces.

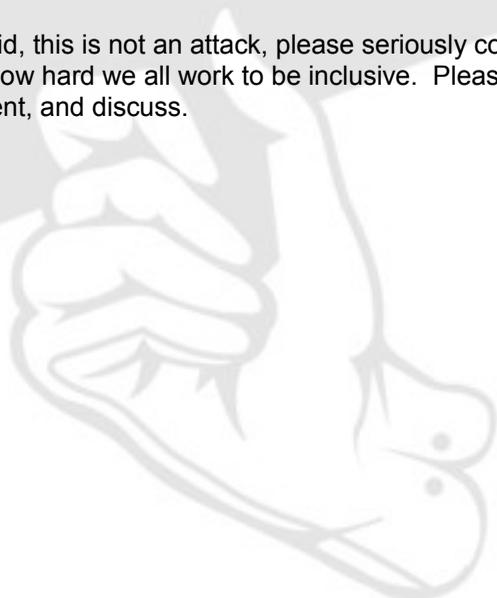
Femme Guild specifically states it is for anyone that self identifies as Femme, even if their sexual attraction differs from your own.

I suggest we tackle FOFaphobia in the same way we tackle all discrimination. Femme Guild has worked hard to be inclusive, to consider the needs of everyone, so lets extend this to include those of us who are attracted to other Femmes.

All I ask is that you consider what you say, and what you make fun of.

I am not asking you to be attracted to Femmes, just the consideration and respect you would like yourself.

As I said, this is not an attack, please seriously consider this. I know how hard we all work to be inclusive. Please feel free to comment, and discuss.



Top 10 “You know you’re a Hick Femme when...”: By Emily

SOURCE: <http://hickfemme.blogspot.com/>

1. You have bear spray and a flashlight in your cute purse beside your lipstick. And your flash light is not cuz you’re a crusty punk with a Leatherman, its cuz ya live in the boonies with no streetlights and you may just walk into a tree or you’re your heel stuck in metal grate bridge on the way home....

2. You can shovel 20 wheel barrels of dirt no problem with press on pink sparkle nails on (and I did!)

3. Your anthem is “backwoods Barbie” by the amazing Dolly Parton. Xo.

4. Your life looks like the TV show “Northern Exposure” or the Gretchen Wilson video for “Redneck Woman”.

5. Your must haves for a partner are: drives a quad, has a chainsaw, and doesn’t chew spit in the house. Xo.

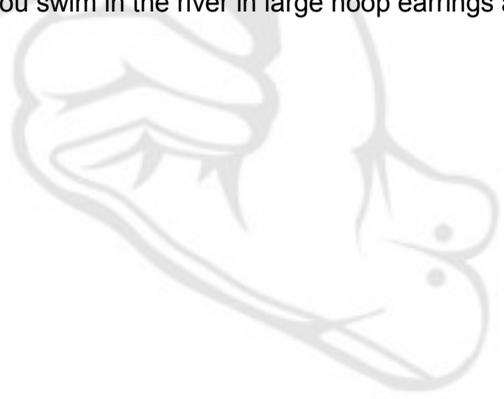
6. An example of a thrilling weekend activity is pulling up the lawnchairs in front of the chicken coop and watching the chickens like a TV.

7. Conversations with the girls can go from doing your hair to drowning a rooster to good prices on bear fencing real easy! Xo.

8. When ya have a pair of overalls hanging beside yer mini skirt, and gumboots beside yer stilettos.

9. You can jump a log in a little black dress!

10. You swim in the river in large hoop earrings and mascara!
Xo.



Medical Self-Advocacy for Queer Fat Femmes By Bevin Branlandingham

SOURCE: <http://queerfatfemme.com/2009/01/05/medical-self-advocacy-for-queer-fat-femmes/>

There is so much to say about Queer Fat Femmes and medical self-advocacy. In honor of Lesbian Health Bloggy Such A Day or whatever (thanks to Sinclair for bringing it to my attention and for the gorgeous masthead up above my entries), I am going to relate a little story and some free advice.

In early 2007, right after the passing of one of my heroes, Heather MacAllister, from ovarian cancer, I had my Heather MacAllister Memorial Gyno Appointment. This is the missive sent out from her loved ones by her side at her death:

Heather's last wish for you, what she wants for us all, is to love each other, and to love ourselves. To take care of our minds and bodies, without fail and against all odds. And to know, beyond doubt, that we are all beautiful, amazing beings. Never forget. This is what she lived for. Take care of yourselves, you beautiful beings.

I felt it was imperative to look after my health and to take steps to prevent the stuff I was able to prevent. Despite being covered by insurance for the duration of my twenties, I hadn't seen a gyno since grad school, mostly because I was really lazy about finding one who I felt safe with.

I did some research and made an appointment. The doctor was fairly nice and the process was streamlined, but I was a bit taken aback that she started up with the fat stuff* immediately. In fact, this was a new tactic. "You are fat, I think you might have a wheat allergy and I am going to run a blood test." And almost immediately blood was drawn and I said meekly Uh, can you also do a full STD screening? That's why I'm here, too. You know, gyno health.

Two weeks later I got the dreaded phone call from the gyno

office requiring me to come in for a follow-up (and another \$50 co-pay). She looked at me gravely. "It says here you are allergic to wheat and corn. You need to stop eating those immediately and start losing weight. You might have a heart attack." And she actually said to me, "You have such a pretty face, you'll look so gorgeous if you lose weight." I was in tears and thinking God, are you my mom circa 1994?

I demanded a copy of the results so that I could bring them to my fairly fat positive primary care physician and show to one of my besties, Kelli Dunham, stand-up comic and published nurse.

My PCP recommended I get a second opinion from a gastroenterologist. Since this was the American health system in the Hateful Bush Economy (TM), this all took place over the course of months, since it took forever to get appointments and cost me \$50 a pop.

The gastroenterologist did an upper endoscopy, a colonoscopy and another full blood work-up. In the meantime, I gave up wheat and corn and later dairy. Seriously, it is extremely hard to eat without wheat or corn, as corn is in pretty much everything, especially gluten free stuff. I remember declaring to my besties When they tell me to give up bacon I'm just going to go for a diet of supplements.

To top it off, the last part of this eight month ordeal occurred while my fiance and I were breaking up. Imagine being told "Hey, I think we need to move apart for awhile on account of my intense depression" the day before you have to have a colonoscopy. I was wheeled into the operating room wracked with sobs because of the whole "emergency number" question.

But, the great news is that I am not allergic to wheat, corn or dairy! That gyno was a quack and I am totally glad I advocated for myself and got that second expensive opinion. And it turned out my gastroenterologist is in the same office suite as another gynecologist. While I was waiting for my many appointments, I read the complimentary cards from her clients and I decided to do my next year's gyno screening with her.

I was really glad I did. I had to ask them to do a full STD screening and they seemed surprised—I was a 29 year old sexually active lesbian and they didn't seem to jump right to the conclusion that it meant I should be screened.** Despite that, I still felt cared for and my weight was not an issue.

I published Episode 4 of FemmeCast about the concept of Health at Every Size, which really addresses fat people and the consequences of un-fat positive diagnoses. I'm sure we'll come back to it again in future episodes.

Fat phobia from medical professionals can itself be a health hazard in that it inhibits fat people from seeking out routine and other medical care that they need. All people, regardless of size, shape, age, race, class, gender, ability or sexual orientation deserve to be treated with dignity and respect in a health care setting and to have their health care needs addressed in ways that make them feel safe and comfortable and not attacked for who they are.

The day that I found out that the wheat and corn allergies were misdiagnosed, I had a tasting fleet of beers, a cupcake and really hot rebound sex. I think Heather would be proud.

*Typically this involves a medical professional saying “OMG YOU ARE FAT YOU ARE GOING TO DIE ONE DAY ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR FAT.” I will note that almost every doctor I have encountered who told me that said “Otherwise you are in perfect health.”

**Dude, always always ask your health providers to screen you, just to be safe.

“i’m at the control tower”

By Lady Brett Ashley

SOURCE: <http://ladybrettashley.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/im-at-the-control-tower/>

In answer to G’s questions about femme invisibility, and a result of a lot of pondering. Among other things, why others’ experiences on this particular subject feel so generally out of line with mine – though some of the particulars are familiar.

I think it is notable in this case that femme is new to me. More, femininity is new to me. I didn’t grow up feminine. I didn’t grow up gay, or questioning. Though i did grow up queer, in the much more general sense that my grandmother uses the term.

Femme invisibility took me rather by surprise. I spent most of my life ’till college being mistaken for a boy fairly regularly. When my hair and breasts grew out, that sort of morphed into an assumption that i was a lesbian, which at the time i was not. I started dating a girl, to which everyone said, “well, yeah?” And for years after that, while i did slowly move towards “more feminine,” no one ever questioned my gayness. Basically my visibility status moved from “dyke!” to “huh, wonder if she’s gay?” or at least “oh, you’re gay? figures.” which, really, was not a notable change.

And then, suddenly (it seemed), one day a [femme dyke, if it's relevant] was taken aback to discover, after spending a day together, that i was a big queer too. Mind, that was in a fairly queer context, where assuming i was straight pinned me as “ally,” not just as one of the many straight folks. And that was the first time that ever happened to me. It confused me, but mostly because it made me aware that my internal image of myself was not in line with the image i was projecting to people.

I wasn’t really upset that she had mistaken me; i was upset that it had taken me so by surprise, essentially because my self-image was lagging – it was stuck back when i didn’t wear skirts (and, if that failed, had a butch girlfriend).

I've gotten over that. I've been femme (and the girly kind of femme) long enough to be self-aware of it. With that inconsistency out of the way, I really don't care.

I don't think there is anything upsetting about being mistaken. Perhaps this is just habit; I have been commonly, publicly mistaken for things I am not for a long time, starting, I think, long before my memory gets reliable. Mostly mistaken for a boy. I was not a boy and I did not want to be a boy, but it certainly never bothered me. After all, boys were not a bad thing to be, even if it was not true. I still feel this way. I'm not straight, but there is nothing wrong with being straight. So, if I am mistaken for straight, I might correct someone, given the opportunity (as it is not true), but I would never find it offensive or upsetting (as it is not a bad thing to be). I suppose I fail to see how one could be offended by a mistake unless it is because of negative feelings towards the group you are assumed to be a part of.

Less specifically, it just doesn't matter most of the time. If I'm at a queer event I just assume that people are assuming I'm queer. I don't find that it affects much either way. In most situations it is just a non-issue, either we are not talking about personal things, in which case being gay is not relevant, or we are, in which case my girlfriend is almost guaranteed to come up (right after the puppies).

As for the positive side of femme invisibility, I like the spy aspect. When I came out, the one thing that really upset me about being gay was that I could no longer be an ally. Because allies are really important in getting people who are not friendly to even listen to your side of the discussion – essentially because it seems more credible to be able to say “I have no vested interest in this, but still support it.” Well, now, on occasion I get to play that part again, though slightly differently. I get to be the unintimidating queer.

In my favorite example, the woman who abruptly changed course and walked across the pavilion before resuming it to avoid my butch-dyke girlfriend while campaigning to take our rights away,

and five minutes later came up to me to ask about Dog. We had a fairly long dog-related conversation, after which i really hope she saw me kiss my butch-dyke girlfriend. So, it was funny and a little snarky, but i really like that i have the option to do that. I mean, i'd rather things were such that people don't avoid interacting with people who look too gay. But 'till then, i am fully interested in my ability to normalize gay. I can hope that it was eye-opening to that woman that lesbians rescue dogs too, and shop for vegetables and smile at strangers and wear skirts and long hair (and kiss butch girls. well...). That option is only open to me because of my femmeininity. And i think every time someone is surprised that i'm gay that is just a visible expression of their picture of "gay" broadening. Which won't solve anything by its lonesome, but it's a step in the right direction.

But of course there are times when being more visible would be cool. The main obstacle i found with being invisibly queer was picking up, of course, because that's when you really want queer strangers to recognize that you're, you know, an option. But i made me a nice – not tacky – rainbow necklace as a "what's up." (i gave it away two weeks after i started dating Jamie, to a friend-of-a-friend who complimented it profusely – i didn't need it anymore.) The other, less slutty version of this is simply that recognition is cool, like alhafemme said:

To be recognized as gay makes me puff out my chest and stand up straighter. Really. I just want to belong here. I want people to know that i'm a member of the club. Sometimes, I do get some sort of signal, a wink maybe, and I just about die, every time. Especially when it's the older, butch lesbians, in their late 30s and 40s. A wink from them is so gratifying. Not transgressive, not presumptuous, not inappropriate. Affirming.

Either way, i found that people tend to be receptive to flirting. She may have thought you were straight at first, but if you think she's cute, and you're smiling like you think she's cute, i guess that's convincing enough. I'm not sure if i define flirting broadly or if i just have a bad habit of flirting with everyone, but i think the same basic idea holds with the simpler recognition-seeking interactions. That is, it totally makes me happy to see visibly

queer people in public – especially couples and cute butch girls. And since it totally makes me happy, i find it really easy to smile like, well, like seeing them makes me happy. And, come on, how gay is that? Not that it always works, and not that you can always smile at strangers without looking like a creep (but even if i mush the smile down, it tends to make my eyes wrinkle up happy-like), but it makes me feel more visible to visibly acknowledge others' visibility. Right.

Oh, and having a girlfriend in hand is a really handy way to look more gay.



femme (in)visibility

By Alphafemme

SOURCE: <http://alphafemme.net/2009/11/17/femme-invisibility/>

I've been wanting to write this post for a while, for months, really, and then when G posted about it recently it was just the shove I needed to actually sit down and write it.

There are so many layers of femme (in)visibility to me. There's how we're seen (or not) by straight people, by society at large. There's how we're seen (or not) by fellow queers. There's how we're seen by fellow dykes. And how we're seen by each other. And of course, there's how we see ourselves. And in all of this, there's the personal, and there's the political.

But I don't really know how to write about it except in terms of my own experience. And of course, my experience isn't representative of anything except itself. But I think there are probably parallels and similarities to and "mmhmm"s and head nods from other femme-identified folks out there.

It starts with not being able to see myself. That must be at the very root of it. As a little girl, I loved to play house, and I always wanted to be the mom. I loved to play school and wanted to be the teacher. I loved tea parties and dollhouses and dresses and patent leather shoes, I loved American Girl dolls and dress-up and imagining my future wedding. I was obsessed with Queen Elizabeth II as a little girl (I had a book about her written by her nanny) and with figure skaters and ballerinas. I fit snugly into my gender box. No questions asked.

Come junior high, I decided to start having crushes on the boys in my classes. Each year on the first day of school, I would scan homeroom for that year's candidates. I carefully weighed my options, and within 20 minutes or so had selected the object of my external focus for the year. Seventh grade: Dillon. Eighth grade: Ryan. Ninth grade: Jason. In tenth grade I started dating, but never really cared much for the guys. In fact I think I was somewhat scared of them. Touching them, kissing them, doing

stuff with them made me feel weird and nervous.

I'm not going to go over my whole coming out story here, but suffice it to say it took me quite a long time to come out to myself. I started questioning that year, tenth grade. I had a friend who I was in love with, but I couldn't quite believe it. There was no way I was gay. It just didn't make sense. I was a girl. I was supposed to like boys. That was that.

Understanding of sexuality is so, so so tied up with gender. That's really what makes femmes so invisible. To ourselves as well as to others. There often aren't any outward signs that we digress from the norm. They're all inward. And society tells us (all of us, not just femmes) all the time that the inward things? Are figments of our imagination. Depression, addiction, anxiety, sexual orientation — it's fabricated, it's (no pun intended) just in our minds. You can't get an MRI that says "whoops, there's some depression in there, we'll have to medicate you" or a pap smear that tells you "yep, yer gay alright, no two ways about it." So unless you look different, unless there's some physical proof of it (whatever it is), there's plenty of room for people to doubt you. And judge you. And feel justified in doubting and judging. Because all that stuff? It's in your mind. So I can tell you you're wrong.

That's what I, as a femme, was up against. Convincing myself that, actually, no, I'm right. That gut feeling that made me ask my mom, as an 11-year-old, whether it was normal to like other girls? That was right. Even though I liked ruffles and paper dolls and the Sound of Music. It took me so long to learn how to trust that feeling. I guess I'm still learning, really. In my first years after coming out for good, I went through all kinds of identity shifts, trying to settle on the self-expression that felt right for me. I just didn't think it could be that I was both totally feminine and gay. I thought I was just fooling myself that I was gay. To be honest, I sometimes still do have those moments of doubt. "How is it possible that I'm gay?"

And, dude, I'm gay. I fuckin' love pussy. The best compliment from mi'lady is when she looks at me in wonder, after a good

fuck, and says, “you’re so gay.”

In fact, I think that’s probably the best compliment from anyone. Even people who mean it as an insult. To be recognized as gay makes me puff out my chest and stand up straighter. Really. I just want to belong here. I want people to know that I’m a member of the club. Sometimes, I do get some sort of signal, a wink maybe, and I just about die, every time. Especially when it’s the older, butch lesbians, in their late 30s and 40s. A wink from them is so gratifying. Not transgressive, not presumptuous, not inappropriate. Affirming.

I’ve spent up enough time and energy proving myself to myself, you know? I don’t have much leftover to try to prove anything to anyone else. So I don’t try, not much anyway. And for the most part, I don’t let the invisibility get to me. But those moments of visibility are all the more precious because of it.



On Femme Invisibility

By Sugar Butch

SOURCE: <http://www.sugarbutch.net/2009/11/on-femme-invisibility/>

G at “Can I Help You, Sir?” asked about femme invisibility recently, and the topic has gone around the gender/queer blogs a bit, with some great posts and thoughts.

First, and probably most obviously: I am not femme. So I am writing from a perspective of having dated and known many femmes in my life, but I do not experience visibility directed at me, but through stories and my witnessing. I am only an indirect, at best, expert on this. But these are my thoughts on femme invisibility, i.e. femmes not being recognized as queer because of their gender presentation.

This is a real thing. Femmes everywhere and from all parts of my life have told me this. One of my first femme mentors, Tara Hardy, has multiple poems about femme identity, one of which quotes: “I no longer get sad if they ask me at the door if I know it’s dyke night: I get mad. I mean, how much pussy do I have to eat before you let me in the club?”

And early on, I knew I was attracted to femininity, knew I wanted to date femmes (though I wasn’t quite sure how). The revelation that there are gay women who like to be feminine, and that I don’t have to chase straight women who will, probably, by definition, leave me to date men, was a relief. But I know that that’s not so easy to grasp for many people.

At the Femme Conference in 2008, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha said in her keynote address, “Femme invisibility is bullshit. You just don’t know how to look.” And I wanted to stand up and scream FUCK YEAH, because sometimes when femmes say “I feel so invisible” I want to say, but I SEE YOU! But I know I don’t always, not every single time, and I know I don’t make up for the other thousands of people who don’t see you, or for the discrimination and rejection from the queer communities that

seems to continue, despite that femmes are a very significant part of queer communities.

One of the bottom-line issues about femme in/visibility, for me, is that it is a form of gender discrimination. When someone refuses to recognize a femme as queer, that person is saying, straight women are feminine, dykes are not, therefore your gender presentation trumps anything that might come out of your mouth about how you identify or who you are, and I am more right than you are about your identity. The sex-gender assumption is too strong and too fundamental for many people to be allowed to be overridden.

And gawd if that doesn't get my boxers in a twist.

Especially since, let's be honest, I fetishize the theorization of gender a little bit (or, um, maybe a lot), so the verbal explanation of gender and sexuality that femmes are pretty much required to do (because the sex-gender assumption is so strong) is all the more hot to me, and even sometimes MORE valid than the androgynous or rejection of femininity presentation of many other dykes and queers. Because, I mean, your strappy sandals are really hot, don't get me wrong, but if you can't use words to talk about femininity and sexuality and dykeness and a claim to queer culture and an acknowledgment of the complications of living in a culture which heteronormalizes femininity, are you going to get my blood pumping? Probably not. The femininity without the intention behind it is less appealing – to me, personally – than the ability to explain it.

From what I can tell, the issue of femme invisibility is at least threefold: visibility to straight folks, visibility to queer folks, and visibility to femmes themselves.

Passing: In/visibility to the Straight World

Not being seen as queer and recognized as radical by straight folks is a common complaint I hear from femmes. There is an added burden of constantly having to come out verbally, constantly having to remind the folks around you that you are

queer, constantly having to deflect and defend yourselves against unwanted straight male attractions, since in this culture the display of femininity is presumed to be for the attraction of men, men's gaze, men's sexual advancement. It is seen as an invitation to being hit on, in fact. A girl out on the town and all dressed up in heels, dresses, lipstick, must be trying to "catch a man." Of course, this isn't true. Whoever this girl is, she could be wearing those things for all kinds of reasons, for her boyfriend, for her friends, for herself, for her wife.

And this is constant. Walking down the street, catching a cab, on the subway, at work, at a party, at a play, at a concert, in a bar – everywhere a femme goes, her femininity is assumed to be for men and to attract a man.

(This is also, in fact, one of the reasons femme-ness is subversive, and feminist: it re-creates femininity not as a tool to catch men, but as an authentic mode of expression for onesself and for queerness, disrupting this idea that femininity is "natural" for women.)

This is also called "passing," and though I have had femmes tell me they like that they get to hear what people say when they don't know someone gay is listening, I think generally passing carries with it a great burden, not privilege. The burden is that of constantly coming out, constantly having to argue with folks, constantly having to defend one's orientation as gay when the sex-gender assumption does not line up.

There is also, as some femmes have mentioned to me, the problem that, after coming out verbally to someone (especially a man who is attempting to hit on you), you are sometimes in more danger than you were before, or than someone masculine- or androgynously-presenting is, because the person feels "tricked." (I've written about this before, a little.) This defense is often cited in trans hate crimes, also – this notion that the trans person was presenting some other way than how they "really" are, therefore the hater was "duped" in some way.

Honestly, I don't know what femmes can do about this

particularly, aside from continue to come out. We – if I may speak for queer and gender and feminist activists – are trying to reach the straight world, we are trying to raise visibility and disrupt the idea that femininity is an invitation, but that is going to take some time. I hope there can be some assurance, regardless, that femme femininity is valid and not intended to be a tool of attraction for everyone, but for whomever it is you choose for it to be for. You can't choose who sees you when you walk down the street – you put yourself out there in a semi-public domain and you can't pick who you interact with on a daily basis. But you can choose what those interactions mean. And here, you just have a more advanced sense of this sex-gender assumption than they do. You are right. They are not.

Recognition: In/visibility to Queers

The second issue here is the visibility of femmes to queer communities. This, I think, is more personal and more of a vulnerable topic, since femininity (and expression of gender), to some degree, indicates desire and sexual signaling, and when those symbols of gender are not recognized as being symbols of attractiveness or attraction, that can be incredibly invalidating and disheartening.

It is a vulnerable process to put oneself out there, to make oneself available for rejection, to get dressed up for an event, to walk in and think, “my people!”, only to have them not recognize you as one of them. It hurts. It is a constant struggle.

It's also frustrating to be hitting on people you are interested or attractive to and to have them not recognize what you're doing as an invitation, or to resist or be skeptical of the validity of the invitation.

I understand the resistance, being on the other side of that equation, of a masculine-presenting person who has been taught over and over not to get caught up with straight women. I know a lot of butches and transmasculine folks who have a history of dating straight women, and the heartache of that inevitable loss is one we learn early. It is also dangerous – plenty of societal

factors will jump in to police any attempts to “convert” a straight woman to our lecherous queer ways, be it the girl’s boyfriend, friends, parents, or complete strangers, and because of the masculine presentation, the threat of violence is implicit or, sometimes, direct.

Not that this is an adequate excuse for the refusal to recognize femmes as queer, especially after a femme says “I’m queer” in some form or another.

I mean HELLO – butches and transmasculine folks and all of you queers and fucking everybody, while I’m on the subject – can we please just start to practice believing a feminine woman when she says she’s queer? Stop questioning her agency. Stop forcing her to defend herself. Stop being an ignorant idiot and realize that femmes exist and are real and valid queer identities. Any time you call a femme’s queerness into question, that is what you are doing.

Yeah so some of you might’ve had your heart smashed by a feminine straight girl in the past. I know. That sucks. You might be skeptical that you could get hurt again. Yep, okay, that’s valid. Entering into any relationship requires you to put yourself out there a little, and involves some risk. But regardless of her orientation, you might get hurt. Regardless of whether you marry this girl or date her for ten years or one year or just have a one night stand or just buy her a drink or walk away in one minute, she could hurt you. (No wait – she could reject you. You can choose whether or not that rejection is painful. But that’s a slightly different topic.)

Also: I’d like to put out there that, when in a queer space, it is okay to assume that the people in attendance are queer. Now, this does not mean that everyone is there for your own personal pleasure, and that it’s okay to blindly hit on anyone and everyone, so the “don’t be an asshole” rule obviously still applies. But if there’s a feminine person over by the jukebox at the dyke bar, it is more likely that she is gay than not. She still might not be – but if she’s in a dyke bar, and you are nice and thoughtful and polite and reasonable and respectful, it isn’t a problem to

assume that she's gay and to ask her if you can buy her a drink or tell her that you like her shoes. If she's not gay, okay, depending on your goals of the evening (to pick someone up vs to converse with interesting people vs something else), be polite. If she is gay, that still doesn't mean she'll sleep with you. You might not be her type. She might be taken. You might be her type and she might not be taken, but she still might not sleep with you because for whatever reason, she doesn't want to. Oh well! If you can, don't take it personally, and move on.

Proof: In/visibility to Oneself

In the post Alphafemme wrote about femme invisibility, she touched on something very interesting:

It starts with not being able to see myself. That must be at the very root of it. As a little girl ... I loved tea parties and dollhouses and dresses and patent leather shoes, I loved American Girl dolls and dress-up and imagining my future wedding. I was obsessed with ... figure skaters and ballerinas. I fit snugly into my gender box. No questions asked. ... it took me quite a long time to come out to myself. ... There was no way I was gay. It just didn't make sense. I was a girl. I was supposed to like boys. That was that. ... Understanding of sexuality is so, so so tied up with gender. That's really what makes femmes so invisible. To ourselves as well as to others. There often aren't any outward signs that we digress from the norm. They're all inward. And society tells us (all of us, not just femmes) all the time that the inward things? Are figments of our imagination. ... So unless you look different, unless there's some physical proof of it (whatever it is), there's plenty of room for people to doubt you. And judge you. And feel justified in doubting and judging.

What a complicated, heartbreaking, turning-ourselves-inside-out that coming to a new identity process is. And when it is not marked by physical proof, when someone looks the same, there is no particular indication that Something Big Has Changed, so how do we know? By speaking of it, by talking about it, by documenting it in some form. Still, so much of the data we take in is visual, so even when our minds take in that something is

different, if we don't see the physical proof, it might not register the same way. I think this is also partly why the process of coming out as a dyke often involves things like cutting one's hair off – which is the rejection of femininity and the association that femininity is performed for the attraction of men, yes, but also a physical marker that something has changed.

These are just things that are “true,” according to our culture: femininity is a tool for the attraction of men; dykes reject this and therefore don't have to perform femininity; if you are a dyke, you also come to a more androgynous gender identity as part of your dykeness. Sexual orientation and gender presentation are so tied together – that is the sex-gender assumption in a nutshell.

It is a radical and subversive thing to occupy an identity that disrupts these social “truths.” It is hard. It is a constant battle. I think it does change, though, in two ways: we come to a more accepting, understanding place about our own identities, with a lot more sovereignty, so we don't have to constantly feel defensive and at war with the world; and culture is changing, too. Culture is not a static fixed thing. Queer culture is advancing like mad. We are pushing the edges of it, calling into question the sex-gender assumptions in big ways. I think society is getting more accepting and understanding, as time goes on, and we do come to more solid places within ourselves, and we do get to know more and more people who are like us the longer we explore these identities.

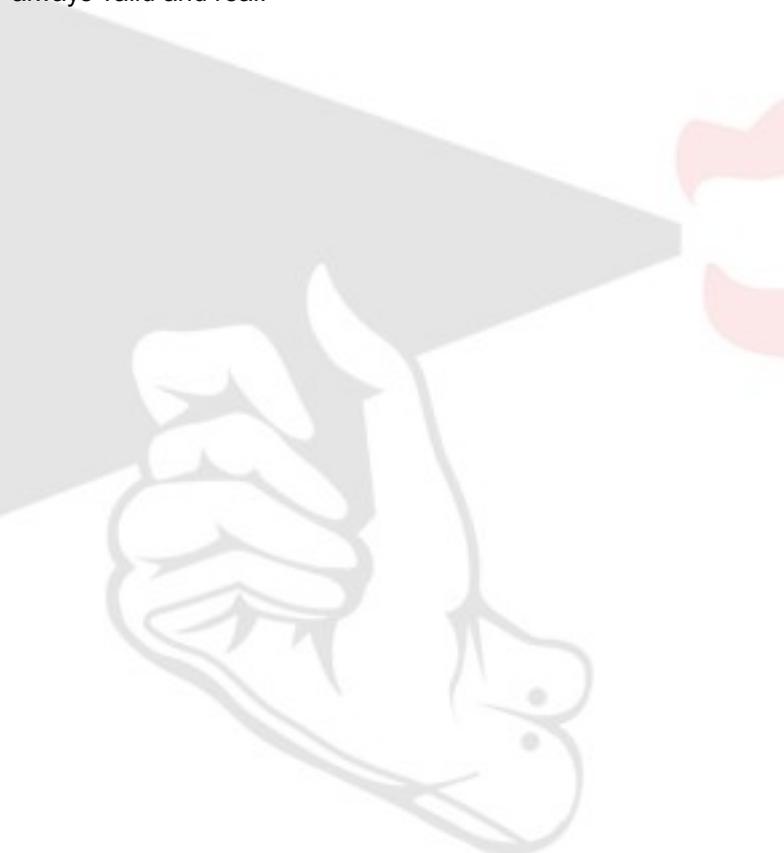
A few more things ...

Femme invisibility is gender discrimination based on the sex-gender assumption. It is not about you, it is about a culture-wide unspoken societal rule that says femininity is for the attraction of men and feminine women are straight.

Don't take it personally. I know that's more easily said than done, but I still think it's true. There is not some magic femme symbol that, if you were wearing it, or if you were more gay, or “really” gay, they would have recognized it. This is their problem, not yours. There are many, many of us who recognize femme as a

completely legit queer identity, as one of the cutting edges of queer identity in fact, and who know how difficult it is and how deep it runs. Your experience is valid, your orientation is valid.

Of course, femmes don't always go through the process of invisibility. Lady Brett wrote a piece about the relative newness of invisibility in her life, and growing up a tomboy. There are so many ways to experience femme-ness and queer community involvement and recognition, and while claims to overarching truths can be called into question, our own experiences are always valid and real.



on gender and disability

By CripChick

SOURCE: <http://blog.cripchick.com/archives/2766>

i've been wanting to talk with others about gender and disability but have been very uncomfortable with writing things as i'm not a gender scholar (damn you academic industrial complex!) BFP's recent post, what is butch?, is pushing me forward and i'm hoping that this can be a place where we can talk about gender x disability x queerness x everything.

in the comment section of that post, BFP tells another person she reads me as a total femme. i don't know if other people would be as delighted as i was but my natural reaction was the immense need to take that as a compliment— with disability being understood as such an asexual thing, no one ever affirms me even having gender. the traditional disability narrative puts me in this place of being something else: that if gender was a binary, i'd be in a third gender realm. (my friend mia has the perfect example of this, bathroom symbols that have the man, woman, and then wheelchair*). our bodies are objects that are not supposed to belong to us and by recognizing our genders, it implies that we own our bodies, think about them, take pleasure in them. maybe this is a big jump but to me, affirming our gender also recognizes our personhood: it says we are human and have a right to not have our bodies raped, abused, sterilized, experimented on, harvested, and more...
cripchick sitting and smiling at the camera

it's only recently that i've been thinking about gender presentation. maybe this is because i finally have a PA who knows that part of her job is being patient in helping me try different outfits and that if i don't like the way something looks, i should take it off. if i want to see if a fedora, vest, dress pants combo looks good, i can. if i want to stand in a dressing room and try on every piece of lingerie in the store, i can. a lot of disabled people don't get to do that, especially with so many of us living in institutions, having unpaid caregivers, experiencing days when we are in total pain or lack energy, etc. there needs to

be a word for disabled people taking part in intentional, pleasurable gender play in their own way. part of the oppression we face is being asexualized, otherized and denied gender identity so playing with gender and demanding respect for our identities is resistance and a refusal to accept that ableist narrative...

i don't know that i'm femme, butch, etc, i just know that i like to play with roles and gender. for me, the word to describe this gender play or personal recognition of identity i've been having lately is cripchick. cripchicks (or gimpgirls) are fierce, strong disabled women who interact with the world on their terms. when i am cutting up a tshirt everyone is wearing so it looks good on me, that's my way of being a cripchick. lately i get a lot of pleasure in mixing up disability with a fierce femme show so i am insistent on that tee looking good on me, even if i do it in a way that traditional femmes may not. as cripchicks, we're dealing with issues that force us to create our own relationships with gender presentation but we do it and feel good about it.

do you know how powerful that is? for disabled women (w/ all disabilities), what does gender look like for you? am i wrong here?

*sidenote about bathrooms. i think the wheelchair accessibility/bathroom safety connection is totally powerful and love places that have a single stall gender neutral bathroom where people are safe. that's not what i mean with the example mentioned above about third gender.

Butch/Femme – Crip By Wheelchair Dancer

SOURCE:

<http://cripwheels.blogspot.com/2009/05/butchfemmecrip.html>

To offer my voice in this important conversation, I want to write my personal resistance to both of these labels and to suggest how disability complicates them as defining personal categories.

Bfp begins by wondering where she is on the butch-femme spectrum. Cripchick continues by observing how disability and sexuality are so publicly invisible that even getting to these terms is hard. She adds the terms cripchicks and gimpgirls into the conversation of gender presentation, explicitly recognizing disability as a primary and defining force.

I don't have identifying terminology to add -- though I wish there were a more hip word for somewhat middle-aged bisexual disabled women like me. My goal here is to look a little at my body and my experiences in being read by others. I am talking about how I am read and not how I would define myself, how ^{*!*} would identify, because I don't actually know how I would choose to describe myself in the terms of this conversation.

The more complicated theoretical expositions of who we are as women and as queer women in particular recognize that binaries tend to produce alienating discourses of authenticity. If you are not one, you must be the other -- and to be one, you must be But even the more complicated expositions of who we are as women also day after day, time after time, explicitly refuse to recognize the force and the power of disability.

Disability and feminism should go hand in hand. Disability should be an explicit part of gender and queer studies. But even in the hallowed halls of academia and, yes, out here in the wild web blogosphere, disability is only a small part of the conversation, a small part of posts on feminism, gender, and sexuality. It is something the cripchicks and gimpgirls (relishes the words, rolls them around her tongue) repeatedly have to bring to the

conversation. And, yes, we do tire of being the voices of "but wait, disability" But unless we speak of our experience, the conversation will fail us and, ultimately, you.

When we got into it, the last two women with whom I almost had sexual relationships told me that they read me as butch. Theoretically speaking, it is a little perverse to argue from the point of view of how someone reads me rather than saying I explicitly identify as butch (or not). But I choose to do so because this particular approach shows how disability complicates what we think we know about possible identities.

Behind that word for them was my fascination with my own body, with its muscles, and with its physical strengths. That's something a lot of queer women notice about me, and it is the source of many jokes among my friends. I say queer women, because the straight ones in my life are usually too shy to comment on it. But also behind that word for the two women in question was my active enjoyment of my physicality. I love the power of my body; I flex my muscles, I pat them in public (sorry peeps, I really do; I love them). Yeah, it's funny. Yeah, it's sexy. But for the purposes of this conversation, I wonder about that understanding.

To say that it is "butch" to somehow forefront muscularity and physicality strikes me as an interesting insight into how we approach understanding conventional femininity. It is to say that somehow conventional femininity does not explicitly prioritize the tendons, sinews, muscles, and bones of its female bodies. But how can you have breasts, vaginas, tummies, and asses without the underlying structure of your body? Is it to say that somehow conventional femininity is only the visible surface of the body. Is it to say that femme is the performance of the hyper surface -- the explicit recognition and enhancement of aspects of conventional femininity? And that butch is somehow the recognition and acceptance of the deeper muscular structures of the body?

If this is what it means to be butch, then, I suppose, that even in my 5 inch heels, even in my see-through mesh dresses, I am butch. But I also think that disability skews -- I almost wrote

queers; I so wanted to write queers -- disability skews that particular assessment of these aspects of my butchness.

Scenes from my life.

You see me on the street. I'm wearing a low cut tank top. Your attention is caught by my ripped back muscles. I turn towards you, flex my arms, and push away. You think:

1. Oh, what an athlete. Wow! Sexy.
2. It's a pity that she's in that chair. Such a strong upper body must compensate for her legs.
3. She should cover herself up a bit.
4. Ugh, and you look in other direction.

You see me in the cafe. I'm wearing the same low cut tank top. I admire my arms. Sip my coffee. Look at my arms again, stroke them, and smile a long smile at you. You

1. Smile back and ask if I need help or anything?
2. Panic. Fuck. Did she just ... flirt with me? Shit.
3. Pretend you didn't see, turn, and leave.
4. Smile and come right over.

You see me in the audience at a dance performance. I'm wearing a mesh dress, pointy heeled boots, and something in between to make it decent. Every muscle in my arms and back is visible; the curve of my breasts rises out of the baggy over-dress; my body gleams through the sheen of the blue mesh. Wizard pushes me into the space. You

1. Wonder if I feel sad watching all those beautiful dancers, given that I can't move.
2. Wonder if I am for real. Disabled people don't dress or look like THAT.
3. Wonder about what Wizard is doing with a woman like me.
4. Wonder what it would be like to fuck me.

OK. So, I am imagining the viewer's responses. But these are moments from my life of last week. No, you don't get to ask what

happened next. And in each vignette, I really think that the question of whether you see me as butch or femme doesn't really happen unless you integrate or get past the disability question. And what about my choices and my perspectives?

My muscles are as they are because I use a chair and because I dance. Because they are a direct consequence of my disabled life, I would argue that you would have to think twice before you interpret them and my enjoyment of them as part of a butch identity.

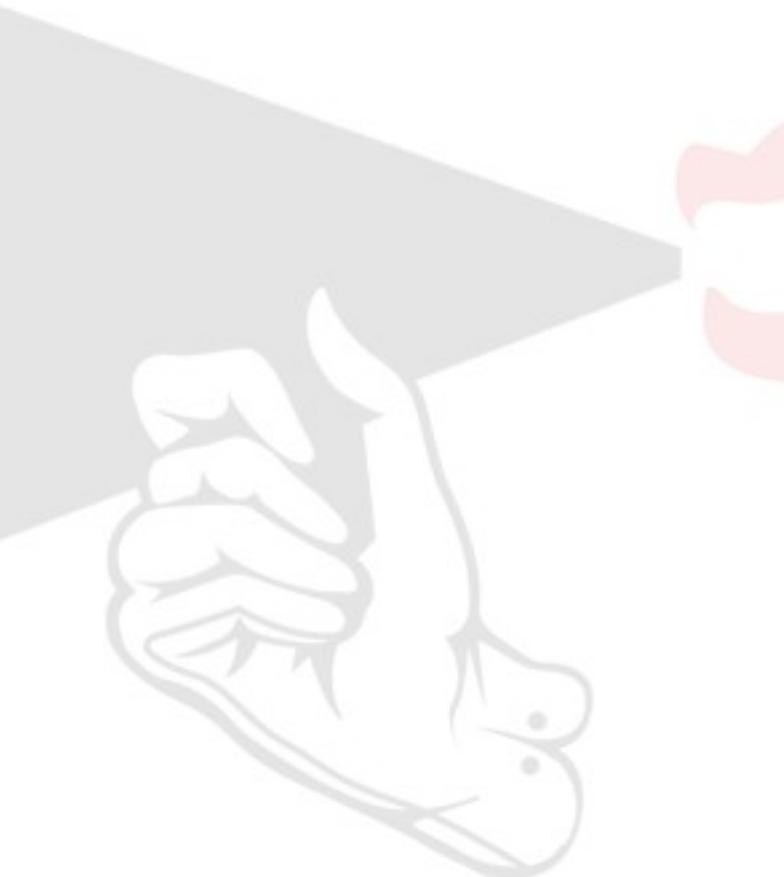
My decision to wear impractical shoes is as much a consequence of me not having to walk in them as it is a decision to participate in a particular understanding of femininity. But what do you see? A sad attempt to look normal? A pair of high heels on a woman? Or something so over the top that it slides into the devotee/fetish view of disabled female sexuality? Note that this is a risk that is only present for disabled women. It's a long way for nondisableds to go through femme to fetish. Merely presenting certain aspects of traditional femme for a queer disabled woman puts her at risk of becoming a usually straight object of the devotee community.

Would you recognize it if I made a pass at you? To see it, you would have to acknowledge an awful lot. You would have to understand that disabled people have sexuality, that it can be a queer sexuality, and that I am looking at YOU.

A while back in this post, I spoke of bones and muscle. I'd like to go back to that place. I am drawn there as a dancer and as a sexual person. The bones of my body hold true for me; my muscles are what my body has given me. So even when my joints are unstable and my muscles torque and spasm, I recognize in these places parts of my deepest self. I strive to hold on to these selfs in every day life and in dance. I strive to bring them to the street and to the stage. Does desiring muscle and bone make me butch and deny me femme as positions from which I can navigate the world?

This, I think, is crip, is gimp. It is an understanding of the

sexuality of the deepest and rawest parts of the body -- it is not so much a focus on gender presentation and on responses to gendered roles. It is an answer to the call of the fibres, the sinews, the fluids, and the infinite structure of the bones.



Love Letter to a Femme in Need By Sublime Femme

SOURCE: <http://femmesguide.com/2008/08/love-letter-to-a-femme-in-need/>

This wonderful post comes to you as a guest post from sublimefemme of Sublimefemme Unbound, a fantastic new blog that I encourage all of you to check out! Big thanks go out to sublimefemme for guest posting!

Just a minute ago, my partner sat down on the couch and—seeing my ubiquitous laptop—asked, “Working on your blog?” “No,” I said, “I’m responding to a femme in need.”

I want to offer love and comfort to a femme in tears who’s afraid she’s “doing femme all wrong.” I don’t know her, but I feel like I do, because I understand her pain and confusion. I’m so deeply moved by her story, because her struggle is not only about how difficult it can be to feel at home in one’s gender, but also about the pressure all of us feel to live up to some ideal of what “femme” is. (Of course, this is true for other genders too.)

Am I really a femme if I don’t know how to send the secret femme signals? If I don’t know how to walk, or act, or flirt like a femme, even when I’m dolled up? If I don’t act “classically femme” with a butch? No matter who we are, I think we’ve all had that moment in life when we’ve felt like we were not “the real deal.” You see a world of dykes, butches, femmes or _____ (fill in the blank) who seem to know instinctively how to make all the “right” moves, and you’re heartbroken because you have no idea how to become one of those people.

Arriving at my own femme identity has taken me many, many years. In fact, it’s only been fairly recently that I have given myself permission to claim “high femme” for myself. I remember the first time someone called me high femme; she was a student of mine (a very adorable butch who went on to become a cop—so sexy!). I was flattered, but shocked. I thought, sure I’m feminine, nails, heels, makeup, whatever, but I’m not really femme enough

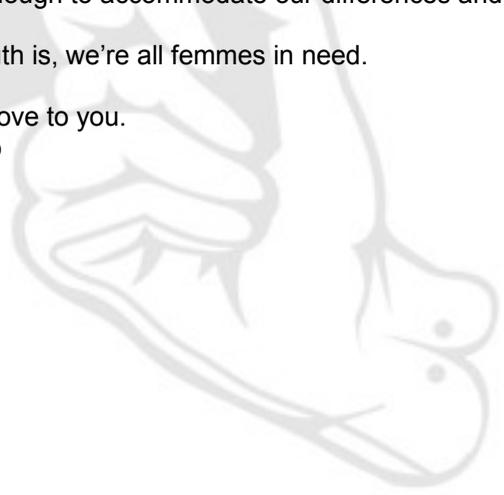
to be “high femme.” It’s funny because that was my first year as a professor and I lectured in a black leather miniskirt and high-heeled leather boots, I kid you not! But back then I imagined “high femme” as some Promised Land of uber femininity where my nails would never chip and, if someone rang the doorbell unannounced, I’d always answer the door looking flawless (a note to all who wish to befriend this particular femme—call first!)

So let me say this to you, Femme in Need. I could not send femme signals on the train going to work in men’s shorts and Birkenstocks, either! Like trans or genderqueer people, we femmes often cannot communicate the complexity of our gender identities to strangers passing by or in brief everyday interactions. (I’m not saying that femmes’ experience is the same as that of transgendered people—I’m just highlighting this point of intersection.)

And please believe me, there is no “right” or “wrong” way to be femme. Embracing an identity like femme can be extremely empowering, but identities are invariably a form of constraint as well. I think we have to recognize and negotiate those constraints, to carve out our own definitions of femme that are fluid enough to accommodate our differences and complexities.

The truth is, we’re all femmes in need.

Much love to you.
xoxoxo



a femme without a butch

By Alphafemme

SOURCE: <http://alphafemme.net/2009/10/29/a-femme-without-a-butch/>

Mi'lady isn't butch. (If she were, there's no way in hell I would call her mi'lady.)

She's not femme, either. Not particularly. Not the way I am. She doesn't really fit into any sort of butch<-->femme spectrum at all. Maybe she's androgynous, though somehow I'm uncomfortable with that word too to describe her. We talked about it a bit on Sunday, and didn't really come up with a label that fit her precisely. But what she definitely is is a dyke.

I guess her gender energy is somewhat akin to Shane from The L Word. (Though I know Shane was commonly referred to as butch, I really don't think she was, or at least not in the way that I understand butch.) Mi'lady isn't quite the same sort of aloof player that Shane was portrayed as, and she's much more outgoing and free with her emotions. Allows herself to be more vulnerable than Shane's character. But she has a similar posture, a similar sort of slightly disheveled look, a similar style. Another stylistic reference would be Tegan & Sara — she's got a sort of punkish female androgyny—tattoo, skinny jeans, chucks, indie t-shirts, black eyeliner.

And I wouldn't say our relationship feels particularly butch-femme, either. It's not that clearly defined. In some ways it does feel very butch-femme. I'm very much a nurturer, in that I'm constantly doing little domestic things. Cooking, tidying, grooming, both for me and for her. I'm a multi-tasker and I'm very attentive to detail. I like things just so. In that regard I can be a care-taker of her. Because she's disorganized and ruffled and a bit chaotic and kind of messy. Not at all detail-oriented. She's fantastically creative, and I help keep her grounded. In a femme way.

She is a nurturer too, in a different sense, maybe in more of a

(dare I say?) butch sense. She's always "big spoon," and we almost always fall asleep that way, with her enfolding me in her arms. She's very affirmative with words, telling me often how sexy or beautiful I am or how much she likes what I cook or how hot those heels look, in a way that affirms and strengthens my femininity. She was the one who pursued me from the get-go, bold and a risk-taker to my subtle flirting.

But in other ways, we're not very butch-femme. Sexually, for example, we have great sex in which she's more dominant and I'm submissive, and great sex in which I'm more dominant and she's submissive, and great sex that doesn't have bottom/top roles at all. I love strapping on and fucking her with a cock (she loves it too), and don't particularly care for the reverse (she's open to it if I want it but isn't insistent on it). And aside from the ways I articulated above, there isn't really any other way that our relationship feels gendered. We're both women.

I wonder, in a way, whether I'm most suited to a butch, considering the extent to which I think I'm really femme. For example, mi'lady doesn't really have (or at least hasn't at any point articulated, to me or to herself) a matching and inverted fantasy of being a "protector" and having a "wife," the way I've got this fantasy of having a protector and being a wife. But... I love her. She makes me laugh, she helps me move beyond details and be flexible, she motivates me to break out of my comfort zone a little bit and then gives me room to go back in, she challenges me. And really, I don't think it's necessary for our fantasies to match up. I think as long as we're willing and able to work out the kinks and figure out our dynamics and make sure we're both giving what we're able to getting what we need, then we should be ok.

And, you know, she really does love it when I cook for her :)

these are not playthings.

By Femme FATale

SOURCE: <http://hussyred.wordpress.com/2008/09/10/these-are-not-playthings/>

i've been doing some heavy thinking lately about these pieces of me i hold so personally dear in the depths of my heart. my identities: my assertion of "femme", my claiming of "bottom," particularly. with the exception of the last two or three years, these have never been easy words or titles under which i've stood. i did not learn these pieces of myself from others. i did not do only as i saw them do and come to these places. they are both identities that, for me, are wrapped in complicated personal histories of a host of things: love, inadequacy, pleasure, guilt, passion, unhappiness, and two hundred other emotions. these identities are not ones i take lightly or for granted.

in short: these are not playthings.

my journey to femme was a hard one ripe with insecurity and an absence of community or language to define who i was and what i was feeling. where i came out as queer was certainly a positive space to do so, but only in particular ways, ways that embraced an androgynous aesthetic that was doubly inaccessible and undesirable for myself.

growing up femme there was heartbreaking.

my queerness was questioned daily by my lovers, friends, my community, the definition of myself by others as nothing more than a "lesbian until graduation". and i tried, and i tried, and i tried to fit in there, to be that non-femme thing they wanted me to be and even donning sports bras and cargo shorts, i failed. miserably. i didn't pass as anything non-femme.

i remember, there was this time, friends of mine were throwing a "frat row" party, and all these dykes just slightly amped up their already masculine clothing to get closer to that douche-y, frat boy image. i was supposed to do the same. i was able to hold it

together long enough to put on those cargo shorts, t-shirt and borrowed a visor from my next door neighbor. but it was actual fucking tears i cried when my best friend told me i couldn't possibly go if i was going to keep on my make-up. there was no place for that. no mascara allowed. no place even for "sorority girls" at this party either. no femininity. period. i left two hours in, cried my way home, and wrote heart-wrenchingly in my journal that i wondered if i'd ever find space where i fit. "will i ever be able to make this queerness work?"

that was a breaking point for me. a moment when i realized it was hurting too much to be queer in this way. and i slowly started to let it go and started to embrace my femme. and as i shed that sorry excuse at androgyny i was trying to pull and stepped up to the plate femmed out the way i'd always wanted to be, i met her. this big, ol' rugby playing butch. this rough, tough femme-lovin' butch. and i was home. i flourished. things fell into place. and i was accepted, my queerness was embraced in this community suddenly. but then, just as quickly as it was handed to me, it was stripped away in my realization that it was just because of her. because i was counterpart to her uber masculinity that was so revered in that space. i was femme, but not my own.

and this went on long after college. still, i held strong to my femme in the midst of queers completely ignoring and straight up disavowing my sexuality and gender. read me, called me, named me "ally" to my face because i was all girled out at dyke night at the bar. how could i be anything other than straight looking like that, they asked my friends. i cried my way home again.

i am home now though in my skin, in my femme, but it wasn't ever easy. it's still hard sometimes, but it's improved. these things is volatile though and i hold it close to my chest because of everything it means to me; that road was rough, but i don't regret the conversations with myself it forced me to have, the questioning of my communities it made me do, the loneliness it caused and the absolute joy and love it has become.

my femme thing is not a plaything.

nor is this thing i claim as bottoming. they are not the same, they are not inextricably linked, but they are related in the depths of me. this identity is newer to me than femme in that i have only in the past few years named it for myself, but hardly a new need or want. this part of me that weaves itself between memories and history of myself alone and myself with her and constantly has me digging for evidence of it that proceeded and followed her. proof that this has been me all along. i find it everywhere.

bottoming is not new to me, not new like her and that love whirlwind we had. it is not trendy to me. i do not will it to be radical so that i might have my points raised as some kinky, subversive queer type. i claim this space because of desire foremost and an investment in all that desire contains – respect, dynamic, communication, need. a big part of this is because of having experienced those desires, knowing what it's like to have them and knowing what it's like to feel their absence. and this is not to say that if you have not done x, you cannot claim y. more so, it's a feeling inside me that is very tied to the act of doing and having done, both being undoings and redos of me.

i come to bottoming first from a place of love – because that's where it was first really named for me. of giving, of expecting to be valued and respected for this generosity of giving myself, of allowing you to take and experience me. this is not about who gets fucked and who does the fucking, it's about yielding and holding, ebbing and flowing.

i do not claim this identity as a mere desire to occasionally have a little control taken from me. i do not claim it as something i think i want, but have never done nor thought about beyond actual physical results. i do not call myself a bottom to satisfy an equation of “femme is...” or use it as a way to critique someone else's needs or desires... and i wish you wouldn't.

because this femme thing, this bottom thing, they are not playthings.

these are heart things, soul things, me things and my chest is heavy when they are cheapened by your carelessness with them.

Spectacular Glitter Explosions: On Femme as a Gender Problem

by: Miss Lola Sunshine

SOURCE: <http://femmesguide.com/2010/05/guest-post-by-lola-sunshine/>

So here's the thing about my gender identity: It's simultaneously subversive and also really radical (in the true sense of the word). It is historical and traditional. It is constructed yet innate. It is both true and false, performance and person, art and self. This would seem like a paradox to some, but this is who I am everyday—this is marked on my body; etched into my brain. It comes out of my mouth in soft-structured sentences, high-pitched angry tones, low growls, and gasps of pleasure. At times I really wish I could be something else, other than, either look more queer or be more straight... or maybe I wish that I were born 50 years ago, when high femme was understood and accepted as a valid lesbian gender identity and came with a clear set of rules and boundaries, but for a myriad of reasons these fantasies are simply not a possibility (and not even actually desired, really they are just the product of exhausted escapism) and so I am to remain stuck in the liminal, possibly forever.

This is not how I meant to start off a description of my gender identity. I meant to say that high femme is fun and playful and colorful and fabulous... but honestly I'm just not there today. There are some days where I'm just not feeling grounded enough for the willful shallow cheerfulness that is needed to reduce myself to shopping, make-up, and shoes. For if gender is indeed a complex spectrum that cannot be easily explained or reduced, then I am so far over on the "feminine" side that I am about to fall right over the edge into uncharted waters. There are simply no maps for where I am going, so clearly this is dangerous territory. As James Baldwin once said, "Here there be dragons." There is nothing but uncertainty ahead, the sort of thing that second and even third guessing yourself will not solve, so there is nothing to do but press on. Sometimes, I am very afraid.

Don't get me wrong, I love reading gender theory, I love questioning things... but the more I question myself, admit that my gender is heavily performative, constructed around a societal idea, etc. the more I also feel that my high femme gender presentation is absolutely, in this and each moment, innate. By "innate" here, I do not mean that it is in any way connected to my birth sex, which is female. "Innate", in this case, means that it is inextricably linked to my person and, beyond being inescapable, is something I have no desire to ever escape. "Innate" means that the closest thing to a "self" that I know is high femme at all times. I am high femme from the time I wake up until the time I go to sleep, and even in my subconscious while dreaming. It is not a costume, it is not drag, it is not a game that I'm playing, and I do not always make up all the rules.

For example, on a snowy night in Chicago several years ago, I had to borrow a pair of Doc Martens boots from a butch friend of mine to walk several blocks from her house to a party in icy weather. Obviously it was dangerously impractical to do anything other than accept the boots and carry my strappy black heels, but I was really quite upset about having to wear them—and not on a "these don't match my outfit!" level, but on a deeply terrifying internal level that I really didn't feel I could express without sounding somewhat insane. As often I've told several of my friends and lovers, the only time I ever encounter any of the sorts of body and gender dysphoria that some of my transgender friends describe feeling so deeply is when I am in drag. Having to wear those boots was a form of drag to me, and it was drag I didn't choose or prepare myself to encounter and therefore I could not remove them quickly enough.

This seems to go against every theoretical example I've read by authors and academics like Borenstein, Butler, and Halberstam that gender and all its trappings is something that is fun to put on and take off—it goes against decades of feminist teachings that women are not meant to wear shoes that pinch their feet and clothes that truss them up to uncomfortable levels, so where does this leave me? It creates me as a wrench in the queer and feminist gears. It makes me into an overly-educated Barbie-girl that cannot be explained away and refuses to let herself be

covered up, dismissed, and ignored. Do you want to know why so many femmes are so incredibly strong? It's because we have to be. Nobody has our backs. Not straight people, not queer people, nobody. Half the time, due to femme-competition, we don't even have each other. You want to know how we all learned to fight in those shoes? Go out to a lesbian bar in heels someday and then take the public transit alone at two o'clock in the morning to get yourself back home.

I am not in any way claiming that gender is innate for everyone, or even the majority of people. In fact, most femmes would probably not agree with all the "I" statements I just made. However, also I don't feel like I should sit here and write a theoretically rich and masterfully dishonest piece about my gender identity as wholly constructed when this is now how I feel. It is constructed, of course, by myself, by society, by how I was raised, etc., and it is also chosen—but it isn't at the same time. I don't really care how others select, construct, and perform or present their gender, but when it comes down to me, I feel bound, quite literally. But the thing I'm trying to get at, what I'm trying to articulate with all these words, is that I enjoy being bound. You can take that statement literally if you wish, as it would still be true in my case, but metaphysically it is absolutely the most correct word for describing how I feel. My version of high femme is restrained and full of fancy knots that are often uncomfortable or outright painful. I find myself struggling against it sometimes, but I don't know if it is because I want to be released or because I just enjoy the friction—I suspect it's the latter. I've always been a big fan of friction.

In fact, I deliberately readjust my bindings every day, make sure the knots are still tight, change the color of the ropes, play with the tensions. I do this through hair, make-up, fashion, accessories, and, yes, shoes. I create an aesthetic that I feel matches who I am inside. It is intentional and I leave very little to chance. As a line in the film *American Beauty* says, "See the way the handle on her pruning shears matches her gardening clogs? That's not an accident." I am relentless. These character traits that some call unstable, neurotic, or high maintenance are actually valuable tools for which I have great respect and find

absolutely necessary.

While I often appear to be caricature of a heterosexual American female, I do not consider myself as such. A wide chasm of difference is created by awareness and intent. My style of being is not meant to perpetuate classism, racism, or heteronormativity although it often does. It is not meant attract attention from straight men. In fact, unless I deliberately consent to step into a specific gaze, it's not actually meant to attract queer individuals, either. These are all just side effects of my high femme presentation. Some are unfortunate or unpleasant, and some can occasionally be enjoyed in a shot-reverse-shot sort of fashion, but none are directly intentional on my part. So, once again, where does this leave me? When I am seen at all, I am perceived as a female object of desire regardless of whether or not I have consented and without necessarily being fully understood. What does one do with this knowledge? I feel that I subvert gender and sexuality every day by merely existing in the form in which I am most comfortable and refusing to conform to its expectations.

It is my experience that high femmes are dually invisible in both queer and heterosexual spaces. We are like spies in worlds that never expect us, never see us coming, and don't notice us when we're already there. While hiding in plain sight, we have brilliant opportunities for subversion, disruption, sabotage, and general queer mayhem. I believe that if we are invisible, then we should have no expectations and cannot be held accountable for our actions. Conversely, if we are visible and yet constantly mystified or misinterpreted, then, again, all bets are off. We can and should do whatever we please and thus force the communities around us to adjust and adapt to a new reality that sees us in it.

Years ago, when I first heard the popular feminist axiom quoted from Audre Lorde, "The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house," I felt immediately uncomfortable. It took a long cycle of self-reflection to fully discover why. The truth is, I actually do believe that you can take up the master's tools if you are first and always aware that you are using them. I feel that if you use the master's tools to completely subvert, and in many

ways thoroughly pervert, his original intentions, then his house will come crashing down in a spectacular, glittery explosion. It is also possible that the house itself doesn't need to be destroyed. Maybe it would be just as exciting to repaint it hot pink with lavender edge-work. This would also clearly upset the balance of power. Perhaps it's that I actually somewhat like living in the house—however I will only reside there under my terms and I would prefer it be filled with my friends, family, lovers, and allies. So, in essence, as a high femme I have stolen the master's house. Maybe I'm squatting, maybe I've outright purchased it, or maybe the master is in pieces under the floorboards. The point is, I plan to reside in my refurbished hot pink house, which is full of silk chaise lounges, full length mirrors, walk-in closets, full sets of vintage glassware and, hopefully, some really sexy radical queers—and I'm going to blast girlie pop music out of all the bay windows for as long as I so choose. I invite all of you to come over and join me. There will be cookies. Come on. You know you love cookies.



why Alphafemme?

By Alphafemme

SOURCE: <http://alphafemme.net/2009/11/23/why-alphafemme/>

A long, long time ago—back in August?—I got an email from a reader named Asha, (1) asking where I came up with the name “alphafemme” and (2) saying that before she’d even read any of my blog, she felt a click—the word alphafemme, she thought, worked really well for her, and would I be offended if she appropriated it for herself. I promised her a post on the subject, and it is woefully overdue.

Let me first address the second thing—if the word alphafemme seems like a good fit for you in your identity, and even if your reasons for finding it a good fit are completely different from the reasons I will articulate below, by all means, if it feels good to you, use it. I think there’s a huge difference between deciding that alphafemme works as an identity label for you (which I would not call appropriation), and deciding you’re also going to publish a blog under the title “alphafemme” and write about (many of) the same things I write about or telling people that you’re me (which I would call appropriation). I would guess that most people are not inclined to do the latter, but I fully endorse the former! Run away with it people!

And now I’ll go back to the first thing, which is where I came up with the name “alphafemme” in the first place. I address this a bit on my About page (which needs updating anyway), but let me go into a bit more detail here.

After the obligatory coming out identity crisis, which I think many (if not most) queer women go through at some point or other (and I think this in itself is fascinating, and I totally want to write about this too), I started grappling with that all-important question: Who Am I? And maybe I have less self-awareness than most, but it took me quite a lot of trial and error to come to an understanding of my identity that felt right. I guess that was part of what I wanted this blog to do for me, to help me go through it all and decide what works for me and what doesn’t. And while

I've (for now) finally settled on femme as a sort of umbrella-word for how I identify, it was hardly easy to come to terms with that.

I'm sure part of the insecurity in identifying as femme was internalized sexism, that some of the fear had to do with not wanting to choose what might seem to others to be "unenlightened" or, worse, hurting feminism. I've pretty much gotten over that now (see my post on femininity for a discussion of that), thank goodness, and am now fiercely, comfortably, and even subversively feminine.

But another major qualm I had with identifying as femme was this fear that I somehow didn't actually know what femme meant, and that I would be scoffed at by other self-identified femmes for identifying as such. ("YOU'RE not femme, you have short hair!" or "but I hardly ever see you in dresses! that's not really femme!" or "femmes don't strap on! femmes don't do the fucking!") In San Francisco, it seems to me like everyone I've met who identifies as femme fits a certain image: dyed blonde or raven black hair, porcelain white skin, bright red lipstick, fishnets, tattoos... And believe me, these ladies are smokin', but it's just not my look. And so I was like, well, if that's what femme is, then I'm not femme. (There are, of course, many other femme-identified ladies in SF who do also do not fit that particular description, as I've come to realize. Yay!)

And yet it still appealed to me. I still felt that my mild obsession with high heeled-peep-toe pumps and my growing infatuation with cooking still somehow made femme the right word for me. But since I was still kind of hesitant, it needed a qualifier. Something that made my identity mine.

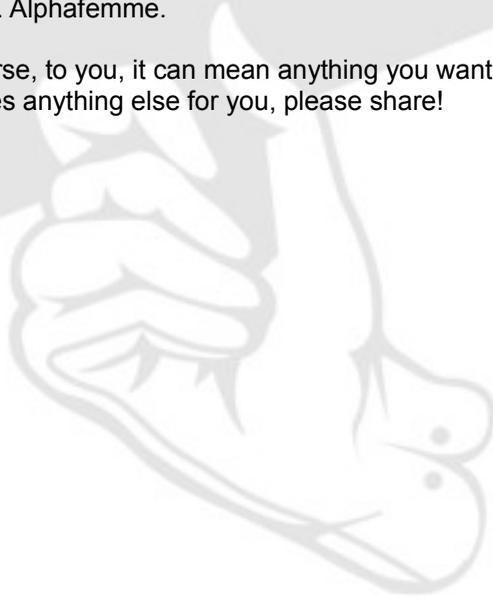
It came to me last summer when I was watching old episodes of *The L Word* with a friend of mine, reminiscing about the pre-Dana's-death days of the show. Or, rather, it came to my friend. We were watching one of the episodes where Bette is dealing with the protestors to her gallery's art show. My friend turned to me and said, "she reminds me of you, she's such an alpha female."

“What does THAT mean?” I asked.

“Well... you’re strong, and fierce, and driven, and you’re always on top of everything, always in control. And you dress sharply feminine, powerful. But you’re also vulnerable, I think, I mean right? Don’t you sometimes just want someone to hold you and have someone else be the stronger one?”

And oh. my. god. YES. She was so right. I think my similarities to Bette end there (I’m not a raging bitch who cheats on my lovers in order to maintain a facade of Control Freak, and unfortunately I look nothing like her), but such as they are, the similarities ring so true. And “alpha” is an excellent way of describing me. I’m confident in my intellect, and I am meticulous, in control, ambitious, and driven. But I’m not just alpha. I’m alphafemme. I’m an alpha who wants to be enfolded at the end of the day. I’m an alpha who loves to pretend I’m a 50s housewife, a la Betty Draper, but happier (I’m currently obsessed with Mad Men). I’m an alpha with soft eyes and a maternal edge. I’m an alpha, with femme. Alphafemme.

Of course, to you, it can mean anything you want it to. If it conjures anything else for you, please share!



Rethinking High Femme, Part 1

By Sublime Femme

SOURCE:

<http://sublimefemme.wordpress.com/2008/10/27/rethinking-high-femme-part-1/>

A charming and generous friend recently told me—much to my surprise—that she sees my blog as a femme finishing school. I'm flattered, believe me (much love to you, charming and generous friend!), but the more I thought about it the more I realized that femme for me is a nonlinear process in which there's no identifiable finish line to cross. I think this is one reason why you sometimes hear femmes say that femme is both something we are and something we do. (Actually, I'd love to hear butches talk about butch in this way, but this doesn't seem to happen a lot. More on that some other time...)

As I've worked on this blog, I've moved away from thinking about femme in terms of a continuum or spectrum between degrees of femininity. I've learned that femme is too complex and varied to be defined primarily through a focus on quantity or intensity (e.g. whether you are "more" or "less" femme). One of my first posts "No, I'm not a lipstick lesbian (I just look like one)" represented an early effort to differentiate between the terms lipstick lesbian, femme, and high femme. It generated a really illuminating dialogue and prompted many of you to suggest other categories/terms such as earthy femme, queer femme, and chapstick femme. Since then, I've tried to complicate notions of femme identity in our discussions of femme style, the politics of femme pleasure, femme and consumerism, what it means to "transition" to femme, how butch and femme are not mutually exclusive categories, and being a stone femme.

This discussion—as well as conversations happening on other blogs—has helped me to expand and revise my thinking about femme and high femme. In my "No, I'm not a lipstick lesbian" post I talked about high femme as "ultra femininity," but I now think this is a bit reductive. What's most crucial for me about high femme as a separate gender identity from femme is not that it's

“more feminine” but that it’s a different kind of femininity that, generally speaking, privileges artifice over realness.

Here’s my new working definition of high femme; let me know what you think!

High Femme— Lesbian or queer gender marked marked by a highly stylized and aestheticized form of femme gender expression or identity. Uses exaggeration, artifice, and/or theatricality to denaturalize femininity. When combined with parody or irony, the effect achieved is akin to drag: femininity in quotes. No particular style of dress or external signifiers; may or may not wear dresses, heels, and/or makeup. May or may not be a “bottom” or a “top” in a sexual situation; may or may not partner with butches, studs, or stone butches. No particular personality traits. May be passive and demure or aggressive, independent, strong, etc. Not equivalent to a lipstick lesbian or stone femme. *

*NOTE: In the future, I’d like to work on expanding and clarifying this definition even more, since high femme is shaped by class, racial/ethnic, and regional differences. For example, what’s high femme in LA might be different than high femme in Baltimore. Please let me know if you have thoughts on these issues. I also would be interested in hearing from people about the herstory of high femme. Most of us would probably agree that high femme in the 50s and 60s meant something different than it does today, but what exactly is that difference? It’s always good to start with what you know, so my definition above has a contemporary focus.

Stay tuned for Part 2 tomorrow!

Rethinking High Femme, Part 2

By Sublime Femme

SOURCE:

<http://sublimefemme.wordpress.com/2008/10/28/rethinking-high-femme-part-2/>

Are high femmes queen bees? If you crown yourself “high femme,” are you implicitly suggesting that others are “low?” Nikki from give me space (to rock) and, more recently, buddhistfemme have asserted that “high femme” suggests a heirarchical ranking of femme that’s fundamentally elitist. This may seem like an unavoidable conclusion, particularly in today’s competitive and status-obsessed world.

I identify as both femme and high femme, and personally I’ve never felt that high femme = better femme. As I stated in my last post, my “rethinking” of high femme emphasizes that, for me, this gender is not a rank or a final destination. I see my femme identity as complex and changing—as I put it yesterday, “a nonlinear process in which there’s no identifiable finish line.” I have not donned my stilettos and clawed my way to the zenith of Sublime Femmeness, I assure you! Like other queer genders, high femme in my view doesn’t exist in a continuum but as part of nonlinear gender galaxy (see Scarlet Lotus Sexgeek on the gender galaxy model).

Fine, you might say, this sounds great in theory, but let’s get concrete: in practice high femme performance requires money and privilege, right? To some extent, yes, but this strikes me as a misconception. High femme is not an exclusive rich girl’s club, nor is it in my view any more steeped in class privilege than any other gender. Since all genders and sexualities are shaped by the social inequalities of capitalism, I think it’s fair to ask why high femme in particular should be portrayed as necessarily classist and elitist.

To say that high femme is an inherently classist gender because it “costs money” and therefore excludes those who have less of it actually sets up a very narrow, elitist notion of what high femme

is. I learned about high femme from the work of my Femme Icon Amber Hollibaugh, a sex radical, leftist, union organizer and queer activist, who has written about her experience as a “rural gypsy working-class poor white trash high femme dyke” in her book, *My Dangerous Desires*. Her life story is just one example of how high femme has been historically linked to queer working-class communities since the 1950s.

For me, high femme says not simply how femme I am, but how I do femme. When I claim this identity and expression, it's not to undermine anyone else—least of all other femmes! What I'm trying to do is express a part of me that was shamed, marginalized or belittled by a misogynistic and femmephobic culture. It's about linking my embrace of femininity with trans and drag queens and all of my femme sisters who dare to assert the right to be unapologetically and queerly femme. It's a revaluing and denaturalizing of femininity that, for me, is fundamentally queer and feminist.

For all of these reasons, I call myself a high femme. Nowadays, when butch is still the gold standard, genderqueer is cool, and bois are hot, I think it's important for high femme to be recognized as a valid gender identity and expression that sparkles brightly in this queer gender galaxy we call home.



What Makes (Me) a Femme By Sublime Femme

SOURCE:

<http://sublimefemme.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/what-makes-me-a-femme/>

Long, long ago in a gender galaxy far, far away...

...I was butch!

I know what you're thinking: how could your favorite ravishing femme queer theorist—who is typing these words with perfectly manicured red nails—have ever been butch? But it's really true, my lovelies, I swear. I had Hilary Swank's haircut in *Boys Don't Cry*, stomped around in big Timberland boots, got my clothes from the men's department, and my only grooming products were shampoo, soap and chapstick. In the community that I came out into, to be a lesbian meant that you were butch, andro, or flannel, period. I actually had no idea that other kinds of lesbian genders existed!

I'm writing this piece in response to Hussy Red's terrific post "The Femme Archive" on *The Femme Guide*, which asks all of us to share our own stories about how we've come to our identities as femmes. So, I've been asking myself: Who and what inspired, affirmed and taught me as I traveled the long and winding road to femme? What made me feel authorized to express my own queer femininity? Here are my answers, in no particular order:

1. **Femme Icons.** These are the brave, beautiful women who inspired me and educated me about femme, even if I never knew them. For me, Joan Nestle, Susie Bright, and Amber Hollibaugh are at the top of the list; their brilliance, political activism, magnetic eroticism and kick-ass femme attitudes made me think, that's what I want to be when I grow up! Femme icons from earlier eras have also been a big source of inspiration for me. If you've read my post on Greta Garbo, you know that I love old Hollywood glamour and the beautiful and talented lesbian and bisexual women who serve, for me, as icons of queer femininity.

(For the scoop about Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead, Mercedes de Acosta, Marlene Dietrich and more, check out Diana McLellan's *The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood!*) But Femme icons are also people we see everyday. For me, getting to know and work with smart and successful femme/feminine lesbians who were my teachers and mentors was an incredible blessing. By modeling their own versions of femme in their lives and work (from lipstick lesbian to campy, queer femme identities), they introduced me to ways of inhabiting lesbian gender that I had never imagined possible.

2. Butch/femme and lesbian history. Learning about the history of butch/femme in the 40s, 50s and 60s was incredibly important to me. Reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*—which was itself a life-changing experience—motivated me to learn more about butch/femme working-class communities in postwar America. I was so inspired and impressed by how brave these women were, and how hard they had fought to carve out spaces for public, visible lesbian communities under extremely oppressive social conditions. In fact, the main reason I began to identify as a femme (as opposed to lipstick lesbian, for example) is precisely because I wanted to connect with that past. This is still true for me today; calling myself a femme is one way I strive to honor the struggles, sacrifices, and hard-won victories of butches and femmes and carry them forward into the present. To learn more about butch/femme communities in the 50s, I highly recommend Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis' wonderfully readable oral history, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.

3. Gay men. What can I say? I'm a huge fan!! Meet me at the intersection of Oscar Wilde and John Waters. Gay men helped me to embrace my identity as a femme because they offered me a space to celebrate femininity with joy and a sense of playfulness, which felt worlds removed from the shaming, suspicion or just perplexed confusion that I felt from some lesbians and feminists. In the gay world, I wasn't just "tolerated" for being femme, I was loved and respected. Gay male friends who appreciated beauty, fashion and glamour also taught me a thing or two about queer aesthetics and camp, both of which

changed the way I look at the world. Most importantly, they inspired me to approach gender and sexuality with a sense of adventure and frivolity that has shaped how I “do” femme.

4. Facing My Own Pain and Gender Oppression. It wasn't until a few years ago, when I had an epiphany sitting in the audience at a GenderPAC conference, that I realized how hurt I've been from the years of being shunned in lesbian/feminist bookstores (for being too femme) or being marginalized in the straight world (for being too queer). At GenderPAC, Riki Wilchins was talking about the oppression faced by femmes, which often isn't recognized because we do not (typically) transgress gender norms.

Suddenly, tears filled my eyes and I was overwhelmed by a powerful emotional reaction I had never anticipated. What was going on?

I went to the conference because I'm an ally of trans and genderqueer people, and I wanted to participate in the important education and advocacy work that GenderPAC does. But as I was listening to Riki speak, I realized that I was exactly where I needed to be—not for others, but for me. Coming to terms with my own gender oppression not just as a woman but also as a femme has enabled me to work towards healing the pain I didn't even realize I was carrying inside me. It has helped me to politicize my own experience as a femme in ways I hadn't previously, because now I understand and appreciate the depth of that experience not only with my head, but also with my heart.

By Way of a Conclusion. All of this doesn't quite tell you how I travelled from the andro butch of my younger years to the captivating vision of femme-ininity I am now, but these snapshots of my journey are at the core of what has made me a femme. I hope you'll go to The Femme Guide and write about what made/makes you a femme, because I can't wait to read your stories! Regardless of how we identify or the differences that shape our lives, we all have *so much* to learn from each other.

Whipping Girl

By Lou

SOURCE:

<http://femmetellect.wordpress.com/2010/01/02/whipping-girl/>

I just finished reading Whipping Girl, which my brother bought me for Christmas. It was actually rather surprising gift to receive from a generally homo and trans phobic person. Which leads me to suspect that he didn't actually choose it.

Regardless of where the book came from, it is still a brilliant book. I adore Juila Serano. She writes with the fire of woman who has been told countless times that she, and her identity are not significant or real. She has a true activist spirit. It infuses her work in a way that reminds me of Leslie Fienberg.

I was reading this book on the couch yesterday, and P looked at me and asked why I was reading it. She didn't understand what I could possibly gain from a book about trans women. I told her it isn't a book about trans women, it is about women and the repression of femininity. This book crosses the barrier between trans and cisgender in seamless way, reminding us that we are all in woman together. This category is ours, and it is problematic.

This book discussed boundaries quite a bit, specifically in terms of the construction and maintenance of the boundary of woman (who constitutes a woman and why?)

This got me thinking about the boundaries of femme. I have often had people new to the term ask me to define femme and explain its requirements – essentially to explain the boundaries of femme. I have no answer to this. However, I would argue that despite its historical association with lesbianism, femme does not have to be queer or female.

I understand femme to be an a state of consciousness in which the individual recognizes the problematic nature of traditional femininity and its relation to the patriarchal state and structure.

As a result, the femme reclaims her femininity in a non traditional, ironic way and uses her body to subvert the ordinary, whether this be through queering or other means. Essentially we do femininity in a different way, a way that empowers us. To me this does not have to be gendered, or sexed.

I have seen drag queens who have challenged and repositioned femininity in a most admirable way. They don the utmost feminine attire with power and confidence, and at the same time challenge the way we think about, and perceive woman. Similarly there are some kick ass straight women who challenge the expectations of femininity daily. There are men that are brave enough to adopt the disadvantaged characteristics of femininity and who perform them proudly. To me, these individuals are as deserving of the femme identity as we are.

I understand the importance of boundaries. If you do not define who is included, then there is nothing to separate you from everyone else. You can't have an identity without boundaries.

I understand that lesbian femmes are working to honour the history and legacy of the femmes that came before us. Our sisters in the 1940's whose femme status did not grant them access to the category lesbian. Our sisters who have suffered the doubts of those around them, doubting the legitimacy, their queerness and their identity. Our sisters who have been experienced violence and rape from men who didn't believe that they were queer. The boundary that keeps us together, unified, is important. But there could be so much more.

I am not trying to diminish the importance of our history and commonality. Instead, I suggest that there is a greater commonality out there. What we femmes all have in common is that we want to gain respect, and acceptance of femininity. We want to make being a girl, being a woman, being feminine not hurt. Perhaps that is more important.

Gender Exploration: Femme Fagette

By Scarlet St Syr

SOURCE: <http://ofpleasure.com/2009/12/11/gender-exploration-femme-fagette/>

I've been gravitating toward a much more "masculine" gender expression lately, really since we moved to Seattle. I've been slowly making my way over, though it's only selectively masculine, it's my fagette persona, my feminine masculinity that I've been working on developing.

Like my transition from bottom to Top to switch I believe this gender exploration will bring me from femme to fagette to femme fagette. Just as I knew I would end up a switch I had to explore the individual parts of that identity expression before I was able to really claim switchness for my own.

I believe in order for me to truly embrace all that is my gender identity of femme fagette, my own gender phrase and identity, I will end up never staying still in one gender for too long or coming to rest, much like switch is it's own identity along with being Top and bottom identities and various other aspects of power and sadomasochistic and any other sexuality aspects thrown in. I claim femme fagette in the same way I claim switch, as a identity in perpetual motion, forever morphing and changing to fit my current desires.

The fagette aspect of my gender identity is somewhat femme in and of itself, so the two really are tied up within each other no matter what I do. I have days where I want to pack, wear a binder, and walk with a swagger and other days when I feel like putting on a ruffled skirt, corset, and a wig, and those days might not coincide with the identity automatically assumed.

My gender definitely has to do with both masculine and feminine energies but also a purposeful queering of those energies as much as possible. I often feel the most feminine when wearing traditionally masculine clothing, and visa verse. For me it is less about the specific gender expression than it is about playing with

gender and experiencing it in a way that jives with me, however that might be.

As I mentioned in my last post I'm a bit of a chameleon, which is why, I think, I cling to such transitory identities. I enjoy labels, as I've gone on about ad nauseum, but the labels I end up claiming tend to be ones that are fluid such as queer, switch, poly, and femme fagette/multigendered/gender fluid, each of these can mean different things depending on the day and my mood.

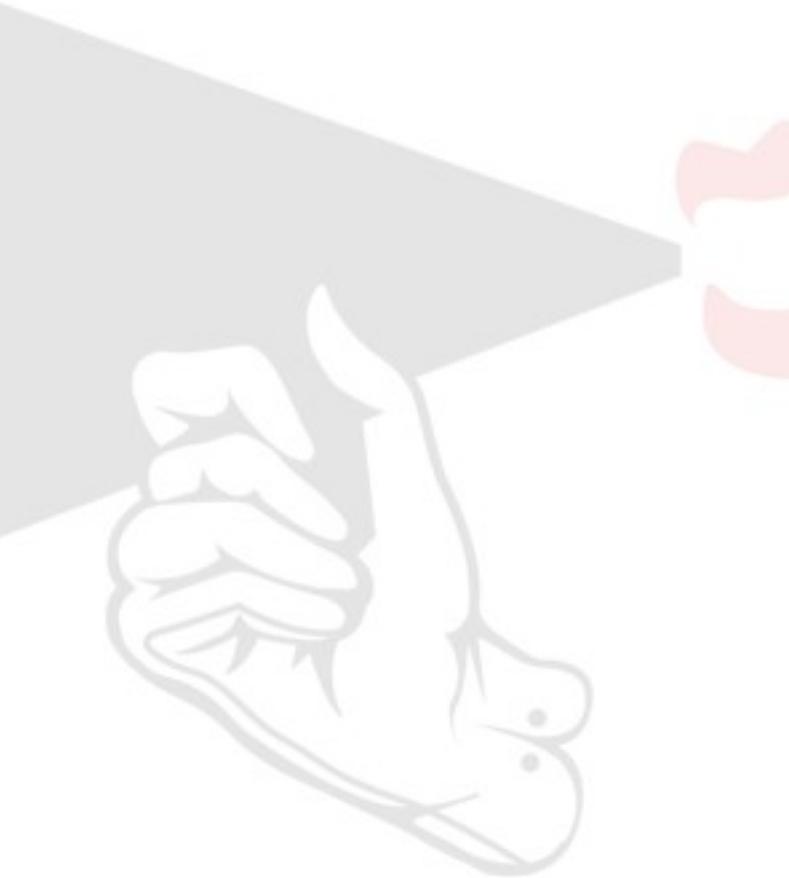
One thing I worry about with terming myself "femme fagette" is that damned gender binary.

I recently opened FetLife and Twitter accounts for a "masculine" persona, Quyn or Quyntin Ari St. Syr. It was somewhat of a spur of the moment thing and inspired by Mina Meow and her persona Aiden. Ever since I've been thinking about what that means to have the two accounts and I know I as a whole am not fully represented now by either Scarlet or Quyn, but I wonder if I'm even partially represented.

I don't feel like I have split personalities, both Quyn and Scarlet are me but are aspects of me but not the end all and be all of me either. There's something missing there, and maybe that's the complexity of how the two personae interact and feed off each other and there may be another aspect of me not yet fully grasped. I occasionally toy with the idea of getting rid of the Scarlet persona and expanding the scope of Quyn, but Scarlet has been such a part of me for so long.

I worry, however, that splitting the personae up in to, basically, a "masculine" and a "feminine" persona isn't doing justice to what I'm actually feeling and is just working to reinforce the gender binary, as if in order to express an "other" gender identity I have to break it down into accepted gender norms. Though it could have the opposite effect, I suppose, since although I am setting up these two personae I think what I do with them could be potentially gender explosive and bust through the confining ideas of binary gender. I guess it all depends on how it's perceived and what I do with it more than anything.

I'm still exploring and getting used to my newly embraced identities and I'm excited to see how everything progresses. I have had a lot of time recently to think about myself and my genders are something that I am working on figuring out more.
Finding Harmony in My Gender Fluidity



Finding Harmony in My Gender Fluidity

By Scarlet Lotus St Syr

SOURCE:

<http://ofpleasure.com/2009/03/14/finding-harmony-in-my-gender-fluidity/>

There are so many ways to play with and express gender and gender deviance, from subtle to in-your-face and everywhere in between. What I've been trying to figure out in the last few weeks is how to reconcile my femme and fagette identities into a conceivable whole. I'm often not sure it's even possible, but I'm trying at least.

I was asked not too long ago on FetLife "how do you find the harmony of being both without being confused or feel like you're betraying one half of yourself at the expense of expressing the other?"

Part of my response:

"Unfortunately, I don't have a good answer for that question. I do often feel confused or like I am betraying parts of myself, but I can only realize that there is almost no way to not feel that way and in realizing try not to feel that betrayal. It's difficult to almost never have my own gender perceived or acknowledged by those around me. I think that is one of the worst things about being gender-fluid, or any sort of multigendered, that it's difficult or nearly impossible to get validation from others on your gender because there's not an easy way to express gender fluidity, if it can be expressed at all in all it's vastness. Since people want to categorize everyone they meet and since we are conditioned to view gender as binary it's difficult to exist outside of that binary in the gender galaxy at large."

My issue with this moves beyond being multigendered into the fact that not only am I multigendered but that due to my appearance I'm easily read by the outside world as cisgendered. It's similar to femme invisibility, though the issue is gender invisibility rather than queer invisibility. While femme is a large part of my gender identity it is not all of it.

Femme gender and queerness is what is invisible, what people have trouble seeing or what people gloss over. Because my primary gender presentation is femme I have the same issues but with the added fagette twist. This isn't to say that my invisibility is more than that of femmes because it's not, it's just a slightly different kind of the same invisibility.

Of course, it doesn't help that I'm involved with a cisgendered male. I'm used to people not seeing my queerness especially when we're together, and I'm used to people not seeing my fagette side because it can also look very femme.

It's human nature to look for recognition in others, and look for others like you. Even while I'm used to people not seeing these things in me that doesn't mean I still don't want them to. I am slowly coming to embrace the fact that it doesn't matter as much what other people see as long as I know how I feel and am being me to the best of my ability. It's difficult, but it's something I'm trying to do.

A few butches on twitter were talking about cross-dressing a while ago, I know Kyle and Sinclair were among them and don't remember who else, but they said that when asked if they cross-dress daily they would say no because cross-dressing to them would be wearing a skirt. I began to question my own cross-dressing, and part of me thinks I do cross-dress daily.

I think clothes for me are cross-dressing, clothes for me are drag. Sometimes I think I've just internalized pomo rhetoric to the extent that I really don't feel like I have an inherent draw to some gender or another. I know that even though all gender is drag that doesn't mean that people don't have a pull to some sort of gender expression or another. I do have a pull to gender expression, but I don't know what gender expression is pulling me to it.

I wear skirts. I don't wear pants. Honestly, I don't wear pants because they are confining and uncomfortable. Although I can't say that has nothing to do with the meaning of pants in our

society since that is so ingrained in us and I'm sure it's still ingrained in me, but I can say that my conscious reasoning behind it doesn't have to do with that.

My only issue with skirt wearing is that it's difficult to be androgynous in a skirt. Or, let me rephrase: it's difficult to be perceived as androgynous in a skirt. If I were male in a skirt that would be clear, but female in a skirt seems to be perceived as nothing but feminine. Since cutting my hair short I've gotten a few more double-takes, a few more curious looks, but I'm generally dismissed as a short-haired girl regardless of how much I try to play with my femme fagette expression.

There are nights I feel more like a femme and nights I feel more like a fagette, and nights where I'm not sure what the fuck I am. The only harmony I can find is by overanalyzing, exploring, and allowing myself and my gender to grow and evolve.

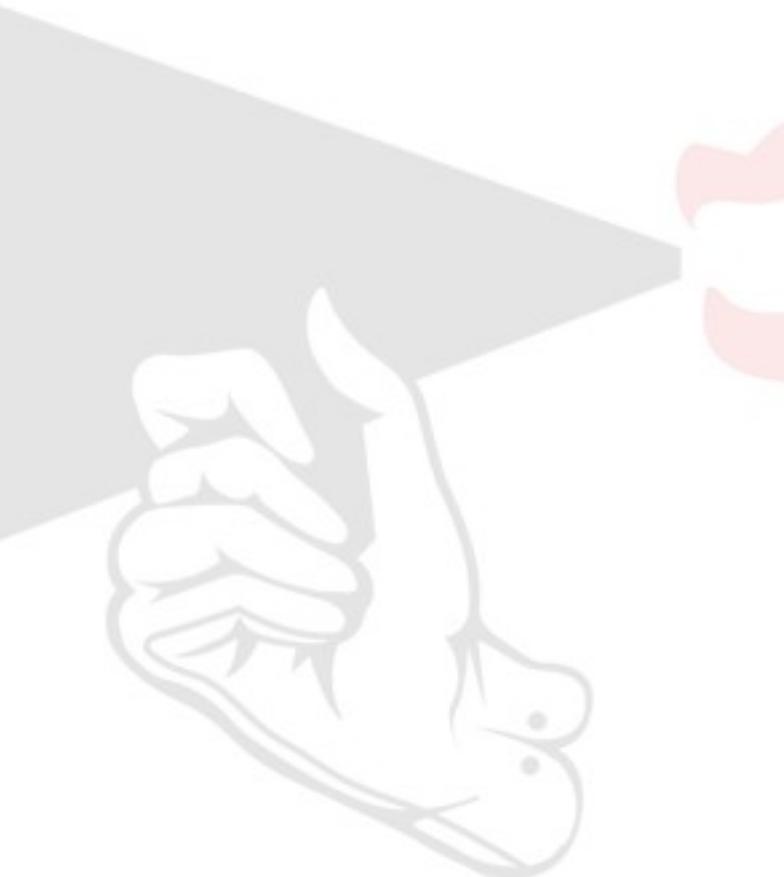
Recently I've been thinking about and exploring the idea of packing. Somehow packing has come up quite a bit in the last few weeks, both in the form of reviews (both Holden and Erin Leone have reviewed packies recently) and pictures (Kyle shared some with us for HNT). I'd been thinking about packing in a peripheral way before these all came out, but they definitely brought it to the forefront for me.

I just recently received Silky in the mail, just yesterday actually. A almost flesh-colored cock that has a bendable spine in the middle enabling the user to bend it to any shape the six inches of shaft can bend to. I enjoy making it S shaped and such just to see how well it bends. Because Silky is so bendable it's also great for hard packing (as opposed to soft packing). One of the main reasons I got Silky is to see how it works for packing.

I packed with Silky for a while last night, though I did it just around the house. It was unusual, but I definitely liked it. The thing about packing isn't about wanting to have a penis, at least not for me and not for the people I've talked about packing with, it's more of a focal point for gendered energy. It was a reminder more than anything else, something to draw my attention and to

bring my consciousness to my gender.

While I was packing I was wearing a dress. My Silky was not really noticeable under the dress at all, unless I sat cross-legged and the dress draped over Silky, but even when that happened it wouldn't have been apparent unless one was looking for it. It isn't meant to be obvious, though, and just the fact that I'm packing under a skirt is genderfucky enough for me. The glaring gender "contradiction" is where I thrive. It's where I find my harmony, even if no one else knows about it.



Hats Off To Beautiful Femmes

By Ivan E Coyote

SOURCE:

http://www.xtra.ca/public/National/Hats_off_to_beautiful_femmes-7215.aspx

To all the beautiful, kick ass, fierce and full-bodied femmes out there, I would like to extend my thanks to you.

It is for you that I press my shirts and carefully iron my ties. It is for you that I make sure my underwear and socks match. It is to you that I tip my cowboy hat. It is for you that I polish my big black boots.

I know that sometimes you feel like nobody truly sees you. I want you to know that I see you. I see you on the street, on the bus, in the gym, in the park.

I don't know why I can tell that you are not straight, but I can. Maybe it is the way you look at me. Please don't stop looking at me the way you do.

All of my life I have been told that I am ugly, I am less than, I am not a man, I am unwanted. Until you came along, I believed them. Please do not ever stop looking at me the way you do.

I would never say that the world is harder on me than it is you. Sometimes you are invisible. I have no idea what this must feel like, to pass right by your people and not be recognized. To not be seen. I cannot hide, unless I am seen as something I am not. This is not more difficult, it is just different.

I know those shoes are fucking killing your feet. I want you to know how much I appreciate that you are still wearing them. You look hot. I love you in them. They look great with that dress.

If it makes you feel any better at all, the boots I have on right now weigh approximately 12 pounds apiece and they make the soles of my feet burn like diaper rash in a heat wave and it feels like

I'm wearing ski boots when I have to walk up stairs. But I wear them for you.

Even still, my new boots are velvet slippers compared to your knee-high five-inch heels. I notice, and I salute you.

I promise, I am not just staring at your tits. I am trying to look you directly in the eyes, but you are almost eight inches taller than me, please see above note regarding your five-inch heels. At the same time, I would like to mention that while I was trying to look you in the eyes, I couldn't help but notice your lovely new pendant. I am sure it really brings out the colour of your eyes, if I could see them.

I want to thank you for coming out of the closet. Again and again, over and over, for the rest of your life. At school, at work, at your kid's daycare, at your brother's wedding, at the doctor's office. Thank you for sideswiping their stereotypes.

I never get the chance to come out of the closet, because my closet was always made of glass. But you do it for me. You fight homophobia in a way that I never could. Some of them think I am queer because I am undesirable. You prove to them that being queer is your desire.

Thank you for loving me because of who I am and what I look like, not in spite of who I am and what I look like.

Thank you for smelling so good.

Thank you for holding my hand on the sidewalk during the hockey playoffs. I know it is probably small-minded of me to smile wicked at all the drunken dudes in jerseys smoking outside the sports bar in between periods because you are so fucking hot, and you are with me and not them, but I can't help it. That's right fellas. You want her but she wants me. How do you like them apples?

Thank you for wearing matching bra and panties. I don't know why this makes my life seem so perfect, but it really does.

Thank you for being the daughter my mother always wanted. You are so smart and successful and you dress so fine that you almost make up for her having me and my sister for her real children.

Thank you for reaching out in the dark at the movie theatre to grab my hand in the scary parts. It makes me feel like I am strong, that I can take care of you. Even if there is no such thing as vampires, and you do so much yoga that you could probably easily kick my ass.

I want you to know I love your crooked tooth, your stretch marks, the missing part of your finger, your short leg, your third nipple, your lazy eye, your cowlick, your birthmark shaped like Texas. I love it all.

I want you to know that I know it is not always easy to love me. That sometimes my chest is a field full of landmines and where you went last night you can't go tomorrow. There is no manual, no roadmap, no helpline you can call. My body does not come with instructions, and sometimes even I don't know what to do with it. This cannot be easy, but still, you touch me anyway.

Thank you for escorting me into the women's washroom because the floor of the men's was covered in something unmentionable. Thank you for asking me if I had a tampon in my purse really loud so the lady in the turquoise sweatshirt did a double take before gathering up her daughter and hitting me with a pool noodle. I can't say for sure whether that is what actually would have happened, but thanks to you I didn't have to find out.

Thank you for wearing that dress just because you knew it would match my shirt. Together, we are unstoppable. When seen through your eyes, I am beautiful. Turns out I was a swan the whole time.

Read more of Ivan Coyote's writing on Xtra.ca.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

Black Femme Diaries:

<http://blackfemmediaries.blogspot.com/>

Sugar Butch:

<http://www.sugarbutch.net>

Tara Hardy:

<http://tarahardy.net/>

Alpha Femme:

<http://www.alphafemme.net>

Lady Brett Ashley:

<http://ladybrettashley.wordpress.com/>

Em the Femme:

<http://emthefemme.blogspot.com/>

Essin-Em: Sexuality Happens:

<http://essin-em.com/>

Crip Wheels:

<http://cripwheels.blogspot.com>

Fit for a Femme:

<http://fitforafemme.com/blog/>

The Femmes Guide:

<http://femmesguide.com/>

The Femme Mobile:

<http://femmemobile.wordpress.com/>

Femme FATale:

<http://hussyred.wordpress.com/>

Fatshionista:

<http://www.fatshionista.com>

The Femme Bibliography Project:
<http://femmebibliography.blogspot.com/>

Queer Fat Femme:
<http://queerfatfemme.com/>

FemmeCast:
<http://femme-cast.com/>

Femmethology:
<http://www.femmethology.com>

Anarcha Femme:
<http://anarchafemme.wordpress.com>

Femme on Feast:
<http://www.femmeonfeast.com/>

Femmetellect:
<http://femmetellect.wordpress.com/>

Femme Fagette:
<http://ofpleasure.com/>

Fat Femme Mafia:
<http://www.myspace.com/fatfemmemafias>

Joan Nestle:
<http://www.joannestle.com>

The Femme Show:
<http://www.thefemmeshow.com/>

Audacia Ray:
<http://www.audaciaray.com>

BLOGGING PLATFORMS

This is a list of websites that enable you to start up your own online blog, free of charge.

<http://www.wordpress.com>

<http://www.tumblr.com>

<http://www.blogspot.com>

<http://www.livejournal.com>



<http://www.femmeguild.com>

