

Considering Femme-ininity

Femmes, femmes everywhere — reading, teaching, shimmying, singing, making art, learning, unlearning, connecting and discussing. Close to 600 femmes, partners and allies gathered in San Francisco in August to convene *Femme 2006: Conversations and Explorations*. The conference, led by a steering committee of more than 20 people, explored how and why being femme matters, and how femme identity can transform queer politics.

In her keynote address, longtime femme activist Amber Hollibaugh, senior strategist for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, issued a call to create the kind of femme community that will “save our lives.”

“Femme identity has often remained an invisible identity, except in relation to who we partnered with, and that has resulted in a lack of community, solidarity, and commitment between femmes that will be the thing that changes our lives,” Hollibaugh explained on the final day of the conference. “You can’t do it by yourself. You can’t survive alone. And yet the price of naming ourselves as ‘femme’ to this day often remains the price of shame — not just ridicule, but shame — and struggle to see ourselves as people worthy of value.”

Hollibaugh noted that many in the queer community don’t understand that femme is a choice, a constructed identity that’s “distinct from unconsidered femininity.” But that wasn’t the case at the conference, where femmes of all genders, classes, cultural backgrounds and sexual proclivities flaunted their femininity in bold patterns, bright colors, the highest of heels, the tightest of shirts and the sharpest of minds.

Though it wasn’t the first femme conference — which was held a decade ago in San Francisco, and another was held in 2005 in Seattle — it was one of the largest conferences of its kind. For many women, just being in a room with so many femmes was a revelation. Attendee Michele Mashburn was heartened to spend so much time with other femmes with disabilities, forming a community she said she hopes will last long after the conference ends. Jessica Eve Humphrey, chair of the 2006 conference, promised there would be more room for political and social discussions at the next femme conference, tentatively scheduled for 2008. To get involved in planning the next femme conference, check femme2006.com for updates.

— Heather Boerner



Lipstick kisses from attendees



The all-queer Twilight Vixen Revue showgirls of San Francisco



From left: Meliza Bañales, Julia Serano and Celestina Pearl



Conference planners and keynote speakers