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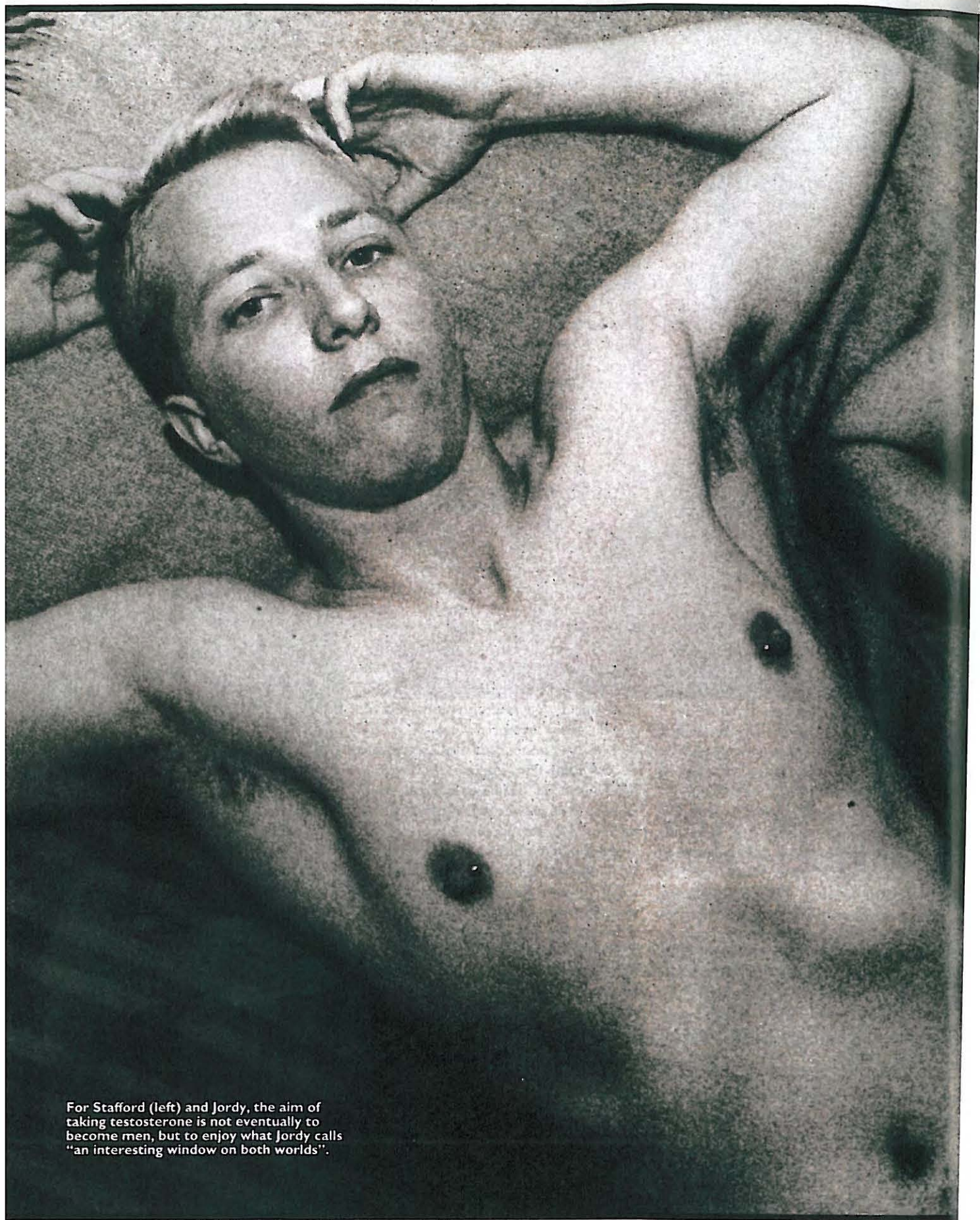


Girls will be boys

Lesbians on
testosterone



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For Stafford (left) and Jordy, the aim of taking testosterone is not eventually to become men, but to enjoy what Jordy calls "an interesting window on both worlds".

They can get by without their tits, but they can't get by without their testosterone. New androgynists are trading big hips and lipstick for biceps and body hair

Girl meets Boy

■ THE SCENE IS A WAREHOUSE apartment in San Francisco's South of Market area. Stafford lies face down on the bed, buttocks exposed, and Jordy, having first carefully wiped an area with an alcohol swab, makes a stab with a hypodermic syringe. "You have to let the alcohol dry or it stings when the needle goes in," Jordy explains, as the clear fluid drains into Stafford's body. A few minutes later Stafford does the same thing to Jordy.

"The first time I did this I immediately dropped to the ground and did 50 push-ups," Jordy says. Stafford's not so sure. "The first time I did it I thought, 'It's immediately working!' but it doesn't really work that fast. Your mind makes it work that fast." Whether or not the physical effects are that immediate, they are certainly dramatic, with ramifications that go far

beyond a quick high. This is no ordinary drug and, despite appearances, Stafford and Jordy are not ordinary men. In fact, they are not men at all, but women — or at least they were once — and the "drug" is the male sex hormone, testosterone.

Jordy and Stafford are among a growing number of (predominantly lesbian and bisexual) women who are taking testosterone with no intention of turning themselves into men — though they do refer to each other as "he". The look is androgyny and the upshot an entirely new sex. "I never felt like a girl. The person I saw in the mirror didn't look like the person I saw in my mind. Now I don't feel like a man, I just feel like me. I feel like the balance is finally there," says Stafford, who has been taking testosterone "on and off" for two and a half years and ▶

Story Tessa Souter Photography Diana M. Smith

has been injecting 200ml of the testosterone Enanthate every two weeks for the past six months. Now she no longer has periods and has developed biceps (without working out), is much stronger, has more body and facial hair, an increased sex drive, a deeper voice, a thicker waist, a larger clitoris and slimmer hips.

Her roommate Jordy, who injects 100ml a week of the testosterone Cipionate, and who "in an ideal world would like to be a fully functioning hermaphrodite", has experienced all of the above changes as well as having put on height and grown out of all her shoes. "[The testosterone] felt more like a deficiency that had been taken care of than something that didn't belong in me," she says. Nevertheless, "It's a major body modification," says Stafford. "It's like piercing your ear times a hundred." Both are thrilled with the effects so far and proudly show off their hairy legs and stomachs like boys who have been brought up all their lives actively

less damaging to the liver than taking it in pill form. "My gynaecologist was worried I would grow a moustache, but I jumped at the chance to become more masculine — perhaps even to pass [as a man]," says Frankie, who describes her former self as "a butch trapped in a femme's body".

Since then her voice has dropped by at least one octave and her clitoris has enlarged to the extent that it's actually formed a head. ("When I get hard it comes out of its hood and looks like a little uncircumcised penis," she says.) And she now leads a double life as a woman by day at work — "where I have to try to speak softer and higher, so I don't shock people too much" — and a man by night — when she "picks" a homemade penis constructed from gel-filled condoms in her pants. "I'm somewhere in between male and female. I have a male vibration, but I also like my female body. I have options. I can wear lipstick and male or female clothes," says Frankie. "There are more than two

Other traditionally "male" traits include "being a lot colder about things" and an inability to cry easily. "I used to cry when I read the newspaper over both sad or happy things. Now I can't cry," she says. "It's kind of awful not crying, but I was *too* sensitive before. Now I'm driven more by physical urges than emotional ones." Stafford is much more aggressive than she used to be and is quicker to anger. "I'm less likely to let people mess with me. And I know why [men] get so angry when you cut them off in traffic. Before I was like, 'Oh what's the matter with them?' Now I'm more, 'You must die for what you've done!'"

According to Dr Barry Zevin, who helps run a San Francisco clinic for the poor (which includes a facility for transgender people), other attributes that may develop with testosterone use include raised cholesterol levels, an increased risk of heart disease, and baldness. "It's possible

"I can really understand the crazy things they do, like drive fast and rape girls"

to welcome body hair. "It is addictive — especially the sexual urge part of it. I went from wanting sex once a week to having to jerk off three or four times a day and I thought it was great," says Stafford. "It works for me," agrees Jordy. "Although when I'm on my bicycle and I get a spontaneous hard-on in traffic it can be a bit distracting."

The increased sex drive is probably one of the most dramatic effects of taking testosterone. Another convert, Frankie, originally began taking it at 38 as part of a combined oestrogen-testosterone pill to counteract the symptoms of an early menopause — including loss of libido, exhaustion and the beginnings of osteoporosis. Within months, her bones got stronger, she had more energy than she'd ever had in her life and her sex drive returned from "nothing" to "waking up horny every morning". Already a cross-dresser, she liked the effects so much she upped her dose to 100ml of Enanthate every two weeks and switched to injecting it, which is

genders. There's nothing wrong with being a masculine woman or a feminine man." Although she remains bisexual, since taking testosterone Frankie has developed a preference for more feminine women and now understands men a lot more. "I'm a feminist, but I can really understand and empathise with teenage boys and the crazy things they do, like drive fast and rape girls," she says. "I went to a Renaissance Fair recently where all the women were in costumes with cleavages showing and it was all I could do not to grab people. Attraction is intensified a hundred times." Her "one vice" is strip shows, which she doesn't see as a contradiction of her feminism. "The women feel powerful," says Frankie, who used to be a go-go dancer. "It's like a goddess thing. I worship them." Stafford, too, finds that she now prefers "super feminine" women. And monogamy is out of the question. "I'm sexually interested in too many things now — basically anything that moves," she says, laughing.

that there is a decreased risk of breast and uterine cancer, but since no-one has ever studied this we can't be sure. It may even increase the risk," says Zevin. "In fact, the level of uncertainty about the safety of all this is pretty big and there are some serious medical side-effects including mood swings, aggression, depression, anger, and underlying mental health problems surfacing. There is also a substantial risk of liver tumours with oral testosterone — although the risks are small with injectables."

In spite of his reservations, Zevin continues to prescribe hormones. "There are some ethical issues about whether we should be providing this stuff but, for me, the fact that we're able to reach these people and give them primary care monitoring outweighs these concerns. I would not encourage anyone to do this, but for the most part the people coming in are already getting hormones on the black market. At least we can make sure they get breast checks and pap smears and general preventative

medicine. We warn people to expect the worst. They will certainly be infertile while they're taking it and may well be after stopping. They should also expect their menstrual cycle to stop and a certain change in hair distribution. And if their cholesterol goes up to a dangerous level then we won't give them the higher dose."

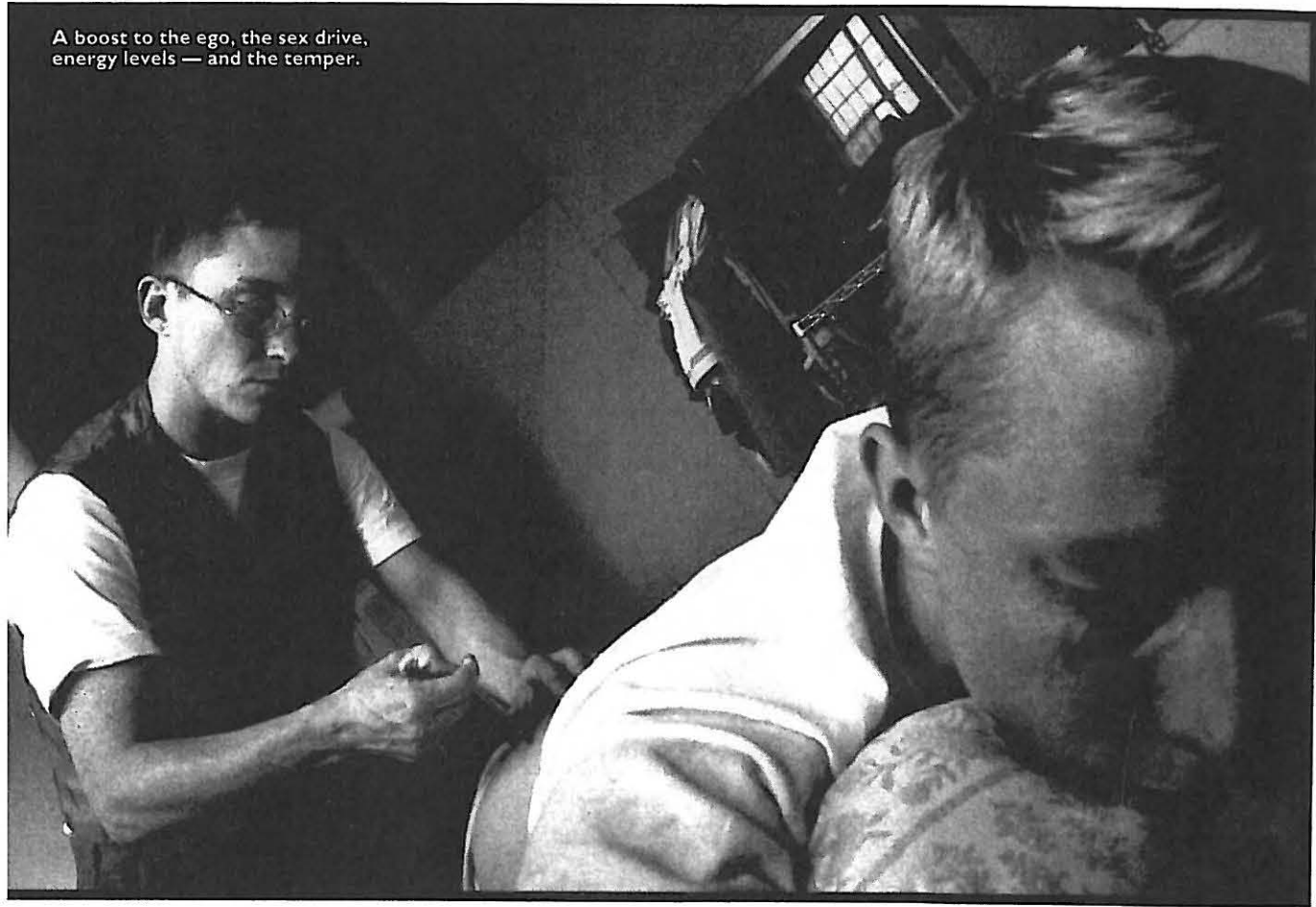
Until Stafford found out about Zevin's clinic she got her testosterone from "a doctor who had this scam run-

you don't act assertively you come over as a wimp. And there are definite rules [to living in a man's world]." Even to using a toilet in a public bar. "In a straight establishment you don't look at any other men. Absolutely not. And you don't catch anybody's glance accidentally in the mirror. Just wash your hands and get the hell out of there. And you don't start a conversation because it's either a gay come-on or a conflict. In a gay place it's OK to glance at each

can run longer. I need about an hour less sleep now and have so much more basic energy. Colours are brighter, things are more three-dimensional. I feel more in the world than I used to."

The emotional effects are a mixed bag. "I communicate less about feelings than women do and I miss that," says Frankie. "But I used to be capable of half-hour crying fits and having monthly mood swings and I didn't like that in myself. Now I'm much more mellow,

A boost to the ego, the sex drive, energy levels — and the temper.



ning where I would come in every two weeks and pay \$80 a time." No medical check-ups were provided. Now she and Jordy pay between \$15 and \$30 each for 10 doses and have their livers and cholesterol levels regularly monitored. In fact, they are more worried about baldness than liver damage and both joke that they would consider reducing their dosage if they looked in danger of suffering substantial hair loss. In the meantime they enjoy what Jordy calls "an interesting window on both worlds".

Says Frankie: "When you're dressed as a man people expect you to know about cars and sports and things and if

other or even start a conversation in the mirror, but not in the stalls or at the urinal. But women always talk, even if they don't know each other. Men's rooms are very quiet."

Another of Frankie's discoveries was that "men masturbate much more than they will ever let on to their wives and girlfriends. I never knew that until I started taking this and talked to my male friends and they all said that they did it once or twice a day without exception," she says. However, her most exciting discovery was "that high" that she thinks all men are keeping secret. "They've got a lot more strength. They

stable and calm and I don't take things so personally. And my male friends on female hormones are experiencing the opposite — crying more, getting physically weaker, having a lower sex drive."

"It's the best of both worlds," says Stafford. "You get to decide consciously your sexuality and what your body's going to look like — to a degree. I feel like I'm the freest person in the world. I decide how I act, who I'm going to interact with, who I'm going to have a relationship with, how the world will perceive me and where my body is going to go. You get to play God a little bit, I guess." ■