



Unapologetically

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Words by: PIM SPOOR

He broke free from his family's suppressive upbringing and fled to Amsterdam. Meet Elio Heres (27), a fashion blogger and nightlife animal who breaks the rules of what is male or female. Time to have a chat with this flamboyant figure on how to dress unapologetically

A dark past

'When I was little, I used to drape the bed covers around me like a dress and flip a T-shirt over my head like long, flowy hair. I stood in front of the mirror and sang songs of my favourite divas like Céline Dion and Mariah Carey. I played with Lego and cars, but I wasn't into football. Ballet and gymnastics were more my kind of thing. My parents weren't that happy with my more feminine side. They let me have a Barbie, but whenever my dad saw me playing with it or spotted me dancing to another Mariah Carey song, he definitely did not approve. I felt busted, like I was doing something wrong.'

'I grew up within a community of Jehova's Witnesses. I didn't know any better, and I was into my religion. I went door to door with friends, because I thought it was my calling to do so. That all changed when going into puberty. I was curious about the outside world; I was attracted by the idea of stardom and developing talents like singing or acting. I got frustrated by my parents being so strict. Friends from outside the religion weren't allowed to come over and when we wanted to go out dancing, I had to stay home. I couldn't

handle that, so my parents and I clashed a lot. When I found out I was gay, I got baptised hoping that God would turn me straight. Well, he didn't and I got so angry about that. It would mean that I wasn't allowed to feel any kind of love, just because I got these feelings. It felt unfair, I didn't deserve this.'

'The frustration against faith and the bickering with my parents led to me leaving my parents and ending up in a foster family. That didn't go so well, so I moved in with my now ex-boyfriend. Even though we had a relationship for three years, he didn't treat me well. He isolated me, lied to me and manipulated me. At the age of 18, I moved to Amsterdam. I broke up with my ex, got my first job, switched schools and got a steady group of friends. I met my current boyfriend, got a nice house and laid the foundation of my own life. I went into therapy and eventually confronted my parents by writing them a letter on how I feel. After that, I broke free. The confetti box called Elio exploded, so to speak. I started experimenting with clothing, wearing make-up and growing my hair. I went out more and got on tours with my boyfriend, who's a DJ. I got backstage, went to festivals and met a lot of people.'>

'I'm very much into deep colours like royal blue and burgundy.'
Image by: Peter van der Wal

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A Sparkly Present

'So when I got more outgoing and opened myself up to the world, I wanted to show that with the way I dress. I dove into vintage stores and got inspired by these old items that had a story to it. In those shops, everything is divided by colour and material, not by gender. I was especially drawn to the delicate materials like lace, tulle and velvet. I'm very much into deep colours like royal blue, emerald green and burgundy. My style is chic and sophisticated, but I also have more modern looks with clashing colours and vibrant prints. I combine vintage with designer pieces. I wear a lot of Dutch designers like Bas Kosters, Juliette Heijnen and one of my best friends Sabine Staartjes is a designer too. You could say my wardrobe is filled with different personas. And that's why I am not the kind of person to buy a look straight off the mannequin.'

'Fashion is the way of showing your own personality. I wear what I wear for me, because in that moment I feel that way. It is nice if people like it, but I don't care if they don't. I've been told for so long what to do. Now that I can decide for myself, why should I conform to what society says? Everything

I'm wearing is part of me, not part of male or female. Society is based on gender. If you're a man, society says you should follow a certain path. Being able to choose what you want to wear, who you want to be is therefore the ultimate freedom.'

'So I put on a skirt if I want to and yes, I sometimes wear leggings. Because they make my legs look great, not because I want to be feminine. I don't believe in garments being made for one gender or the other. For instance, high-waisted trousers are usually seen on woman. They're my favourite thing to wear because they accentuate my good features, like my waist and booty. Men want to show their assets just as much as women do, that is not a gender-related thing.'

'With my blog and recently vlog too, I want to share my view on life by sharing my personal life. Not to show you how great my life is, but how you could be happy by living the life you want to. My vlogs don't have to be a life-saver, but it can be an eye-opener to those who feel scared of what others might think of them. If you do want to break free from that and be able to express yourself through clothes, you can start small. Just look at yourself in the



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mirror, see yourself wear anything you can imagine. Start searching for specific items that you find beautiful. Don't feel the need to create entire looks. I've had certain pieces that stayed in my closet until I found the perfect garment to go with it. Now I get all these compliments when showing them off.'

A bright future

'I honestly love vlogging, I love presenting and hosting parties, but there is more to me than this extravagant party boy. I'm team leader at Albert Heijn and I'm getting my Master's degree in Special Education. These parts of my life keep me grounded. In the future, I would love to be a TV-host and search for people who could use help in being more themselves. Not how they could dress to fit the current trends, because that kind of make-over shows goes against what I stand for. Don't let others tell you how to dress or what to do. People need to get more out of their comfort zone, be themselves without any boundaries or setbacks. I think I could be the one to push them over the edge. In that way, I can combine my love for fashion with my interest in the social aspects of life.' •

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