



IT'S THE
CHEMICAL
WARFARE
ISSUE

PART 1

STARRING
ASHLEY ALTADONNA!!!

GENDERCIDE#3

Welcome to the first of two very special issues of Gendercide. In issues #3 and #4 I've asked a couple of friends to write about 'chemical warfare' as it relates to their transitions. In this issue Ashley Altadonna talks about her experiences with HRT, the chemicals she takes and the effects it has on her to make her the woman she is.

Stay tuned for Gendercide #4 when we get a glimpse at chemical warfare from an FTM perspective.

-Milo

As I sat in the waiting room, it struck me that it had been years since I had actually been to a doctor's office. It seemed as a child, I was always seeing a doctor or dentist, or even therapist of some sort. Now as I patiently waited for my name to be called, those memories came flooding back to me. It was a strange sort of a distraction from the anxiety and nervousness I had been feeling about my decision to start hormone replacement therapy.

Before I even walked into the clinic where I was meeting with an endocrinologist, I had already been seeing a therapist for about 3 months. According to the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's (HBIGDA) Standards of Care, I had to undergo testing and examination by a licensed psychiatrist. Aside a little discomfort from having to divulge sexual activities I'd long been ashamed of and silent about, this wasn't too bad.

The most interesting moment of my examination came in the form of a 300 question multiple-choice test. The only purpose for this test, as far as I could tell, was to determine whether or not I was clinically insane since some of the questions were, "Do you believe in Superman?" or "Do you ever hear voices?" Having my sanity and gender dysphoria confirmed, I was approved for hormones by my therapist.

My name was called and I met my endocrinologist. She seemed nice, and we got right down to business. She asked me what I wanted to get out of HRT. At that point, I simply wanted to see if taking estrogen would ease the depression and frustration I felt over being born into the wrong sort of body. I was very cautious about taking hormones and didn't want to overdo it. My doctor suggested we start out on a low dose of Spironolactone and Premarin.

Spironolactone is an anti-androgen. It basically shuts off the testosterone that body produces. Premarin is a synthetic version of pregnant mare urine, which is supposed to be super high in estrogen. PREGant MARE uRINe gets you Premarin. Neat huh?! Anyways, after our exam was over I went to get my hormone levels checked. This was to establish a base and track my levels over time. I dropped my prescription off at pharmacy located in the hospital and went to go give a blood sample.

Freshly punctured and drained, I went to go pick up my prescription. I was stunned by the price, nearly \$145! Thankfully, my health insurance later covered my prescriptions and brought

the cost down to an affordable \$10 per pill. I walked out of the pharmacy thinking, "Okay here goes nothing!" I took my first dose of female hormones and waited for them to take effect. The anticipation was much like Alice in Wonderland when she eats the cakes that say, "Eat Me!" and then shrinks.



Unlike Alice I didn't shrink (at least not yet) and I didn't feel any different. Several other trans-women I know told me of their experiences on hormones as being this wonderful high. Colors were supposed to seem brighter, sounds more beautiful, the world a more magical place. Another described it as a "pink haze that covered everything". I had no haze, nor brighter mystical world. I basically felt the same.

This anti-climactic reaction was largely due to the fact that A) hormones don't work overnight, and B) I was on such a low dosage that nothing was bound to happen anyways! After a month or two of feeling little to no results I went back to my doctor and upped my prescription.

Basically hormone replacement therapy (HRT), as it relates to transgendered persons, is mainly meant to supplant the hormones your body naturally produces with those of your intended gender. This in a sense is/was like going through puberty again, only this time, in my mid-twenties! Hormones affect you on a physical, mental, and emotional level.

Physically estrogen creates secondary sex characteristic typical to females including

lighter/thinner body hair, the redistribution of body fat, a lessening of muscle-mass, a softening of skin and of course the development of breast tissue. The first thing I began to notice was how much softer my appearance seemed in pictures. This was because my skin texture was changing. Another bonus was that hormones cleared up acne problems that had persisted since early adolescence. All those years of washing and scrubbing were needless after a few months on the pill!

Having my body hair thin and lighten also increased the feminizing of my appearance. Unfortunately, this did not include facial hair which I have had to remove repeatedly with expensive laser and electrolysis treatments. The redistribution of fat took longer. Slowly but surely I noticed my stomach losing the slight gut I once had, while my thighs and hips began to become more curvy and woman shaped. I also lost weight in my face. Losing muscle-mass was also something that took time, however I only notice this on the occasional instances where I need to use lots of body strength (lifting really heavy boxes or opening that damn jar of pickles!)

By far the most interesting physical change was the development of breasts. Since I started HRT before going fulltime as female I had to worry about what to do with an ever increasing bust size. This led to a brief period of





wearing baggy shirts or jackets to hide my fledgling boobs. The development of breasts was preceded by quite a few months of sharp pains and aches as the tissue began to form. Thankfully this went away, and I happily received a respectable B cup! Transwomen usually have about a cup size smaller than their closest biological family member, in my case my mother. I also knew my Mom was truly supportive of me and my decision after she helped me go shopping for bras!

Other than the physical changes, hormones also had a dramatic effect on me mentally and emotionally. I was able to tap into my emotions more easily. As a guy I felt like I was in a semi-permanent state of indifference and numbness. Hormones seem to heighten my emotional highs and lows. This rollercoaster of feelings can be crazy at times but I love that I am able to experience things more deeply emotionally.

A decrease in sex drive is another effect of estrogen on the body. I was concerned that I wouldn't want to have sex after starting hormones, but honestly the desire is still very much there, only decreased. Sex is no longer constantly in the foreground of my thoughts. It allows me to focus on other things more intensely. I also worried that sex would be less enjoyable, but my new body has proved this to be far from the truth!

Hormones have unfortunately rendered me sterile at this point. This was one of the toughest aspects about choosing whether to start HRT, but the trade off of being able to be identified

as my correct gender and be myself was something that I saw as being more important.

These days my body and my mind are mostly aligned. I often wonder how so many cissexual men and women can take their bodies for granted. It's a luxury I have never been afforded. Everyday I am amazed at how much my body has responded to my treatment. I can look into the mirror and see the woman I have waited so long for staring back at me!

Ashley Altadonna is the director of **WHATEVER SUITS YOU** as well as numerous other short films. A feminist, femme, transgendered/queer activist, Altadonna is also a singer/songwriter and volunteer at Broad Vocabulary, Milwaukee's feminist bookstore. **WHATEVER SUITS YOU** is Ashley Altadonna's most personal work to date and is the first to address her transition.

WHATEVER SUITS YOU is available on DVD from AltCinema:
<http://www.altcinema.com>

The trailer can be seen at: <http://www.altcinema.com/whatevertrailer.mov>

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