

13. VERACIOUS BY EMILY STRONG

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW:

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by close family and/or friends?

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FULL INTERVIEW:

Age 26

Assigned Sex Female

Pronouns She/Her

Gender Identity Female

Race Hispanic/Puerto Rican

What is your gender identity? Please describe

I am female and I like to see and describe myself as sensual, curvacious, and delicious. I like to think I'm confident for the most part, but also kind of delicate, I'm really sensitive.

What does femininity mean to you? Masculinity? How do you relate to these terms? How do these concepts impact the way you present yourself?

Femininity to me is more of an inner strength in my opinion women are better able to deal with bad news and things like that. I feel like men swear that they're stronger, but it's physical. So, masculinity for me is more physical strength and outer-looking strength and for women we kind of hide it. We use it when we need to.

There are some times when I'm not feeling down, but just weak. I'll dress more masculine, just to boost my own confidence. For some reason, I feel really beautiful in men's clothing.

Do you dress more masculine to feel more confident or powerful if you're feeling a bit unsure?

Yeah, I feel like when I do dress more masculine, people assume, 'Ok she looks a little more tough, don't mess with her'. It's more about how I come off to other people. I don't know if this is

a bad word to use, but I think that people look differently at people who are 'butch'. It's more of a fierce thing for me, so I use looking that way to my advantage.

What is your racial identity?

I am a Puerto Rican living in Allentown. I don't know, that's a tough one...

Have there been times in your life when your race has influenced how others have treated you?

Yes, I used to work in hospitals as a phlebotomist, and I was dealing with the ER people who came in, and a lot of the times the older white females would kind of push me aside. Literally, I'd just be standing there watching and they're like, 'We got this we got this', but they wouldn't do that with the other girls there that were White. So, I feel like they kind of saw me as dumb or incompetent, which is horrible because I think I'm well spoken. I make eye contact when I speak, I'm pretty educated and I feel like a lot of people see the tattoos, the gauges, and the hair and they think, 'Oh, I don't know...', I've gotten used to it, though. A lot of the time, as soon as we have a conversation it gets rid of that. Usually.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by close family and/or friends?

YES. When I was younger, I was a super chunky kid. Super chunky. So every single time my parents, my grandparents, or even my siblings would see me eating something they would say, 'Oh, are you sure you should be eating that?' and I HATED it! I would cry. My grandmother would say, 'You know how they have gorditas at Taco bell?' In Spanish that means chunky, or like, a 'fat girl', and so my grandmother would call me that and I would hate that. I would not eat in front of anyone. There was one summer where all I did was drink water and do Russian twists every day. And I lost a lot of weight because of it, and I feel like, yeah I was small, but that was my least happy moment. I wasn't doing it not for me, but for everyone else, and I hated it. I was 125 lbs, I looked like a little stick, and I hated it. I hated it.

What about close friends?

[...] My best friend is the reason why I'm as confident as I am today. She is a plus-sized, beautiful woman from Brooklyn and her parents raised her to think no matter how you feel about yourself, you're beautiful and she kind of brought that into my life. I would always have ideas like, 'Oh, I want to dress like that', and she'd say, 'Well why don't you?' And I'd say, 'Welllll, I don't know, cause this person will say something...' And she'd say, 'Wear what you want to wear, dress how you wanna dress, you're beautiful, wear your hair up' (I used to always straighten my hair). So yeah, she kind of brought that, so she's a very positive influence on me.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by people you know only casually or by business associates?

Actually no, I mean, when I was in the medical field kind of. I would take my gauges and my piercings out, but that was more for safety. Maybe more when I was younger, I would worry about my peers in school. I would worry about what they would say if I dressed a certain way or wore my hair a certain way. But into my adult life no not at all, not even a little bit.

Have there been times in your life where you felt insecure about your appearance?

When I was younger.. Even now, I'm in the process of trying to switch over to eating vegan. It's the hardest thing in the world. But I'm trying to switch over and my fiancé is like, 'oh this is so easy', and he's losing all this weight. I'm like 'really?' But yeah that's really all though nothing. Too crazy.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by the media? What aspects of the media has impacted your self-perception the most? Commercial? Social? Other?

Yeah, in both my adult life and my childhood. Of course, you see all these skinny-mini girls on tv and then the ones that are plus-sized but aren't really plus-sized. They're just a little bit curvier than the skinnier girls. Hourglass. I mean don't get me wrong, I have a slight hourglass shape, but it's not that defined, so of course I look at girls like that, like old pinups, and I'm like, 'I want that stomach sooo bad'. I wanna be a Victorian goddess! But yeah, I would say as far as skills almost, too. How girls do their makeup, and how girls do their hair, and throw on an outfit and it's the most trendiest thing... I want that.

Do you do anything to alter your natural appearance? (tattoos, piercings, hair dyeing, makeup, etc) If so, why?

Makeup, yes, and I am leaning more towards tattoos. I do want to cover my body, eventually. Within the next five years, I'm trying to be completely covered and it's the hardest thing ever, because of money! It's so expensive. So, I would say the tattoos. I think for me personally, I wear them more as an armor. Usually, when people see them they're intrigued, but kind of standoffish and I kind of get off on that. Like, 'Don't talk to me'. And it's fun, cause when you speak to me it's like, 'oh, she's not like her tattoos at all', so yeah I would say I kind of use it as a defense mechanism, like don't talk to me unless you're this type of person who'll want to talk about it, but usually like the older women at my job are like, 'hmm I don't know why you do that, but ok!'

What makes you feel beautiful? What makes you feel empowered?

My stomach! For a long time I hated it, but after working with Angie and a lot of the other photographers I have worked with, I've learned to love it. I feel like I look more beautiful when you can see my flaws. I'm not hiding it, here it is, accept it. If you don't accept it, that's fine! I'm happy with it. But, I feel most beautiful when I'm fresh out of the shower and I just stand in the mirror looking at myself, I'm like, 'Wow, look at this'. Rawest form. No makeup. Hair is wet. That's when I feel most beautiful.

How have your family and close friends been supportive of your appearance and self-perception? You mentioned that your best friend has been supportive?

She planted the seed where I blossomed from. My fiancé is a key into how I feel about myself. He's super supportive. Even days when I KNOW I don't look beautiful...there are just those days when you know you don't look beautiful. He's still like, 'Babe you look so gorgeous!' So, he's very essential to that. He helps me a lot with that.

My mom. She's super supportive towards my modeling and the type of modeling I want to do. She's super supportive. My dad's just kind of there. He gives no opinion. Sometimes parents struggle with their daughters doing something so open, vulnerable, putting themselves out there like that.

I want to do fetish modeling and I've spoken to my mom about it and she's like, 'As long as you're safe and nobody kidnaps you I support it'. I post my pictures, and she's the first one to say, 'You look beautiful, I love this picture, I wish I could frame it', so she's really great with that.

She's even pretty comfortable with the sexuality of it?

Yeah, because my mom was super chunky. She was a plus-sized woman for a large portion of her life. Even when she was at her biggest, I still looked at her like she was the most beautiful thing in the world because of how she carried herself and how she made us think of ourselves. Even the days when I'd be the little chunky kid crying cause the other kids were teasing me, she'd be the one to sit me aside and be like, 'Listen, I understand how you feel, kids are mean, they don't understand. I guarantee you that when you're older you're gonna love your body'. She was absolutely right. She was great with that.

Have you had any positive experiences with casual acquaintances or business associates that impacted your self-perception in a positive way?

I had a music teacher in school, a music teacher, I sang, Mr. —. Tiny guy, but everyone loved him. I sang he was super supportive in terms of telling me that one day I'd be something, I'd be happy to live my life. To this day I wish I could thank him. I also have a lot of work associates that follow me on social media. They see me at work and they're like, 'WOW, you look so different on social media, you look beautiful', so little comments like that I really appreciate. Little things go a long way!