

## 7. FLUX BY EMILY STRONG

### **EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW:**

#### **What is your gender identity? Please explain.**

"My gender identity ... This is something that I don't talk to many people about, but I'm really glad to be opening up about it in an artistic way with you. I have Dissociative Identity Disorder. I have multiple identities with different genders, different sexualities. I have some alters that are female, some that are male, and some that are transgender, so I would say that I have multiple genders, but I generally just accept female and just go by —, but I do have other identities within myself."

#### **So, what pronouns do you use? Would you prefer to express yourself as whatever alter you are feeling at the time? Ideally, if you felt like society would be open to it?**

"Yes, it's very difficult for all of my alters who came about through childhood trauma that identify differently from — to all be referred to as and almost have to pretend to just be —. I believe that if I were able to be a bit more open and they could speak for themselves more, there would be a lot less pressure and a lot more ease in interacting with people if they didn't have to hide behind the façade of just being one cohesive identity.

DID comes about, like I said, from childhood trauma and neglect. It's something that generally happens in very formative ages, infant to 5 years old. That's when it begins to develop, so this is something that I've lived with my whole life, it's a part of me, and yes I would like very much if I could be more expressive of that.

I had a bit of a difficult and more self-destructive past. I used to be very secluded and isolated and felt so different from everyone else, based on having the DID that, for a long time, I didn't know about and no one else knew about. The more I've really gotten to know myself, or selves, I feel much more comfortable with who I am and less concerned with who other people think I am or want me to be, or what they think about me. I just want to experience so many things with other beautiful souls and that's what's really kept me going and made me realize that we all have something that we struggle with and when we can connect and accept each other and show love, that's really what changes everything and that's just art within itself."

### **FULL INTERVIEW:**

**Age** 21

**Assigned Sex** Female

**Pronouns** She/Her/He/Him (Depending on alter)

**Gender Identity** Multiple/Female

**Race** Caucasian

## **What is your gender identity? Please describe**

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

As a child developing this disorder, I was given examples of very skewed masculinity and femininity. I believe masculine and feminine can be very blended and I think they're both so beautiful and a part of each of us and maybe operate on more of a spectrum than society would like to allow. They're boxed in their categories of what they should be, but I believe there is a little bit of both in every person.

I think maybe masculinity would be more representative of ... hm. I don't want to say power, but maybe more firmness and grounding, whereas femininity is more a sense of softness or delicacy and warmth. Almost like what a mother and father would do for their child. Like I said, though, I think they're both beautiful and a part of each other. That's a very hard thing to try to define when you really are asked it! I almost feel like I can't really describe it.

## **I think especially if you're someone who doesn't totally ascribe to the way society has built those terms and that you can sort of see the problematic aspects of them it's hard to just be like yeah this is that and that is that**

Yeah. I almost feel like my answer is, not wrong, but not right?

## **What is your racial identity?**

Oh, that's a very interesting question. I identify as a White person, but I feel like race is just something that's one of those things that's very categorized. We're all human beings; the human race. I think that we're all human and that's beautiful, and I wish that we were less divided. I think that our society is growing towards less division and more unity in the sense of us all being beautiful human beings, and that's awesome.

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

Yes, I feel like there's a division that's been instilled in some people and our society at large. There are perceptions of what should and shouldn't be in terms of what music you should listen to, what clothing you should wear, and who you should associate with. This is something that I have experienced, but I personally don't allow those things to keep me closed off to what I like and what I decide to do. I just try to be respectful to everyone.

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

Yes. In the past, the ways that I have presented myself in terms of clothing choice and what I do with my body has been protested a little bit by my family. Mostly because they were afraid of what other people would think of me based on my appearance, or that other people would disrespect me in terms of tattoos, piercings, wearing black, whatever. But, my response to that is, if someone is going to disrespect me based on my appearance, then that's not really someone I need to hold close to me and I'm ok with that. I care more about myself than about what other people want to project onto me.

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

Yeah Although I think we are slowly growing out of this, society has this idea that if you have tattoos or piercings, or you dress in a way that isn't standard, that you aren't professional. I've even heard very negative things, such as people who have tattoos are 'on drugs' or are 'bad people' or are 'violent'. I don't think individuals should be defined by the way they appear.

I've had some people be very off-put or act like I'm unapproachable based off of the way I look. But that isn't the case! I may dress very gothic or whatnot, but I'm generally a pretty bubbly and excitable person. I might be kind of against the grain of what people would expect from me. I've had people seem taken aback by the fact that I'm polite, because I'm wearing a crazy metal band t-shirt with a zombie on it or something. They just seem shocked that I'm respectful!

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

Yes, I think that having these alters all in one body and one self has caused some conflict based on what each of us decides to look like and meeting someone for the first time. Each of us has a bit of a different style.

I think that sometimes I would be uncomfortable looking too 'feminine' or too 'masculine'. I've even been told in the past that certain things are, quote, 'slutty', or that a woman shouldn't be wearing men's clothes. So yes, I have been insecure, but I like what I like and that's ok.

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

It seems sometimes that people who appear a certain way either get more or less attention. There are certain beauty standards, like high fashion modeling, where you have to look a certain way: very thin. Whereas, to be a fit model, you need to be super, super muscular and 'look' a certain way. These may be pressures for some. So, I think a lot of those different standards make people think they should be something they're not, or that what they are isn't enough.

I hope that that changes. I think that we're getting to a place where that is changing, and I think that's really sweet. I think every person is their own universe, and that should be appreciated for what it is, not anything that's so categorized.

I would say that when I'm feeling insecure about myself already, I might look to someone else that I admire for their beauty or talent, and feel like, 'Wow, I'm not that'. But I try to remind myself that I am the way I am and I'm meant to be how I am. I try not to let that pressure affect me, but I have been affected by that in the past, particularly when I'm already feeling kind of down about myself.

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

One thing that I've always really loved is tattoos, and the reason I love them is being able to cover myself in beautiful artwork to kind of mark a memory or an experience on myself. Some of my tattoos don't have a meaning within themselves, except for the memory of the time that I got them. I almost assign a certain emotion or something to them that I want to think about every time I look at them. I also enjoy covering my skin. In a weird way, it makes me feel less naked or something, which is really interesting. I actually heard one tattoo model speak about how she covered so much of her skin in pure black ink, because that made her feel more comfortable, and for some reason that resonated with me. Not that I'm uncomfortable with my skin, but it makes me feel just clothed in beautiful artwork and I love being able to create myself, like I'm my own little canvas.

As far as piercings, I like the experience of the release; of that moment of pain. I almost think of tattoos and piercings, for myself personally, as a bit of a ritual. I like to have a meditative experience with them and almost offer up that pain to make more room for more good, beautiful, peaceful thoughts and memories within myself.

**So, it's sort of about the process? The experience, maybe more so than the end result in terms of piercings/tattoos?**

Yeah.

### **What makes you feel beautiful? What makes you feel empowered?**

What makes me feel beautiful is interacting with other beautiful minds. It feels like two universes coming together and sharing an experience and feeling love with another person. Whether it's a friend or someone I'm just meeting. Just to speak to someone's heart.

I also love modeling. That's something that's really helped with my self-esteem. To see myself in a natural environment, whether it's nude, or fashion, or doing some weird horror stuff. That makes me feel so good and so empowered and so good about myself, because I can show the world who I am without any fear.

### **How have your family and close friends been supportive of your appearance and self-perception?**

I think that having other friends and family accept me, or at least hear me out about why I like to look the way I do makes me feel really good. I've had a lot more support lately. My best friend is a tattoo artist and she's designing my sleeve. It's really cool to be around other people who love to alter their appearance for whatever reason. I've had many people say they have tattoos that don't really have a meaning, and some that say theirs do have a particular meaning. Some people just like to get covered and it's really beautiful to share why we love looking the way we do after experiencing pressure to not be that. So, I've definitely gotten more support lately.

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

Yes, I've been told that people enjoy the way I carry myself, or that they like my tattoos, or piercings. They speak to me in a way that my differences don't matter, and that we're all kind of in it together. Just making connections with people who might be so vastly different, but connecting so well.

### **Is there anything else that you feel like is important for you to express about yourself or your relationship with yourself; anything like that?**

I had a bit of a difficult and more self-destructive past. I used to be very secluded and isolated and felt so different from everyone else, based on having the DID, that for a long time I didn't know about and no one else knew about, but the more I've really gotten to know myself, or selves, I feel much more comfortable with who I am and less concerned with who other people think I am or want me to be or think about me. I just want to experience so many things with other beautiful souls and that's what's really kept me going and made me realize that we all have something that we struggle with and when we can connect and accept each other and show love, that's really what changes everything and that's just art within itself.

### **Do you mind if I ask when you were diagnosed with or when you found out that you have DID?**

I started to realize it about myself when I was about 18 or 19 years old. I had been hospitalized many times and I started noticing that I could be different at times. Other people were noticing a little bit that I would change and just seem like a different version of myself. I was officially diagnosed when I was 19, almost 20.

**So, relatively recently?**

Yes, probably a little more than a year ago. That's really what's helped to keep me a little bit more control over it and work with what I've got. I think it's important that I am ok with myself now. I know what's going on and I can try to manage it a little bit better.