

Venus as a Boy

A retrospective of my personal development as and into
an effeminate male

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First
of all, I feel the need to
clarify what I mean when I talk about
“feminine”. I would like to explain what I mean
through femmephobia or the fear of and hatred
for all people perceived as effeminate. Femmephobia, for those who have never heard of the term, is in the simplest terms the resistance and attack of actions, forms of expression, and characteristics that are perceived as feminine. Feminine things are usually little more than things that are not masculine, which might sound silly to say, but it makes sense if you take a step back and look at how male-dominant and male-centered the world is. What is seen as feminine is often nothing more than just what is rejected by masculinity; things like crying, showing emotion, dancing, makeup, and more. None of those things are inherently feminine, they’re only feminine because society says so, and because they’re labeled feminine, men should not do them.



Chapter I: The Birth of a Taurus

[2] I was born male in 1992, the same year when Men
The Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus, a best
book has seller for 121 weeks yet widely criticized [2] for
been criti- having placed human psychology into stereotypes,
cized for placing human psychology was published. Funny enough I was born under the
into stereotypes; it tells Taurus sign, a zodiac ruled by Venus [3].
men that being masculine means dismissing feelings
and downplaying prob- lems. That isn't what
most men do, and when I was a child I started to question gender roles.
it isn't good for From my all-female group of friends, I learned of [3]
either men or female problems and became aware of the great [3]
women. feminine mysteries. is the God-
My parents can be considered pretty open des of Love. In
minded and even bohemian. I was allowed astrology, grace, charm
to do whatever I pleased to a certain extent. A lot and beauty are all ruled by
I learned through mistakes. When I was a small Venus. Through Venus, we
child, younger than 6 years old, my father had a learn about our tastes, pleas-
hard time getting used to me sometimes wearing ures, artistic inclinations, and
dresses. Only later did I learn it was because he what makes us happy. Venus rules
was afraid of me being bullied for it by other kids. attachments to others. It rules at-
My father had been bullied when he was young tractiveness – both the ability to
for he was much taller than anyone else. Nonethe- attract and attraction to others
less I felt nearly always free to play with dress and as well as to things. Venus'
experiment. Hardly any adult and no kid in my life energy is harmonious, and
questioned it, or at least I didn't know about it (my this is why people with
mother still doesn't believe me when I tell her that I Venus prominent in
wasn't really bullied at school). their charts are
The fact that I am a boy really hit me at the often peace-
age of seven when I started school and was segregat- makers. In
ed from my friends for gym class. Of course I knew Venus,
already before that, that we are physically different on we find
the outside. But one doesn't see that through clothes. a need
And even in the sauna when we're all naked together, to be
appreciated
and to
appreciate.
Venus rules,
amongst other
things, the arts,
love and romance,
beauty and the beau-
tifying process, money,
entertainment, leisure,
sensuality, and comfort.

we're partaking in a ritual, minding our own business. No stranger was ever confused how to refer to me: in Finnish there is only one word [4] to refer to all genders, thus political correctness and gender neutrality is easily achieved.

I never had to pick a gender, yet somehow gender binarism lured its way into my life.

[4] hän: he, she, one or singular they (only of a human being; the pronoun does not determine the sex of the person).

This thesis is a result of retrospection and contemplation on my own development as, and into, an effeminate male. It is a collection of personal accounts that had an impact on my life, moments in which Mars and Venus fought for dominance over me. I focus on the difficulty of expressing femininity and wish to answer why is it difficult. As the issue is so multifaceted and

I brush on issues such as misogyny [5], I am writing this thesis from my own perspective. I feel the need

to one more time acknowledge, for the record, that

I am physiologically male, white, and in many other ways privileged [6].

[5] A hatred of women.

[6] Biologically "male" privilege is only one of the many power structures that may exist within a given society. The term "male privilege" does not apply to an isolated occurrence of the use of power, but rather describes one of many systemic power structures that are interdependent and interlinked throughout societies and cultures.

Chapter II: The Dress

Already as a small child I was very particular about dress. My mother would try to dress me in, I suppose, whatever happened to be clean at the moment but

I had my own preferences. I still remember my favorite shirt: it had Pinocchio [7] printed on it, and although Pinocchio and I have a lot in common, that wasn't why the shirt was my favorite. The shirt was a bit too long for me and the hem was two centimeters

[7] In a certain sense Pinocchio experienced body dysmorphia as he was created as a wooden marionette but dreamed of becoming a real boy.





open on the side seams. I didn't dare wear a dress to kindergarten so this shirt acted as a dress, but only I would know it. It was my secret. I was only afraid of judgment by my peers but in the comfort of our home, and at family parties such as weddings, I would wear a real dress. I remember having insisted, at my grandmother's funeral, that I get to wear my mother's hat, veil and gloves. I wonder whether it was a lack of enough support from my parents or if it was my own internalized gender bias that prevented me from expressing myself through dress in other circumstances. Perhaps then it wasn't as clear but now it seems to me that it was a question of gender expression, not gender identity [8].

[8] Geneti-

cist and pediatrician,

Eric Vilain who directs the UCLA

Center for Gender-Based Biology, says that children

express many fantasies in passing. He says that most studies

investigating young children who express discomfort with their birth

gender suggest they are more likely to turn out to be cisgender than trans

- and relative to the general population, more of these kids will eventually identify as gay or bisexual.

Chapter III: The Decisive Moment

When I was five years old, my mother had to bring me for a final check up at the maternity clinic where they track a child's development by various measures.

One of the tasks given to a child is drawing a human.

When asked, I drew a human to my best ability; highly focused I drew a princess and her castle. I drew her an elaborate dress with lace and embellishments. Once

I was finished with my drawing, my development was evidently deemed sufficient but the real impact this experience had on my life came from the nurse's comment. She speculated that, perhaps, I "would become the next Christian Dior of our time." As I

remember it, I didn't understand what Christian Dior was, but I pretended to. Only later in the car on our way home I asked my mother what it was. She simply answered: a fashion designer. I didn't understand that either so she explained it to me. That didn't make sense to five-year-old me either but nonetheless I decided that's what I wanted to become. Thus I continued drawing princesses, beginning to understand one of the concepts of fashion: a princess cannot wear the same thing twice.

Chapter IV: Discovery & Denial

Eight-year-old me discovered porn movies in our house and would watch them in secret, not fully understanding what it was about. I gathered that since the VHS tapes were hidden, the viewing should be clandestine as well. I didn't masturbate to them (I will tell you later when I did start doing that) but watched them more out of curiosity. This is when I realized I was drawn to penises more

than to vaginas. Gay, or "homo" [9] in Finnish, was a part of my vocabulary but only as a derogatory term or

[9] When referring to people, as opposed to behavior, 'homosexual' is considered derogatory and the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' are preferred. Homosexual places emphasis on sexuality and is to be avoided when describing a person.

Gay man or lesbian are the preferred nouns which stress cultural and social matters over sex. In Finnish, the word "homo" is a childish profanity usually paired with a swearword to make it sound like an insult. The word is also used in everyday speech, mainly by gay men, to counter the negative use of the word.

slur. The lack of knowledge and understanding of homosexuality lead me to think that what I felt was strange and even unnatural. I didn't hate myself for it but nonetheless I suppressed those feelings. I would continue to have crushes on girls and I do believe those feelings were genuine. Between the ages of 6 and 13 I didn't live with my mother continually but would see her every few months and later every other weekend. Thus my childhood was spent in a household of five males and one female, namely my father, me and three brothers





[10]

Repression is a key concept of psychoanalysis, it is a defense mechanism, but it pre-exists the ego. It ensures that what is unacceptable to the conscious mind, which would arouse anxiety if recalled, is prevented from entering into it; and is generally accepted as such by psychoanalytic psychologists. In psychoanalytic theory repression plays a major role in many mental illnesses, and in the psyche of the average person.

and stepmother, and I felt pressure to belong, to be one of the brothers. I didn't feel like I could be myself and fit that picture at the same time [10].

Chapter V: Eros takes the Wheel

I was born with a tight foreskin. It was never a problem, yet somehow I was ashamed of it. My mother talked about it sometimes but I could never talk about it myself and would respond with anger, fear and shame. Only at eleven years of age did I finally gather enough courage to tell my mother, with tears flowing from my eyes, that I think I might need an operation. Thus the process began. Having always been extremely private about my body, I didn't allow her to my urologist's appointment. The circumcision [11] took place soon after, and for a few weeks after the operation I was in tremendous pain. I couldn't talk about it to anyone myself so my mother had to explain my friends, and even my brothers, why

[11] While male circumcision (the removal of the foreskin from the penis) is a common and medically sound practice across cultures most often as part of a rite of passage, female circumcision or more aptly female genital mutilation, however, is violence against women and therefore a human-rights - not a medical - issue.

[13] Phallic love. The love of penis (or clitoris in the case of girl) accompanied by penile pride and interest in masturbation. The term is also used to refer to love that is characteristic of phallic period. Phallic pride. An exaggerated sense of superiority and even omnipotence experienced by boys when they discover that they possess a protruding sex organ that is absent among girls. These feelings help to master the castration anxiety.

I couldn't play with them. When I had healed, I was astonished. I had never seen my glans, and it was almost like the mere sight of my new penis launched (read skyrocketed) me into puberty. Not only did it look different, there were sensations I had never had before. Soon I discovered masturbation and, perhaps strangely, I felt no shame [12]. All the shame for having needed a circumcision was replaced with pride. All of a sudden I was free of all shame [13].

[12] Even though many medical professionals and scientists have found large amounts of evidence that masturbating is healthy and commonly practiced by males and females, stigma on the topic still persists today. Proving that these ancient stigmas against masturbation are still alive and felt by women and men, researchers in 1994 found that half of the adult women and men who masturbate feel guilty about it. Another study in 2000 found that adolescent young men are still frequently afraid to admit that they masturbate.

Chapter VI: Aphrodite Versus Adonis

My family has a history of mental illness. Both my mother and my brother have been diagnosed with clinical depression and have suicidal tendencies.

Although my father was never diagnosed with depression, he has suffered various types of trauma throughout his life. Both of my parents tend to gravitate towards alcohol not only when life is tough but on a daily basis. Neither of them have had major problems with it so far, thus one might call them functioning alcoholics. Although depression runs in the family, I haven't experienced it myself. Sometimes I am scared I might fall into depression but I have usually been able to conquer my personal struggles myself.

As I mentioned earlier that besides my brothers, my peers have always been mainly female. I grew up "thinking like a girl" and thus it was easy for me to assume issues that girls typically fight with such as body image [14]. I don't remember exactly when I first noticed symptoms of eating disorders in myself but when I was 13, I started dieting. I would skip every meal I possibly could. Usually it was easy to skip breakfast and lunch but supper proved more difficult to skip, both because my body really craved for fuel and I did not want to raise my mother's suspicions and therefore I ate her cookings. On those rare occasions when I could go a whole day without eating much of anything, I felt pride. I had control over my desires, over my nature.

Soon, however, as puberty really sparked its fire, I assumed other ideals as well. In other words: I became more of a "boy". The two ideals, Victoria and David

[14] It is safe to say that every girl, and more and more boys, grows up in front of a mirror. The normal existential struggles of teens – Who am I? Am I worthy of love and respect? – are too often channeled through another question: How do I look? For girls, the most significant social pressures they face as teens are to conform to conventional notions of beauty.

Beckham, coexisted within me causing much confusion. They would both awaken in turns. Come fall, I would want to be stick thin and the closer to summer it got, I wanted to gain body mass and, more specifically, muscles [15].

[15] For a long time the understanding was that eating disorders do not occur in males. In reality one to two males out of a thousand suffer from eating disorders. In men, eating disorders go hand in hand with different types of body dysmorphic disorders (BDD). Muscle dysmorphia is a subtype of BDD, but is often also grouped with eating disorders and sometimes also called “bigorexia”, “megarexia”, or “reverse anorexia”. The Adonis Complex encompasses broader concerns of male body image. Increasing occurrence of men diagnosed with BDD is due in part to recent popularization of extreme cultural ideals of men’s bodies but also the increased BDD screening in men by mental health workers.

Chapter VII: Crushing Boyhood

My first boy crush was in my first year of lower secondary school, at thirteen years of age, on a boy called Jerome. I didn’t talk about it to anyone as I wasn’t open about my sexuality, even though I had begun to accept my attraction to penises, that is, to penises as well.

In August 2006 I fell in love with a girl. This love, figuratively, made my head spin. In retrospect I realize that it spun me around in another way too: all of a sudden I was convinced I was heterosexual. Again my attraction to penises and even my crush on another boy not more than a year before were suppressed and undermined. On 6 December 2006 I lost my virginity, or my boyhood, to the girl I then loved. This was the beginning of our sexual explorations. We both liked sex, and each other, so much that we would sometimes have sex several times a day. Now this doesn’t seem so crazy if two adults do it but I have to admit that as I look back on it, I am happy and relieved I



experienced it with the person I cared about so much, and who cared about me. I can see ways in which what we did could have been severely traumatizing. If it had happened with a different, wrong, person for instance. Maybe it is only a question of certain maturity, perhaps the understanding of possible consequences. There were times we were scared of being pregnant, and prepared for, what for us at the time was, the worst. Our love affair lasted 21 months.

Chapter VIII: Coming Out

Coming out as gay to friends was quite easy.

We were on a cruise ship to Stockholm with the whole class of 2008 of my upper secondary school. We were obviously doing the one thing that was strictly not allowed: drinking, and one way or another the topic of sexuality came up and I, with ease, opened up. Though I did tell my friends that I thought I was bisexual. This, supposedly, “softens the blow” of coming out, as if to prove that you are still enough of a man [16]. I see it as a sort of gateway to being gay for someone who isn’t ready yet to admit neither to themselves nor to others that they are indeed homosexual.

[16] Even those under attack can become the attacker. The app Grindr, which has replaced online chat rooms for gay men, offers great examples of how deeply heteronormativity and patriarchal ideals penetrate our society. In many profiles you can read, “Not into fems.” Being effeminate is a flaw in the gay world, and if you identify yourself as “fem,” you can be quickly rejected. Many times, in order not to miss out on opportunities, feminine gay men pretend they are deeply masculine, assuming a gender expression that doesn’t fit them. That happens because they want to feel accepted and respected in the gay community. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), says that the oppressed, when given the chance, can become the oppressor, as a means of transcending their own history of oppression. That’s why it is so common to see homophobic gays and sexist women.

Chapter IX: From Andromeda [17] to Androgen

Growing up I was never an aggressive person [18], actually quite the opposite. I averted fights, didn't display any reaction to bullying and felt uncomfortable even if two people would cross each other verbally. By nature, I am very peaceful (I have to admit, though, that some things, such as unfairness, make my blood boil) but there was a time, between ages sixteen and eighteen when I was still in upper secondary school, when I must have been at a peak level of androgens [19], when I would often look for a fight, and even wanted to hurt people. One instance of sudden aggression even

[18]

Some aggressive

behavior can be linked to testosterone levels, which, starting around age 10 and peaking in the late teens, are typically more than 10 times higher in boys than in girls.

I did not see coming myself was at a concert in Helsinki. I remember enjoying the music and after a while sitting down for a rest and suddenly kicking a table topped with 15 or so pints of beer on the floor. I was kicked out of the club, which further infuriated me into cursing the bouncer and his family and whatnot.

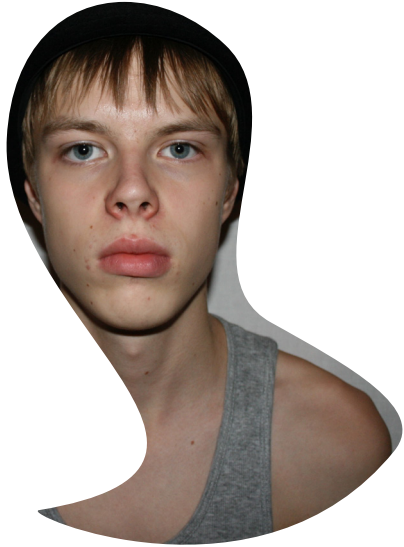
These sudden moments of fury made me feel like an animal, and therefore I felt manly and was even proud of what I did and said. To me it seems like a textbook example of male puberty [20]. Now it is even painful to remember some of the things I have done, the mere thought of some of those occurrences makes my stomach turn.

[19]

Androgen (from Greek andro meaning male human being), also called androgenic hormone or testoid, is any natural or synthetic compound, usually a steroid hormone, that stimulates or controls the development and maintenance of male characteristics.

[20] Early-

maturing boys develop "more aggressive, law-breaking, and alcohol abusing" behaviors, which result in anger towards parents and trouble in school and with the police. Early puberty also correlates with increased sexual activity and a higher instance of teenage pregnancy, both of which can lead to depression and other psychosocial issues. However, early puberty might also result in positive outcomes, such as popularity among peers, higher self-esteem and confidence, as a result of physical developments, such as taller height, developed muscles, and better athletic ability.



Chapter X: Sagittarius in 10th House

Moving out of my mother's house at the age of 19, which then felt like a big step, doesn't compare to moving out of the country. When I moved to Amsterdam, I knew no one in the city and had virtually no prior knowledge of the people and the culture. I was forced to find things out for myself. Moving to Amsterdam gave me the circumstances to do serious soul-searching, to really figure out who I am or want to be and what do I stand for. This, the biggest event in my life thus far, has hardened and softened me at the same time: I have become more stubborn and demanding in what I want and my values and opinions have become less harsh. When you are at the center of events, it is difficult to see and understand what is actually happening. My new beginning enabled me to step out of that personal center of events and acquire (a different) perspective to them.

I remember before, when I knew for certain that I was going to move to Amsterdam, I found the idea that I could reinvent myself exciting. Or be "more" myself. Somehow being surrounded by only strange faces didn't encourage me to experiment more with dress. On the contrary it made me want to blend in more. Perhaps to optimize the possibilities of making friends by dressing up as an empty canvas or at least not too distinguishably in order not to repel people, as at that point any friendship is desirable.

[21] According to Greek mythology Narcissus fell in love with his own image in a pool of water and lost his will to live as he was unable to leave the beauty of his own reflection.

Chapter XI: Peter Pan by the Pool [21]

One thing I know for certain: I am gender non-conforming. What I do have to ask myself is what is my gender identity [22]? Am I cisgender? In many ways it doesn't feel right. Perhaps I am cisgender but with androgynous gender expression. Or am I genderfluid? In ways that doesn't resonate correctly either. I suppose I just don't agree with the categorization [23].

[22] Gender identity is a person's deep-seated, internal sense of who they are as a gendered being; the gender with which they identify themselves. There are a few commonly used terms that are as follows: agender describes a person who does not identify as having a gender identity that can be categorized as man or woman or who identifies as not having a gender identity; bi-gender combines any two gender identities and behaviors, possibly depending on context; cisgender is a term to describe a person whose gender identity matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth; genderfluid is someone whose gender identity shifts between man/masculine and woman/feminine or falls somewhere along this spectrum; pangender is defined as including all genders and not being exclusively man or woman; transgender describes a person whose gender identity does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Although not a gender identity, gender nonconforming is worth mentioning. Gender nonconforming is a person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. Not all transgender people are gender nonconforming, and not all gender nonconforming people identify as transgender. Cisgender people may also be gender nonconforming.

Ever since I have had a camera I have been "accused" of vanity. I have always taken a lot of pictures of myself, perhaps in search of something beautiful or because I have had issues with my self-esteem, but I am happy,

nonetheless, that I have captured the momentary beauty and youth of a given, lived moment. I have grown to be who I am: an effeminate young man, and I want to cherish that [24]. I want to flaunt my boyish beauty while it lasts but not for other people but because, for the first time, I truly enjoy the human being that I am. I might reach manhood in terms of age but I might not identify

[23] In

an interview in Out magazine Miley Cyrus said: "I don't relate to what people say defines a girl or a boy, and I think that's what I had to understand: Being a girl isn't what I hate; it's the box I get put into."

[24]

In her book "The Boy" Germaine Greer's exploration of how young men in fifth-century Athens allowed themselves to revel in their own peacock beauty, or in 18th-century England dressed up in satins and flounces, walking with a swagger on shiny high heels, provides a telling contrast with our current culture, in which even pre-school boys are forced into grey and navy and discouraged from exaggerated grace or expressions of feeling. This tells us a lot about the development of our own attitudes to male beauty.

with being a man. At this point in life I want to love myself, and with what I do, I want to urge others to love themselves as well - unconditionally. By exposing myself through personal accounts, I want to encourage others to do the same because the most radical thing one can do is being oneself [25]. I am Peter Pan [26], I will never be a man.

[25]
 Emmy-winning drag queen and supermodel of the world
 RuPaul says, "Every time I bat my eyelashes it's a political statement. The

drag I come from has always been a critique of our society, so the act is defiant in and of itself in a patriarchal society such as ours. It's an act of treason."

[26] Although not recognized as a mental disorder, Peter Pan syndrome is a concept in popular psychology. It is the concept of an adult who's emotional level has remained at an adolescent level. In mythology, Puer aeternus, Latin for "eternal boy", is a child-god who is forever young.

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