

My name is Helena, and I am a 23-year-old detransitioned woman from Cincinnati. As a teenager, believed I was transgender, but since then I have returned to identifying and living as a woman. In the years since detransitioning (stopping testosterone treatment and no longer seeing myself as transgender), I've become interested in exploring why, in the last decade, nearly every English-speaking country has seen a meteoric rise in adolescents believing they are transgender and pursuing cosmetic medical and surgical interventions. I'd like to go over how and why I came to see myself as transgender, the process of transitioning, the events leading up to my detransition, and why adolescents like I once was must be protected from irreversible medical interventions based on the unproven sociological theory of gender identity.

What leads a girl with no history of discomfort with stereotypical "girl" toys and clothes, or even the slightest desire to be a boy in childhood, to want to be a "man" through hormonal injections as she approached adulthood? In a vacuum, such a profound confusion leading to such drastic measures sounds like it should be rare and a sign of some sort of severe mental disturbance. Was I a fluke? Was I some kind of idiot who mistakenly believed I was trans because I'm crazy or just downright irresponsible?

The truth is that there has been an extreme rise in adolescents, especially girls, believing they are transgender. UK NHS referral data shows a 4000% increase in pediatric gender service referrals (yes, that's the real number). So-called "gender dysphoria", which was once a very rare diagnosis that described mostly prepubescent boys and adult men, is now most common in adolescents, particularly adolescent girls. Activists will argue that these explosive numbers are a result of increased societal acceptance, and that at long last trans people are coming out of hiding and living as their authentic selves. If this were true, one might expect to see comparable rates of transgender identity across all age groups and between both sexes, but its disproportionately adolescent females feeling that warm and fuzzy inclusive acceptance. Considering "acceptance" now implies supraphysiological doses of cross sex hormones and having healthy body organs surgically rearranged, it's worth a deeper look into what kinds of factors are driving young girls like I once was clamoring to go under the knife.

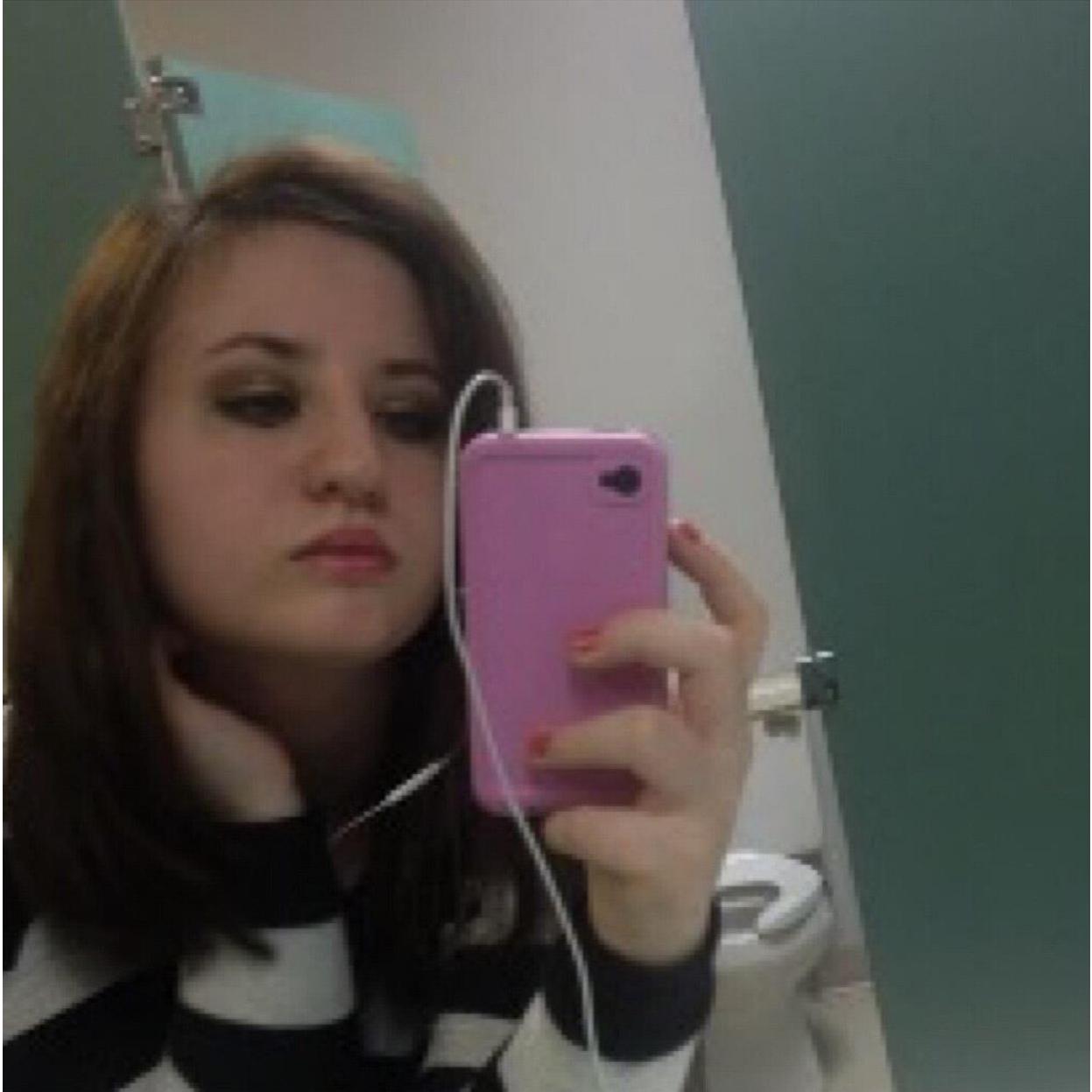
How did it happen?



As a child, nobody would have pegged me as a future transitioner; I was never particularly masculine or even tomboyish. Of course, nobody is a walking sex stereotype so there were certainly “boy” things I enjoyed, but my point is that neither female-typical activities nor being seen as a girl caused any distress for me before I was introduced to gender ideology. On the other hand, even at a young age I was beginning to experience some deep emotional difficulties unrelated to gender that would get more urgent over time. I suffered a serious loss when I was seven, which triggered long term grief and depression. My family was also very preoccupied with image, especially dieting and weight, and this began to have a pronounced effect on how I saw myself. By the time I was thirteen, I was isolated, self-harming, and had developed an eating disorder. I started skipping school, spending lunch in the bathroom, and in general just keeping my head down, trying to get through the day unnoticed.

During this time, I developed an obsession with classic rock, and while searching the internet for photos of young Elvis Presley I found a website called Tumblr. I immediately noticed that on Tumblr, there were many accounts posting about 50s, 60s, and 70s artists and that best of all, they were other teenage girls like me. I made an account and began posting scans of some vintage pop magazines I had bought off eBay, and soon enough, these accounts

were following me back. Between sharing photos, drawings, and fanfiction, these girls were posting about their lives and going into deep detail about their struggles. Many were social outcasts like me, also struggling with things like self-harm and eating disorders. Finding a community of such like minded people felt amazing, and I quickly began spending nearly every waking moment on Tumblr. At school, I would sit in the back of the class, scrolling Tumblr and messaging girls from Tumblr without engaging in class. When I returned home, I would open Tumblr on my laptop or hop on Skype to voice call with girls halfway across the planet, ignoring homework and studying all the while. As you can imagine, my high school GPA was abysmal. Tumblr would stick with me as I moved through various interests, from classic rock to Harry Potter, to One Direction and Justin Bieber, each iteration subsumed in a community of countless other intense, obsessive girls like me. I was in love with my new world, and even now I look back on some of these times spent on Tumblr, and the girls I met, with incredible fondness.



Me at 15; not identifying as trans yet but well into Tumblr, eating disorder, and being sad all the time.

Tumblr, though, wasn't only a place to post art and make friends. A major aspect of Tumblr culture was social justice ideology, something colloquially called "wokeness" by some today. The oppression hierarchy of racial and gender identities now being written into law in our country was the state religion of Tumblr long before anybody normal knew the term "CRT". As cultish religions tend to operate, open devotion to the religion is mandatory. On Tumblr, any claim to being "oppressed" would accumulate social credibility,

while any “privileged” status was justification for verbal abuse. As a “privileged” person, you were expected to constantly grovel and apologize, you had no right to speak on any issue involving the group you were “oppressing”, and you could not object in any way to any mistreatment hurled against you because of your race, gender, or sexuality.

I found myself in a bit of a double bind. On one hand, I had found what felt like the perfect group of friends who understood me on an intuitive level, who I was able to talk to openly about the things I liked and made me “weird” in real life, but on the other hand I was a “cishet white girl” in an environment where that was one of the worst things to be. In this climate, you are made to feel guilty and responsible for all the horrors and atrocities in the world. No hardship you could possibly go through could ever be as bad as the prejudice and genocide POC and LGBT people face every single day. You’re made to feel LGBT people and POC can’t even walk out of their houses without being murdered by cishet white people just like you!

It’s understandable that any young person exposed to this kind of belief system would grow to deeply resent being white, “cis”, or straight. The beauty of gender ideology in communities where “wokeness” flourishes is that it provides a way to game this system, so that you can get some of those targets off your back and enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded youths. Think about it: you can’t change your race, pretending to have a different sexuality would be very uncomfortable in practice, but you can absolutely change your gender, and it’s as easy as putting a “they/them” pronoun on your social media page. Instantly you are transformed from an oppressing, entitled, evil, bigoted, selfish, disgusting cishet white scum into a valid, stunning, brave trans person who deserves celebration and special coddling to make up for the marginalization and oppression you supposedly now face. Once a young person takes the plunge and achieves this special status, they can relax a little and talk about life and their interests again without the constant guilt and fear of verbal abuse. With the new pronouns often comes a wave of positive affirmation from friends and followers, and the subconscious picks up quickly that there’s a way to make the deal of being in these communities even sweeter.

This is the incentive I felt to comb through my thoughts and memories for things that might be further evidence that deep down, I wasn't really a girl. On top of that, I was inundated with messages that told me things like, "If you don't like your body, that's a sign that you're trans." Or, "If you've always felt awkward and you don't know why, that's a sign that you're trans." Or, "Cis people don't question their gender," meaning that just the fact that I was confused and unsure meant that I was some form of trans.

The adolescent brain is in a developmental stage primed to incorporate experiences into the process of identity formation, and spending as much time as I was online inundated with these messages without building much of an identity through real social and life experiences led me to be vulnerable to strong convictions about myself that were not grounded in reality.

My perception of myself as trans formed in the intersection between overwhelming mental health struggles, lots of fantasy sharing art and fanfiction online, social and ideological incentives to be trans, and insulation from experiences and perspectives that might have challenged the views I was developing about myself and the world.

From fantasy to reality

Over the three years that I identified as trans prior to reaching legal adulthood, I kept this huge aspect of my self-perception to the confines of Tumblr and the few school friends I met after switching high schools, also avid Tumblr users, and all but one also identified as trans. I cut my hair, wore baggy clothes to hide my body, and was gifted a breast binder by a friend from Tumblr that I would wear out and about, but I didn't talk to my parents about any of this until late into my senior year of high school. By this time, I fully identified as a "trans boy", wished I had a male body, and wanted to medically transition.



Some examples of how I looked in high school after beginning to identify as trans. I would alternate between wearing a lot of makeup, long fake nails, and other very “feminine” things and making awkward attempts at looking looking more boyish.

When I told my mother about all this it was on an impulse. I had a whole spiel planned out where I would tell her all about how I was always trans, I just didn’t know it, and hand her a big packet of printed out articles from pro-trans organizations about what different words meant and why I needed to transition. For some reason I still don’t quite understand, on one gloomy day we were driving back from the grocery store and I just blurted it out mid conversation, telling her that I was going by a male name, male pronouns, and was going to transition. I immediately wanted to stuff my foot into my mouth, but it was too late, and the dead awkward silence was setting in. For what seemed like eternity, she drove in silence. I stared at the headboard, eyes wide and heart thumping. Finally, she responded with a word: “No.”

“No, I am not going to call you that. You are Helena and you are a girl,” she said, maintaining her glare at the road before us.

Deflated and conflict avoidant, I remember saying something meek and passive aggressive like “if you feel that way, I guess...” and we finished our drive in silence.

The next day, I went to the school library and printed out all those articles I had saved for my planned “coming out”. When I got home, I scrawled a long-winded letter on loose leaf paper with what was originally going to be my “coming out” spiel, stapled it all together, waited for her to get home late and

head to bed, then I slipped it under her bedroom door at night as she slept. The following day, I anxiously awaited speaking to her, wondering what she thought of all the articles. Had they convinced her? They had to, right? I was showing her that experts clearly agreed that trans people like me are valid.

When I returned from school that day, the packet was face down in the kitchen trash.

Distraught, I agonized over what would happen when she got home. Would she yell at me? What did she think of the packet? I wondered if she had already read “transphobic” material that countered the articles I sent her. Hopefully she read my letter and could see past any transphobia and realize that this was the real me. She didn’t yell at me though. Instead, we mostly avoided each other for a few days and then both acted like nothing ever happened.

This would continue for months until another fateful confrontation, ironically at the same grocery store we were driving home from the first time. I don’t remember how the argument started, but somehow, we got into it over my conviction that I was transgender.

“I don’t understand why you can’t just be a masculine woman,” she said.

I responded, “Because I’m not a masculine woman! I’m a trans boy!”

She didn’t understand that the issue wasn’t of repressed masculinity itching to be let loose, it was a conviction that I was a part of the transgender identity group, and any masculinity I engaged in was a conscious supplement to that end.

Yelling and crying between us ensued, very classy for the middle of the dairy aisle at Kroger. She told me I had lost my mind and needed to see a psychiatrist. I told her she was a hateful bigot who wanted trans people to die. We went back to not talking much after that.

I was heartbroken. Now that I’m older and on the other side of this, I understand why my mom was struggling so much with her reactions to what I was

demanding of her. We never had a close relationship where we confided in each other often, and she can be somewhat emotionally distant. I don't demonize her for it anymore, but at the time I interpreted her unwillingness to entertain my identity as a disregard for what I was feeling and a rejection of who I was. To me at the time, being trans and wanting to transition was a desperate attempt to do something about my misery, and when she rejected my trans identity, it felt to me like she was telling me I didn't deserve to feel better, and she wanted me to continue feeling the way I was, which was suicidal, lonely, and self-loathing. I do wish she had responded with more compassion and curiosity, but she was doing the best with the skills she had. It's an unreasonable expectation for most parents to respond perfectly to something as outlandish as an unexpected transgender identity and the possibility of irreversible medical interventions, especially when teenagers like I once was are under the influence of a noxious ideology that makes authentic communication nearly impossible.

To add fuel to the fire, I went to my school guidance counselor and told her I was very depressed (true) because my parents wouldn't accept me as trans (not so true). She completely affirmed my perception and told me how sorry she was that my parents weren't more supportive. She looked online with me at the local children's hospital gender clinic and said she would call to see how long their waiting list was. We also came up with a budget plan for how I would pay for testosterone using an informed consent clinic if I waited until I turned eighteen. In the meantime, she said I should talk to the school psychologist to help me deal with my family being so transphobic. I asked my mom if I could stop seeing the therapist I had been seeing occasionally and switch to the school psychologist. My mom, having no idea that the school was affirming me and helping me put together plans to transition behind her back, agreed.

The psychologist was also very affirming, and again told me how sad it was that my parents weren't supportive and that I was a real and valid boy. After years of self-harm, depression, and struggling with an eating disorder in silence, it felt nice to have all these adults suddenly take such an interest in my "mental health". It was just further proof to me that being trans was my ticket to happiness, anybody who urged caution only wanted to hurt me and hold me

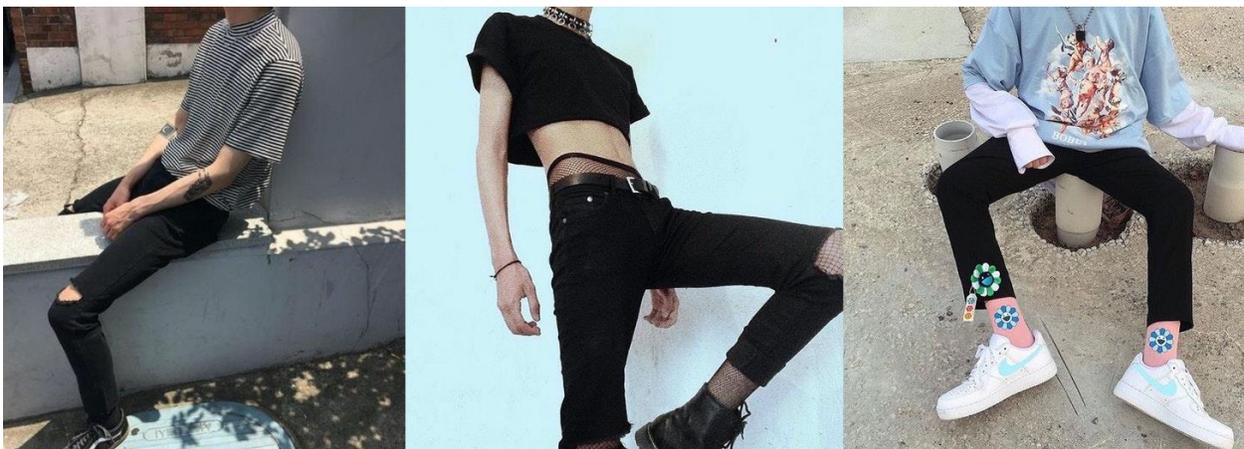
back. The psychologist brought up the idea of a family session to work things out between me and my mom, and once I felt assured that she would take my side in the matter, I agreed. I hoped coming face to face with a psychologist would finally convince my mom to take the fact that I was transgender seriously. In our session, the therapist and I all but ganged up on my mom, telling her that I needed to transition to be happy, and that trans youth are at a high risk of suicide if they are not given “access” to hormones and surgeries. Predictably, my mom did not respond well and we both left the session feeling bitter.

Some time over the summer, my mom told my dad about my “trans thing” and he told me calmly that he didn’t think I was a boy, but he wasn’t going to fight me on it either because he could see it wasn’t going so well for my mom. He even took me out to drive his stick shift car thinking I might like to do something “manly”. I couldn’t figure out how to do it and got really upset that I wasn’t able to easily do something he considered “manly”. I think he was trying to show me that I didn’t need to be trans to enjoy “guy things”, but that was sadly missing the point. It was this weird belief system I found on the internet that made me want to be trans, not a repressed yearning to do “guy things”. I had never been all that interested in “guy things”. My dad and I didn’t talk about it much other than that.

Soon after, I turned eighteen. I have a July birthday, and over that summer after graduation I began to put more intention into “passing” as male in preparation for testosterone and my plan to “live as male” in college. I went out and bought what I thought were “boy” clothes that would fit my curvy, slightly overweight female body. Joggers, basketball shorts, and hoodies. Ugh, I cringe just thinking about it. So not my style, but I wanted people to think I was a boy. I believed once the testosterone transformed my body, I could be more creative with my outfits.

I want to take some time to explore what my expectations were for how testosterone would change my body. I am a female, 5’3 and a half, and at the time probably weighed about 150lbs. I don’t have the curviest body, but I

certainly carry a lot of my weight in my legs and arms and almost none in my waist. Even with the fat redistribution caused by testosterone, there's no way that a testosterone regimen could give me what I wanted: a tall, lanky, bony male physique. During puberty in natal males, testosterone is able to sculpt the male body while bones are still growing, which is part of the reason why this kind of physique was unrealistic. Testosterone also cannot change a female's height, or elongate leg bones, so no matter what I did I would never be tall or have long, spindly extremities. I also have long struggled with my weight, so my expectation to look bony was unrealistic in that regard too. I would look at male "thinspo" (pro-anorexia term for imagery of very thin people that is used as inspiration to restrict food) and "transition goals" (a similar concept in trans circles where people look at photos of the opposite sex that they want to emulate through style, hormones, and surgeries), which caused a massive disconnect between how my body really looked and what I thought could by some magic happen in the future. This kind of unrealistic fantasy obsession over body changes is one of the many ways in which trans identity resembles anorexia, which also involves an unhealthy obsession with unrealistic body goals and shifting goal posts. I spent much of my time before being trans looking at pro-anorexia content and chasing the ideal of an ultra-thin, androgynous [female] body. My restrictive dieting led to binge eating, and I convinced myself testosterone would do what I never could myself through starvation.



These are examples of the kinds of images I was perusing daily which formed my "transition goals". Notice the cropped faces in each picture; the images are objectifying in a similar way to anorexia "thinspo" images. This allows the

viewer to enmesh their self-perception with the bodies in the images. Anime and Tumblr art were also hugely influential. Search terms like “tumblr boy aesthetic outfits” or “tumblr soft boy art” will show countless additional examples of this aesthetic which is popular among young trans identified girls. Incidentally, these androgynous, pretty boy types are also the kinds of young men that adolescent girls tend to be attracted to.

My first injection of testosterone, was on August 15th, 2016. I had just turned eighteen. I drove out to a Planned Parenthood in Chicago on the recommendation of some people on Tumblr because, at the time, there weren't many (if any) informed consent gender clinics near me. This has since changed dramatically, and there are many clinics that offer these services, including all Planned Parenthoods.



Me at 18; putting more effort into “passing” as male. I wore that hat all the time because I had no idea how to do or cut my hair in a way that resembled a typical man. I was too scared to go to a barber or men’s hairstylist. Also, because people have made this comment before, the thing on my shirt isn’t a confederate flag, its the logo of a local pirate themed laser tag place my brother used to go to and I stole the shirt from him.

I woke up early on the morning of the appointment, which I believe was for some time around noon, got together my couple hundred dollars in cash, put on my uniform of basketball shorts and hoodie, and got in my car. I was banking on my parents waking up and leaving for work without coming to my room and would text them I was heading over to a friend’s house at some point during the day. My mom called me during my drive, at which point I remembered I had actually been supposed to attend a dentist appointment that day, and I made up a story to her about how I was on my way to the dentist appointment and would head to a friend’s house after. She wished me luck at the dentist, and we said goodbye. I still have always been too scared to admit to her what I was really doing that day, and that I didn’t get that cavity taken care of for an embarrassingly long time.

I was probably late because I didn’t factor in the whole issue of finding parking, and if you’ve ever been to Chicago its always a disaster. Directly through the door was a woman behind plexiglass next to a locked door. She asked for my identification, and I remember thinking how great it was that Planned Parenthood was keeping women and trans people safe from violent haters who might try to get into the clinic. Upon confirming my identity and appointment, she buzzed me in and I proceeded to the reception area. As I completed my intake forms, I looked around me at the people in the room with me, mostly women and a few couples, mostly black and Hispanic. I remember thinking how cool it was to see so much diversity in such a great and helpful place like Planned Parenthood. Being a Tumblr SJW from a mostly white area, I was euphoric at the thought of a place that affirms trans people and caters to a poor black and brown people. I think I was feeling that this connection confirmed my status as “marginalized”, as this was still very important to me.

Before long, my (trans) name was called and I looked up to see a tall, heavy woman with shoulder length brown hair and a clipboard. As we walked back through the halls of the clinic, she introduced herself as a social worker and told me we would do a brief intake to understand what I was looking to get out of the services at Planned Parenthood. I told her that I had drove six hours all the way from my hometown, and I think she responded with some comment about how I must be so determined. When we arrived at our room, she motioned for me to sit and she began the intake process. This process consisted of a handful of basic questions, which you can see below, along with her notes on my answers.

Social Work Intake Form

TODAY'S DATE: 8/15/16	PATIENT #: 4 [REDACTED]	DATE OF BIRTH: 07/24/1998
PREFERRED NAME: [REDACTED]	LEGAL NAME: Helena K [REDACTED]	PRONOUN(S): Male
GENDER: Male	SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH: Female	SEX LISTED W/ INSURANCE: N/A

What do you know about Hormone Therapy? What are you hoping Hormone Therapy will do for you?
 Patient was well versed and knowledgeable about hormone therapy. Patient reports that he has thought about using hormones for some time, especially over the last 2 years. Patient states that turning 18 is why he was able to start the process.

Who knows about your plans to start hormones?
 Patient states that he is "out to everyone" and identifies trans. Patient states that he has told one friend about starting hormones and is also connected to online communities for support.

Do you live alone or with other people? If with others, does it feel like a safe place to transition? (consider coping methods if they do not know or may have negative reactions)
 Patient does live with his family; however he is going to college in Columbus in 2 days. Patient states that his family is not supportive of his transition; however he does indicate that his mother and father have started to come around more. They refuse to identify him by his preferred name or pronoun in the home and with family, but have made a commitment to do so at college. Patient feels that once his family sees how truly happy he is once he transitions; he feels they will come around and be more supportive.

Why hormones now (vs. past/future)?
 Patient states that he is now 18 and can initiate the process himself.

Do you work and/or go to school? If so, are you out at work/school or considering talking to your employer/school?
 Patient does not work currently. Patient going to college in a couple days and would like to study biochemistry.

Aside from hormones, are there other changes you are considering or thinking about making?
 Patient states that he is 100% confident that he will get top surgery in the future. Patient states that he has considered some facial masculinization work as well, but states that he wants to see what the hormones will do first. Patient states that he would consider bottom surgery if the options that he would like for a penis became available, but he is not interested with the current options.

Do you date or have a partner? Thoughts about how you might talk to partner/dates about your identity?
 Patient is not in a relationship currently. Patient states that he has no fears about this as he believes that he will only connect with other trans people or an individual who is supportive of his process.

How are you thinking about coping with stressors from the changes you will experience?
 Patient states that he feels like he will be much happier. Patient states that he has struggled with depression currently and in the past. Patient states that this summer was tough for him with depression and suicidal thoughts. Patient states that since he has been able to make this appointment, his depression has already started to improve. Patient expects that his whole life will be quite different and he will be very happy when he starts to change.

General Screen:
 Oriented to person/place/time/situation: YES / NO
 Mood and affect appropriate to situation: YES / NO
 Suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm: YES / NO
 Patient endorses a hx of depression and SI. Patient denies any current SI, plan or intent. Patient states that his most recent thought was about 2 weeks ago. Patient states that he was very suicidal over the summer and it was tough for him. Patient states that now that he has started his transition, his depression is significantly improving.
 Client can make informed consent: YES / NO

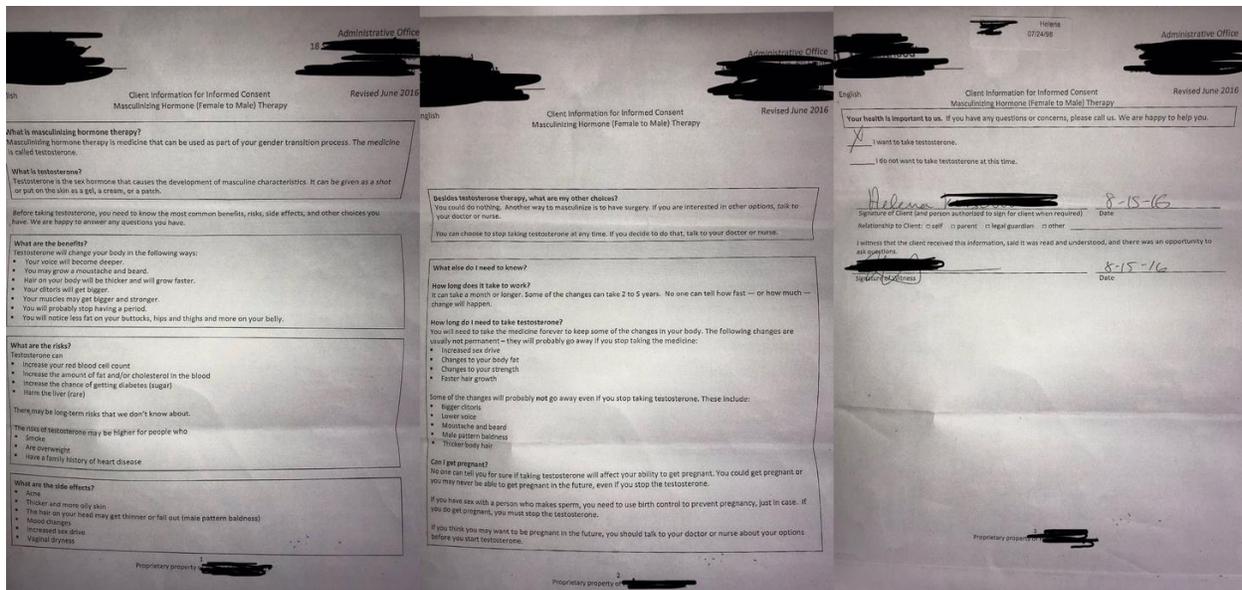
Feminizing: How do you handle depression when you get sad?
Masculinizing: How do you handle anger when it happens?
 Patient states that he feels that he will be able to manage his emotions. As stated, patient feels that his mood will significantly improve.

In most

of the records I share here, certain information is redacted, because at the time I took these photos I was speaking to a lawyer who advised me against naming Planned Parenthood publicly, or releasing other information. Nothing came of those pursuits, and I am now more open about these things. My real name, Helena, is also used on the Planned Parenthood records because their policy was to use my legal name on official records, but my clinicians called me by my preferred name, and on some of the records my preferred name was also listed.

I remember the intake process taking about 20 minutes, at which point the social worker told me she would talk over my intake with the nurse practitioner, and they would decide if I was a good candidate for testosterone. I waited anxiously by myself for a couple of minutes, and then the social worker came back. She told me that I was a perfect candidate for testosterone, and since I had traveled so far, and seemed “so sure”, that they would even work around their typical policy of taking blood samples and waiting for test results to prescribe the hormones, and give me my prescription that very day.

Ecstatic, I burst into tears of joy and called my friend who was also trans (at the time, she isn't anymore) that they were going to give me my first injection that day. My friend and I squealed to each other over the phone and when we calmed down, we hung up and the social worker motioned me into a new room. There, I met the nurse practitioner who handed me the informed consent document and asked me to read it over. I gave it a glance, knowing that I had already made my decision and some silly formality wouldn't stop me. I and the professionals already knew what was best for me. I signed the document.



My full informed consent document. My main criticism is that testosterone as a hormone and testosterone as a treatment are presented as primarily cosmetic, when in fact testosterone is involved in many physiological processes, and healthy in different amounts for men and women. I took a closer look at the contents of this document in [this thread](#).

Now that all that legal liability nonsense was taken care of, it was time to get to the exciting part: dosage. Typically, females beginning a masculinizing testosterone regimen are started on a relatively low dose and monitored for a few weeks or months, at which point the dose may be increased. Considering I hadn't even had blood work, in hindsight this would have been the more responsible way to do it. That is not what happened in my case, though. When the nurse practitioner suggested a lower dose to start, I objected, saying I believed I had "higher estrogen than most AFABs" (people "assigned female at birth"), citing the size of my thighs and breasts as evidence. This was acceptable to the nurse practitioner, and she asked me what dose I would like to start at. Nervously, I said something along the lines of, "well what's the highest we can go?"

Most female transitioners I've known have told me they started at 25mg, or even less. Some of my FtM friends who are still on testosterone and look remarkably like natal males, are only on 50mg. I was prescribed 100mg of

testosterone, to be self-injected into my thigh muscle weekly, starting that very day.

There were no words that could have prepared me for what was about to come.

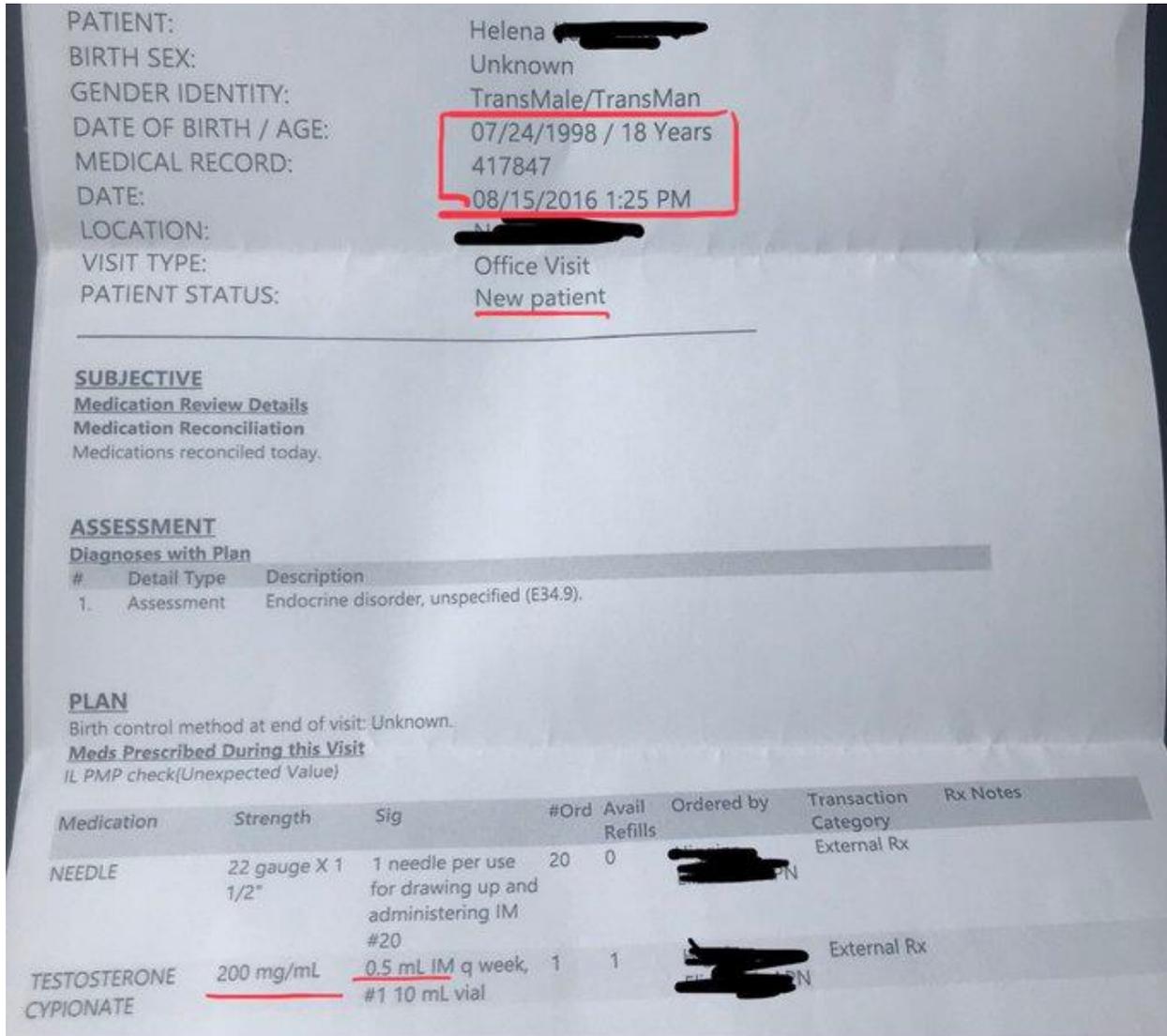


Table 1. Hormone preparations and dosing (Grading: T O M)

Androgen	Initial - low dose ^b	Initial - typical	Maximum - typical ^c	Comment
Testosterone Cypionate ^a	20 mg/week IM/SQ	50mg/week IM/SQ	100mg/week IM/SQ	For q 2 wk dosing, double each dose

My medical record showing that I was prescribed testosterone cypionate on my first appointment, without blood work (results take at least a few days), and that

my dosage was the maximum recommended dosage per the UCSF dosing guidelines.

Shit, meet fan

Two days after I started testosterone was my first day of college. The weekend prior, I told my mom that I had requested for the university to list me under the male name I had chosen, and that to avoid confusion she should use this name if only when interacting with the school. She agreed to use the name and male pronouns when she and my dad dropped me off at my dorm so that at least I could start my first day of college on one page, even if she wasn't on that page herself. I was content with this, and felt like I was finally getting her to understand.

On August 17th, 2016, my parents and brother dropped me off at college and helped me carry all my new college stuff into my dorm, unaware of my testosterone expedition. I hid my vials and needles deep in the recesses of a bag of clothes, which I insisted my parents let me unpack later. My bed sheets were standard red and navy-blue plaid from Walmart, my school supplies were all some mix of grey and navy blue, and my only dorm decoration was a Star Wars poster. My wardrobe was a handful of sweatpants, hoodies, and t-shirts, all mostly from Walmart or the men's section of TJ Maxx. Gone were the days of glitter gel pens, notebooks covered in cat stickers, my cozy bedroom with a plush, floral comforter, fluffy rug, and One Direction poster. It was now time to "act like a boy", because if I acted like myself, nobody would believe I was trans.

My roommate was another trans guy (whom I will call "he", because that is how I remember him), who I later learned was one of the youngest people in my state to have gone on puberty blockers and testosterone. My school had a "self-ID" policy, and I was originally supposed to be placed with an actual male, but when I looked him up on Facebook, he was some massive ripped sports guy and the idea of sleeping next to him scared the living hell out of me. I'm sure he wouldn't have appreciated coming to school and finding out he was rooming with a girl, either. I chickened out of rooming with him and asked an

administrator if they could find me another trans person to live with. That first day, I was simultaneously intimidated to meet another trans guy and feeling incredibly awkward introducing my parents into this whole new trans world when just a few months ago they'd had no idea I wanted to be trans at all. We all went through the motions of pretending everything was normal until my mom accidentally called me "she" to my roommate and he locked eyes with me apologetically, signaling to me he witnessed the incredible violence that had just occurred. My mood soured for the rest of my parent's visit, and I gave them both attitude until they left for the drive back home. That night, my roommate and I got to talking, and he said he was sorry that my parents were so transphobic and unaccepting. He told me that his mom was very supportive of him being trans, and fought tooth and nail to get him "access" to transition at a record setting age. I was seething with jealousy.

That week was eventful, and I made a bunch of new trans friends. My roommate introduced me to his ex that he was still friends with, who at the time was also trans and eventually became my closest relationship for nearly four years (I will call her "Jamie", and "she", because that is how I know her now). She and I clicked immediately and would be inseparable for years, even long after any resemblance of a romantic relationship fizzled away. I consider myself heterosexual and would not date a trans man now, but at the time as a "gay trans man" under the influence of gender ideology, which tells you biological sex isn't real, and experiencing surges of testosterone, I convinced myself I was attracted to this girl who looked like a boy at the time and had rapidly become my closest friend. Since in the back of my mind I knew she was a biological female, she didn't intimidate me as much as actual men did.

In a classic *me* maneuver, I had forgotten one of most important items: my laptop. The first week was just orientation week, so I didn't need it, but I would need to drive back down to my home town to retrieve my laptop before Monday. On Friday or Saturday, I said goodbye to my friends and drove the two hours back to my parent's house. As I pulled up to the house, I saw my mom had just arrived home from work. Stiffly, we greeted each other and entered the house through the garage. I nervously wondered if either of my parents would

be able to guess that I had started testosterone, even though a week is hardly long enough for there to be visible effects.

As I walked from the kitchen to the stairs, my mom called me “Helena” and I whipped around, snapping back at her that she needed to respect me now and use my “real name” (my trans name). She yelled after me as I stomped upstairs to my room, and as I was collecting my laptop and charger cable, she stormed in behind me. Six months of pent-up frustration and rage spilled out of her, and she tore into me in a tirade that felt eternal as it was in progress. I don’t say these details to demonize her, I understand why things happened the way they did, but it’s an important part of the story. The tirade reached some dark places, and she said things I won’t repeat here but hurt me deeply. As she yelled, I sat on my bed staring at the floor and whispering “okay, okay” over and over. One of the last things she said was that I shouldn’t come back until I realized I was a girl. Whether she meant this literally or not, I already had a narrative in my head that transphobic parents disown their trans kids, so that’s how I took it. Plus, I thought I would never stop being trans.

She left the room, and I began panicking. Hyperventilating, I grabbed my laptop, a few extra things I meant to retrieve, and headed for the door. As I went to walk out, my sweet old cat, Puff, was standing in the doorway like he always would when he came upstairs around the time I went to bed. He was my little buddy, and always slept next to me. The night before I left for college I cried and told him that I would be back to sleep next to him all the time, but I never got to again.

Tears welling, I patted Puff on the head, and gave him a little kiss goodbye.

I was properly shaking by the time I started my car and drove it to a near by gas station. There, I allowed myself to break down and called a [trans] Tumblr friend of mine. I cried to her and told her that my mom had just disowned me, and I didn’t know what to do. She helped me remember that I had left money in a box in my room, and told me to call a family friend to retrieve it for me, which I did. Once I had the money, I began the drive back to my university, getting in

at one in the morning, throwing my belongings on the floor and crashing to sleep in my top bunk bed.

The Dark Days

Everything that followed this altercation with my mother was dark, and things were dark for a long time. I won't bore you with every story, but let's just say there was a succession of demotivating, stressful, and painful events in quick succession. There was a lot of drama, I lost nearly all my new friends, and I started to feel really, really down again. Within a month, I moved into the campus LGBT house due to issues with the room mate and the three other people who lived there with me were my entire social circle. We mostly sat around smoking weed and drinking, and my academic performance plummeted. I was also advised to financially emancipate myself by one of the campus gender studies professors who was "helping" me navigate being "disowned" by my parents, which just created financial issues for me down the line that added to the stress. I remember feeling numb for months, and when I wasn't numb and checked out, I was angry. I'm still not sure how much of that was due to the testosterone or the general state of my life.

The anger started as a smoldering anger at first. I found myself feeling more irritable, less able to put up with the little things that bothered me about other people. I was uncomfortable with my newfound tendency to get bent out of shape at everybody so I started isolating myself, trying to hide this awful person I thought I was turning out to be. I didn't make the connection between this and the testosterone, I just thought I was a bad person. I didn't feel like being around people, and when I was, I felt so unlike myself that I didn't know how to relate to them. Even five years after the fact, I still feel like this experienced has damaged my self esteem and social capabilities in a major way. It definitely changed me as a person.

These next few years of my life are still incredibly hard for me to think about, much less write about for everyone else to see. The one redeeming quality of this dreadful time period is that I adopted my cat, Corndog (yes that's his name) early in 2017, and he has been by my side through all of it. I remember myself

as a shell of a person, a monster, someone who didn't recognize the feelings in her own body anymore. To make things worse, the testosterone injections themselves were causing significant distress for both me and Jamie; it would take us hours of crying and hyperventilating to drive the needles into our flesh once a week. I had always had emotional problems, but this was different. In high school, I had always banked on the future where I would be in college, transitioning, and part of me genuinely thought testosterone would somehow make me into this outgoing male jock archetype and I would be handsome, have lots of friends, and love life. That wasn't really panning out. I was lonely, enmeshed in toxic and stressful relationships, on academic probation, in legal trouble due to substance use, and feeling possessed by some sort of demon I now recognize was at least partially the testosterone's worsening grip on my mind. With the reality of my old future fantasy having rapidly deteriorated, but not yet realizing the fundamental issues with my life, I set my sights on another route of escape.

Jamie, who was in a similar position of plummeting mental state, still maladaptively coping with the trauma of growing up in a severely dysfunctional family, one night suggested that we run away; just take what little stuff we can fit in the car and move to a whole new city, one that will embrace our transness and will allow us to realize our true potential. I told her I knew just the place...

Chicago.

And so not long before the end of that school year, we told the few acquaintances we had that we were moving and they wished us luck, excited to hear we were getting out of suburbia and moving on to better things. I remember feeling awkward telling them, like there was some cognitive dissonance between the fact that chasing trans had only made my life worse, and the fact that I was making another drastic life decision to chase trans once more.

I quit my crappy fast food job, unenrolled from the university, which was going to kick me out anyway, paid a visit to my mother to let her know of my plans (we were on strained speaking terms at this point), and soon enough I was en route to Chicago. We had managed to rent a small studio apartment, and both

applied to schools in the city. I didn't end up attending school, though, because not long after getting settled in to the new apartment my mental health would get even worse.

What I thought would be a fresh start turned out to be more of the same. I isolated, too uncomfortable with myself to even make eye contact with other people. I didn't get a job, didn't go to school, didn't meet any people, and for the most part, didn't even get out of bed. It was around this time that something really weird started happening to me, and this part I largely do contribute to the testosterone.

When they tell you about testosterone, they mostly frame it as a cosmetic thing. Sure, you might feel more irritable, you'll probably have a higher sex drive, and there is that whole thing about increased risk for heart disease and cancer, but for the most part its all about fat redistribution and getting a deep, commanding voice. My informed consent document even generously warned me about "mood changes". But I don't know if anything would have prepared me for what it actually felt like.

During the initial months following my first shot, I recall a general feeling of suffocating numbness and inability to identify my emotions, with bouts of anger that were easy to trigger dispersed throughout. Something that before would have made me mostly sad, or even frustrated, made every cell in my body overflow with rage. The anger was also of a different quality than the kind of anger I experienced before. Previously, I might have gotten so angry that I cried, or yelled, or very occasionally slammed a door, but I rarely if ever felt much more of an urge to externalize it physically beyond that. While I was on testosterone, the anger demanded to be externalized. I felt like my body would explode if I couldn't hit or throw something, and this scared me. Crying was no longer an option, at least at first, as crying was nearly impossible to achieve. When I was emotionally overwhelmed, instead of easily crying like before I would start to feel extremely angry, and instead of hitting others or anything in my surroundings, I resorted to hitting myself. I would struggle against the anger by punching myself and eventually, after there was enough pain, I could cry and

when I cried I'd cry for hours, often falling asleep and not remembering much when I'd wake up. I had these kinds of meltdowns about once a week or so, and regularly had bruises on my head and body from where I would hit myself.

One day, I had a meltdown like this and instead of hitting myself I hurt myself quite seriously with a kitchen knife, and when I calmed down enough to be spoken to I was coaxed into going to the emergency room by Jamie. I can only imagine how traumatic it was for her to be around me during this time. I still, at this point, made no connection to the testosterone. We both just thought I was a severely mentally ill person; even though I had never experienced anything remotely like this before testosterone (and never again since!).

I was checked into the hospital psychiatric ward that night and remained for seven days. There, no inquiry was made into my high testosterone dosage or whether it might have been having an impact on my behavior. Instead, I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, depression, and acute psychosis, for which I was prescribed four separate psychiatric medications. Upon my discharge, I dutifully took my prescribed medications and even felt validated by my being prescribed an "anti-psychotic". I was thankful that I had finally been diagnosed as severely mentally ill and given strong medications that would fix my faulty brain chemistry and allow me to live a better life. For the next few weeks, I was to attend a thrice weekly outpatient group therapy program that was three hours a day. In this intensive group therapy, we talked about mindfulness and how to manage the demands of work while living with "mental illness", but deeper psychological work was absent, and once again the fact that I was a young biological female on a supraphysiological dosage of synthetic testosterone remained completely unaddressed. Throughout every experience in any mental health treatment during my trans identification, my testosterone treatment was never identified as a potential source of mental health symptoms, and my desire to be a "boy" was never questioned as possibly a result of pre-existing emotional issues. My "preferred name and pronouns" were always used without hesitation or question, and I was "affirmed" by every professional I saw during this time. I had still not developed the skepticism of the mental health

and medical industries that I have now, so I saw this as even more reason to not question my identity as trans.

While I was enrolled in the outpatient program, I was not improving. I was still unemployed, using substances (including some of my prescribed medications), unable to get out of bed most days, talking about suicide in group, and having “episodes”. Eventually, the psychiatrists and therapists at the outpatient program sat me down and told me I needed to go back into inpatient. I did, and this time stayed for about half a week. When I got out, I decided these programs were not helping me and that once I unenrolled from them, I was going to get a different therapist (at the local LGBT center), get a job, and try making some friends, the latter of which didn’t happen until after I detransitioned.

For the next six months or so, I worked in a small cookie shop where I often worked ridiculous hours, including relatively frequent 10 hour solitary night shifts, not returning home until nearly 5 am. Needless to say, this wasn’t fantastic for my mental wellbeing either, but its where some changes started to take place. I started interacting with people regularly, and though I didn’t make any long-term friends, it was helpful just to know some names and faces and be a fly on the wall listening to the drama in the lives of my coworkers. A trans coworker of mine clued me in to an organization that issued grants that paid for trans surgeries, as my insurance at the time didn’t cover them. My coworker showed me the website to apply, but I always procrastinated it. Strange, considering I would publicly talk about how badly I wanted the surgery. So I never got any surgeries, something for which I am extremely grateful.

During some of the late night, solitary shifts, I had a lot of time to reflect. In some ways, it was a bit maddening, but dispersed within the general neuroticism were moments of clarity. I remember deciding to take my chest binder off at work for the first time, because it was just me and one other worker who always sat in the back, and that thing hurt. It felt so much more natural not to have anything constricting my chest underneath my work shirt. I started skipping testosterone injections because they made me so anxious, so I was only injecting once or twice a month. With this, my “episodes” dramatically decreased. I

remember browsing trans subreddits in hopes I would get some answers for what to do if transitioning wasn't improving my mental health. There were many posts asking this question, and by far the most common answer was to "just keep going" and that one day, after all the surgeries, it would all be worth it. There were times when I sat back and questioned nearly every choice in my life, like the relationship I was in and moving to Chicago. I thought about how all these things I desperately jumped into thinking they would save me had not don't anything of the sort. The only thing I didn't outright question was my choice to be transgender. That would require a more up-front reality check.

The call is coming from inside the house

Not everyone has an "a-ha!" moment when they realize they want to detransition, but I did. Mine was after a few weeks of occasionally thinking back to before I had transitioned, the comfortable clothes I used to wear and how I didn't worry about whether or not the "feminine" stuff I liked would make people "doubt I was trans". I thought about how much I loathed the way men's clothes fit me and the way masculine styles looked on me in general, and I remember wishing society was more accepting of "gender non-conforming men like me". I also wished I "wasn't trans", and even recall making a reddit post to this effect, lamenting how even though "being trans" was making me miserable, I knew it was who I really was and after I got surgeries it would be right for me.

This kind of thinking, I now realize after talking to so many detransitioners, is common in the weeks or months leading up to detransition. My "a-ha!" moment happened in February of 2018, when Jamie made a video montage consisting of photos of us chronologically from the day we met (2 days after I started testosterone) until recently, set to music. As I watched the video, I saw the way my face changed from so young, hopeful, and most of all, recognizable, to weary, deadpan, and foreign.



Top row: Photos of me from the first month of my transition. Bottom row: Photos of me from the final months before detransitioning.

I began to sob uncontrollably. At first, Jamie thought I was crying because I loved the video so much, but I quickly informed her it was something else, but I wouldn't say what. I cried, and cried, and cried. Every memory those photos evoked was flashing before my eyes, all the pain I knew was behind my eyes was emerging vividly. I saw innocence turn to anguish and I knew I had been on the wrong path for a long, long time. I didn't know. I didn't know it would be this way.

How could I have been so stupid?

I couldn't bring myself to tell Jamie what I was truly thinking. I knew that she would probably freak out and try to make me rationalize away these feelings, but it was too late for that now. The dam had broken. Instead, I silently berated myself and catastrophized internally until I mustered the courage to tell my very pro-LGBT therapist: being trans had been a massive mistake.

I remember her response clear as day: "But you always tell me about your terrible dysphoria!"

"I know, but I... I don't think this is right," I replied, and started to tell her my still developing thoughts on how I had developed the "dysphoria" after finding out about gender identities online as a teenager, when I had been struggling with so many other emotional issues for a long time, and that in retrospect I must have gotten carried away, thinking that being trans was the explanation and solution for all of my problems. She wasn't really hearing me, and questioned the things I said from the angle of "you're trying to talk yourself out of being trans because transphobia is making you hate yourself." Ironic that nobody ever questioned my desire to be trans that way.

This was the first moment I started realizing something was off about the trans movement, and institutions in general. I had experienced this massive realization, and it was agonizing but at least it was finally something real, and here I was being met with all these rationalizations for why this of all things was a psychological symptom. Not the effects of the testosterone, not my belief that all of my problems would be solved by transitioning, not my aversion to being female, but the fact that I now knew transitioning had been a mistake.

I left this session feeling frustrated, and I don't think I ever went back. Sitting in the car outside the building, I told Jamie that I was regretting my transition and questioning my trans identity in general, and predictably she was extremely upset. She reacted in anger, saying I must be confused and, like my therapist, accusing me of having these thoughts due to some underlying psychological issue, like only an insane person would ever regret being trans.

She was not being uniquely harsh here, this is a common occurrence in the trans community. In one direction, there's a desire to encourage gender questioning in others who do not identify as transgender (some people call this "cracking an egg"). In the other direction, there is an intense fear of others changing their minds about being trans or wanting to transition. Once someone is questioning their gender, there's a push to encourage them to take steps towards social and medical transition, which, once initiated, makes changing one's mind more complicated and going back to living as they did before more difficult. I personally have gotten very angry and desperate when friends in the past would voice doubts about identifying as transgender, and I have also encouraged gender questioning and trans identity in friends of mine who did not yet identify as trans. I regret this very much now, as some of these friends have gone on to medically transition, and I no longer believe this was remotely in their best interest. But in the trans community, people cope with the inherent doubts and cognitive dissonance of pretending to be someone they are not by encouraging others to do the same. An enormous amount of mental energy is devoted to the crowdsourcing of validation and firefighting of anything that triggers internal conflict, which is always nagging in the back of the mind.

When a person is at peace with themselves and expressing themselves naturally, they don't police and micromanage everything and everyone around them.

Around this time, Jamie and I were preparing for a trip my mom had invited us on with herself and my brother. Now finally on cordial terms, we agreed to go, and our dramatic conversation in the car occurred in the week before. We both felt pressure to act like everything was fine because I had worked so hard to get my mom to tolerate my transition, and I was feeling guilty and humiliated. Being somewhere else kind of felt like a neutral ground where we could have conversations more freely with less judgement. We took many long walks to talk about our transitions, trans identities, and reflect on our lives up to this point. During these walks, Jamie also admitted to herself and to me that she didn't want to be trans anymore. We felt crushed, scared, confused, and regretful, but so much more free.

Back in Chicago, we now had to figure out what to do next. Neither of our families knew what we were thinking, and we were both scared to tell them. There's an enormous amount of shame in realizing how much hurt and chaos has been inflicted on others in your pursuit of ideas you now think were ridiculous and destructive. You think of all the decisions you made that weren't directly related to your transition, but were made in the effort of chasing the fantasy more broadly, and you feel like you've just woken up in a pit of your own digging, too deep to climb out of. You feel trapped, cornered, panicked, and deeply ashamed. Regret comes with a lot of self flagellation, and at the time, there wasn't the big detransitioner community there is today to let us know that we weren't alone. I remember looking up transition regret online, and I found one essay by an older lesbian. While we did have detransition in common, everything else about her experiences were different and I couldn't see myself in that story. I felt an incredible emotional whiplash, like I had just woken up from a five-year spell and was suffering amnesia about how I'd gotten to where I was. I was hungry for clues that would help me make sense of my position.

I began to search online with key words like "regret", looking for anything that might resonate with what I was experiencing. I knew the standard trans narrative was wrong, at least in my case, but looking at other perspectives still scared me. In fact, I called myself nonbinary, and picked a "gender-neutral" name to go by, because I was still reflexively averse to being myself, a filthy "cis girl". It felt incredibly uncomfortable -- more uncomfortable even than being FtM -- and I dropped that pretty quickly. Once the dam broke, the same old tricks of self-deception were no longer tolerable to me. I remember finding the reddit r/detrans forum, which at the time had only around 100 subscribers, if memory serves me (it now has tens of thousands). This clued me in to the fact that at least a handful of people out there were feeling regret too.

When I had my detransition realization, I immediately wanted to go back to looking like a girl. The men's clothes, short hair, and my wispy little testosterone moustache made me sick to look at. I bought some basic clothes, like leggings and long sleeved, women's cut shirts, simple things I used to like

wearing before I transitioned. I also bought some cheap make-up and a wig. Though these made my reflection in the mirror less jarring, I felt kind of like a man in drag. It was a really gross, uncomfortable feeling. I didn't know if I would ever feel normal. The realization that my escapist fantasy I had hoped would save me from my teenage misery was a fraud sucked me right back into that old misery. The consequences of my decisions compounded it further. I felt utterly, hopelessly trapped.

Somehow, I kept picking jobs where I'd end up doing entire shifts alone, which once again made things more difficult in some ways, but also allowed me to do lots of internet searching, and it was during these lonely shifts that I found some communities online that were critical of gender ideology. At first, the "transphobic" language (such as calling trans women "male") horrified me. I felt so incredibly guilty for even reading the words in front of me, but I couldn't look away. It was my first exposure to a perspective towards trans issues that wasn't the mainstream narrative, which I now knew was at least not true for me. I searched for topics of detransition and regret, and I saw other young women posting similar stories to mine. Somebody recommended the book *Female Erasure* by Ruth Barrett, which presented me with both illuminating facts that contradicted the trans narrative and an alternative, positive image of womanhood. I still remember the exact moment, standing crouched over the work iPad alone in my smoothie store, when I had the mind-bending realization that not only was I not the only one going through this, but it was a full fledged phenomenon. I had been involved in a cult-like movement.

I soon found out about parent groups and advocates like 4thWaveNow. Here, I could read a lot of thoroughly researched information on trans activism, corruption, regulatory and institutional capture, and more non-ideological critiques of the trans movement. I found out about "Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria" (ROGD), which is a term coined by researcher Lisa Littman. It describes certain patterns parents have reported that preceded the sudden declaration by their adolescent children that they are transgender, most notably in adolescents who showed no pronounced gender incongruence in childhood. I read her study, and I just about ticked every box.

Pre-existing mental health issues, check. A friend group where multiple people began identifying as trans around the same time, check. Decline in mental health and parent-child relationship since identifying as trans, check. Expressing distrust/dislike of non-transgender people and spending less time around non-transgender friends, check. Isolating self from family, check. Only trusting information about gender from pro-transgender sources, check. Increased social media use directly preceding the identification as trans, check.

I was in shock. This was... me! Perhaps more importantly, this was... EVERYONE! All of those young biological females I had been friends with online and offline who identified as trans also fit this *exact* description.

While researching this phenomenon, I also learned that in the years that I began identifying as trans, the demographics of people seeking to transition had changed dramatically. I learned that gender dysphoria was once seen primarily in pre-pubescent boys and adult men. I learned that there had already been research into these men, and that they had completely different histories and motivations to myself and the other girls who fit the description of ROGD.

Finally... I saw that Dr. Littman had been targeted for her research. Targeted by activists infuriated by her evidence that contradicted the trans narrative they were so emotionally dependent on, her institution turned its back on her, unwilling to stand up to the activists.

I was angry.

I was angry about having this kind of information kept from me by the community, which I now understood exhibits information control dynamics similar to that of cults or extreme religious sects. I was angry that clinicians either didn't understand or didn't make the effort to read this information about demographics and gender dysphoria. I was angry that I had been affirmed every step of the way, and only questioned when I was starting to express regret. I was angry that people who seemed to be making a genuine attempt to understand this new phenomenon were being targeted, and I was angry that I would have targeted them too if I had known about this not long ago.

This inspired me to boot up that old 25 follower Twitter account I had made in college and subsequently abandoned. Furiously, I began typing away a thread defending the idea of ROGD, and offering details of my own life trajectory to back it up. I didn't know if anybody would see my post, but I wanted to get these thoughts out. People did see it though, and I began to interact with other detransitioners, parents, and trans-critical people. Hearing how deeply so many people were being affected by this phenomenon that had been so damaging to me too was invigorating, and I became passionate about understanding it (and my experiences) as thoroughly as I could and exchanging ideas with others who were lost in the confusion with me.

As I began to feel strengthened by the knowledge that this was a phenomenon and not a personal failing, I decided I would tell my parents when I saw them next. Sometime in the spring of 2018, they invited me to visit them back in my hometown. I felt myself growing more and more nervous as the day of my flight approached, and on that day, I was a wreck. The airport in my hometown has a long hallway that requires maybe 10 minutes to traverse from the terminal to baggage claim. I distinctly remember my walk down this corridor and seeing my parents as two little dots at the very end. The dots grew and their image came into focus, and with every step I felt more afraid, my heart pounding in my chest, stomach churning, and a dizziness overcoming my body. At about 50 meters away, my vision blacked out for a few seconds! That's how terrified I was to admit to my parents what I had realized!

When I told them, it was that night at dinner when they asked me "what's new?" It was an awkward conversation, but at least they didn't say "I told you so". They didn't say much; maybe they didn't know what to say. They did say they were glad to hear it though and that they thought detransitioning was the right decision. My brother was fairly silent throughout, and later that night I heard him say to his gaming friends on Discord, "Sooo, my sister isn't trans anymore."

The hardest thing about detransitioning in my case has thankfully not been living with permanent damage to my body, something many other young people

with similar histories to mine cannot say. It has been coming to terms with the bad decisions I made that made my emotional struggles much more painful, my ability to socially adjust and have healthy relationships much more difficult, and generally took my life in an unexpected direction that has been *very* hard to climb out of. In many ways I am still climbing out of it. The years following my initial decision to detransition have been fraught with challenges that, with each overcoming, have required me to mature beyond my age. I am very thankful for that, and am growing to truly enjoy and respect myself, but it has also made finding my place in the world difficult. I have continued to struggle with many of the original problems that lead me to identify as trans in the first place, like social weaknesses, anxieties about not fitting in, poor body image, unresolved childhood grief, shame, and conflicts in my family.

Living life by delusion and going to such extreme lengths to chase a falsehood steer one away from true resolution of such natural human issues. Even if the testosterone itself hadn't had such a damaging effect on my mind and my life, the very act of trans identity and transition was, for me, an act of immense self-harm. Emotions are a way for the unconscious body to communicate to the part of us that experiences conscious thought about how our environment and the people around us affect us. In order to move through and overcome painful emotions, we must first acknowledge the core emotion that is occurring and have compassion towards ourselves for feeling the emotion in the context within which it is occurring. Trans identity took me far away from this into blaming and punishing my body for the emotions I was feeling. It resulted in an even wider disconnect from understanding the conditions that led me to feel such sadness, fear, and grief. Transitioning made my mental health much, much worse. Not better. It was a "fuck you" to the hurting child inside of me. It was telling her that she didn't matter. It was telling her that I hated her and wanted to annihilate her. It was an act of war against myself.

War against yourself comes with a cost. In the aftermath, there are fires to put out, ashes and debris to clean up, towns to rebuild and ground to fertilize so that life may exist once again. Having just been at war, these necessities of the aftermath feel insurmountable; the body and mind is too exhausted. I had to

begin not with action but with turning inward and finally respecting the emotions I had tried to cast away and smother. With each level of depth into compassion with myself, I could then turn to one step of action that would move me forward in the outside world. That has been my back and forth process of healing and recovery from years that not only were wasted, but pulled me down so deep I nearly drowned.

I often felt that upon waking up from “the spell”, I was transported backwards in time into the consciousness of my fifteen-year-old self. Like all the years of being trans were not really me, and the real me lied dormant under it all, finally able to come forward once the false persona disintegrated. Being the “real me” again, years out from detransitioning at this point, I still can’t fully wrap my head around having been consumed by that false persona. It doesn’t really feel like that was me. And it makes me sad that I did feel the need to reject myself to such a degree as to completely dissociate from who I was, because I quite like myself now, actually. I recognize that many of my qualities that have made certain aspects of life more difficult also make me unique in a very powerful way.



Photo 1: about 6 months after I quit testosterone. Photo 2: About a year post detransition. Photo 3: About 2 years post detransition. Photo 4: About 2.5 years post detransition, I still was really not doing well up until the time of the next photo. Photo 5: About 3 years post detransition. 2021 was a big year for me because I made some major strides in my emotional wellbeing and started practicing far better nutrition. Photo 6: About 3.5 years post detransition. My mental and physical health are better than they have ever been, but there is still much work to be done!

My story is not a fluke, and I am not uniquely troubled or irresponsible. What I am though, is fortunate, because there are others for whom the harm has been

exponentially worse. I am fortunate to have at least been 18 by the time anybody was able to prescribe those dangerous hormones to me. I shudder to think how different my life would be if I were given puberty blockers, hormones, or surgeries as an adolescent. I know detransitioners who were given these medical interventions as minors and the harm they are suffering with is unimaginable for most people. Today, any young person who remotely struggles with self-esteem, making friends, fitting in to common gender roles, or body image is now vulnerable to being subjected to what amount to medical experiments that may permanently destroy the prior functioning of their bodies before they have had the chance to build identity and strength through the normal means of overcoming life's challenges. I have seen firsthand that for some people, and I am determined to share my story to help people understand that the situation is so much more complicated and dangerous than what the trans activists put forward. All young people deserve to come of age in a healthy body, surrounded by loving adults that guide them towards self-acceptance, not subjected to medical experiments and told lies about their bodies being wrong and in need of changing. For this reason, I support H.B. 454 to protect children and adolescents like I once was.