

Introduction: Am I even queer?

Because I think I want to take testosterone.

I mean, I'm wearing men's underwear right now.

Is that a boy? Is that a girl?

Man, woman, cisgender, transgender, like we're born into language.

Butch, femme, T-girl.

Decolonized.

Queer, trans, BIPOC.

Neurodivergence.

Cisgender, hetero, patriarchal, capitalist girl boss.

Queer femme, lipstick every day.

T4T fag-boy relationship.

Butch, boyish, spritely.

The softer, more fay.

Oh, you're so feminine. You're so feminine.

Attraction to [00:00:30] a hot T-boy.

I used sexuality to try to understand my gender.

What does it look like for non-binary people to "transition"?

I was a boy. If I was looking down at the memory, I was a boy.

It's really difficult to look at gender identity head-on.

Wait, I think I'm trans.

Babette: You know, Ally, it took me a really long time to figure out how exactly you're famous. There's this combination of comedy, [00:01:00] CollegeHumor stuff, but in the past few years, you've also made your way into this Dungeon and Dragons

community, which I feel like people don't realize that Dungeon and Dragons is actually very queer, very trans. And I'm curious how you've been thinking about D&D as it relates to your gender and what it's been like for you to be in this community for the past few years.

So as a queer person, can you sell me on D&D right now? [00:01:30] What is the appeal? Why are so many queer and trans people into D&D and what has it meant for you to be a part of this community for the past few years?

Ally: This is a really funny question right now because I was just up until 3:00 AM playing D&D in a warehouse last night, so that's why I'm so fucking tired.

Yeah, I do think it's like the queer fandom of D&D is enormous. There are a lot of queer [00:02:00] players on these kind of major shows, so I do think a huge part of it is one, it's just fun. It's like storytelling. It's like those shows like The Moth or these big storytelling shows, if during the story they had to roll dice and depending on the number they got, had to change the story completely, like you roll a good choice-

Babette: Oh, there's an improvisational...

Ally: Exactly, exactly. You can say something's going [00:02:30] to happen, but then roll a 20-sided dice and if you get a one, it absolutely fails. It's just randomized storytelling and I think kind of in this way, and Persephone talks about this in this interview, but a lot of queer people I feel like have the avatar, not the movie, not the blue people, but this video game avatar awakening when they're really young, where they're like, "I'm always picking the woman," or, "I'm always picking the man" as a [00:03:00] root memory, and that's the first little taste of freedom and choice that you get as a young person where everything is like, "Oh, you're a little boy. You're a little heartbreaker. Aren't you?" All this weird language we get from adults.

So D&D is a lot like that. You just get to make up a character. You're not even in costume. You're just like, "This is what I look like," and everyone's like, "Yeah." No one's going to be like, "You don't actually look like that character that you're pitching." [00:03:30] That's the whole point. You can just pick anything that you can dream of.

I think a big part of my transition and early watching transition videos on YouTube and stuff like that, some of that started because I was like, "I'm going to play a trans guy cowboy in New York City." That was an early character that I played in this show, Dimension 20, that I'm on. Yeah, it was just an excuse [00:04:00] to keep researching the stuff I already wanted to research. I was just like, "Okay, how do you take testosterone? What are some meds you could take with it?"

Babette: It's for the role, it's for the role.

Ally: Yeah, exactly.

Babette: Right. It's just for the role.

Ally: I'm just method acting honestly, even to this day. This is all for my D&D campaign. I'm a cis woman named Ashley and...

Babette: Right!

Ally: Yeah. But [00:04:30] you haven't played, right, even though there are a lot of people you know that play?

Babette: I've never played. Someone that I'm close to plays and they have a game every Sunday, and I feel like whenever they come back from it, I'm like, "Did you win?" And they're like, "That's simply not how it works." I'm just like, "Are you winning, son? You did good?" And I'm just learning that's not what it's about.

So no, I know absolutely nothing about it and I feel like it's through you that I've learned some things about it and I know a lot of the people [00:05:00] that admire you are very passionate about this show, and it kind of also tees up this interview pretty perfectly because you talked about Dimension 20. The guest that we're going to talk to you today was part of Dimension 20, right?

Ally: Yeah, definitely. Today, we're talking to my friend Persephone Valentine, and she is like a content creator, drag performer, internet D&D person. She's done a lot of stuff in that space, and I really loved what we got to [00:05:30] talk about.

Quick disclaimer up top. I recorded the top of this episode in my car while driving home from therapy, which I had forgotten about, so please bear with the car noises. It does switch to a better mic at the end. Thanks for listening!

Persephone, how are you?

Persephone: How am I?

Ally: Yeah.

Persephone: I'm fucking great. I'm so good. I am fantastic.

Ally: Good.

Persephone: I am being crushed by the existential dread of the universe, [00:06:00] but that's normal.

Ally: Oh, oh, interesting. Interesting. We have different definitions of fantastic I think.

Persephone: You know, if you can't depress yourself thinking about the heat death of the universe, what can you rely on?

Ally: I deeply agree. What is your relationship to femininity, and more specifically, your femininity?

Persephone: Oh, I am aggressively feminine is what some of my friends have called it, like in your face, [00:06:30] violently feminine, if that can be a term, but my relationship with my femininity is extremely complicated in that I both love it and sometimes I just can't fucking stand it. I hate it so much.

Ally: Wait, what do you mean?

Persephone: Well, the thing is that it's performative. Yes, I'm feminine, but it's the performance of the feminine that gets to be tiring, and I think it's the same for all sort of gender presentation, especially when you're trans and you're [00:07:00] so adamant about being seen the way that you want to be seen. That can get really exhausting because my default state is a goblin in a pile of maybe clean clothes on my bed that I'm laying on top playing with my Switch. So it becomes complicated when you are someone who wants to be seen as a particular gender and having the requirement of that hanging over your head can be exhausting.

Ally: [00:07:30] Whoa, okay. That's so interesting because I feel like I've heard something similar from a lot of my trans femme friends. I'm curious if you have to take each day and see what your bandwidth is for femme presentation?

Persephone: I think that that is true, but I will be real; I expend almost all of my bandwidth towards that.

Ally: Really?

Persephone: If I am leaving the house, [00:08:00] I will be as femme as humanly possible. Maybe I won't have the most elaborate makeup or anything, but there are certain requirements that I will not go below when I go out. I have to have my beard covered. Because I have to have my beard covered, I have to use heavy foundation, which means I need to balance it out with other makeup, otherwise I'll look like a ghost. My hair must always be done, stuff like that. Always.

Ally: Whoa, whoa. Yes.

Persephone: It's a defense mechanism. It's a way to protect myself. It's not just for my own peace of mind. [00:08:30] It's not all just to silence the dysphoria of how I feel

about myself. Most of it's really just so that people don't kill me if I go to the bathroom.

Ally: Oh my god. That's so dark and so real. What part of that feels like safety and what part of it feels euphoric or do those kind of percentages change all the time?

Persephone: They do change all the time, but I will say that the amount of euphoria I get from [00:09:00] it has lessened the further in my transition I get and the closer I get to passing privilege or whatever you want to call it. I know it's a kind of a complicated term within the scene, but that comes with safety.

But the problem is is that the closer you get, the more work it becomes, and the more you learn, the more work it becomes, and there are things that can make it easier, like beard hair removal, facial feminization, body feminization, [00:09:30] all of that, which I've done a lot of. I've had laser consistently for a year and I'm still dealing with the remaining dregs of my facial hair still clinging to my face like a bad relationship. But even though that makes it easier, it's still this weight and that weight will never go away. It doesn't matter how far along you are in your transition; because of the way society sees us and because of the way that we're taught to fear, it doesn't matter how "beautiful" [00:10:00] you are in the traditional sense or how traditionally feminine you are or how passable you are, there will always be that feeling inside of worry and fear.

But at the same time, I do love this shit. I love all aspects of femininity. I love hair, makeup, nails. Even though all these things don't necessarily make you a woman, these are things that I do enjoy. It's just would I rather have the option to engage with them when I feel like it? Yes. But then again, to a degree, cis women feel the same way.

Ally: Yeah, definitely. [00:10:30] I can so see that. What kind of places do you think you feel most at ease when it comes to how other people are perceiving you or where do you feel most peaceful and not going through a checklist of like, "Oh, did I do this? Did I cover this space?"

Persephone: Home, my house! You know?

Ally: Oh, yeah, that's real.

Persephone: There are actually people that I feel very comfortable with, but even some of them, [00:11:00] I don't think I would want them to see me fully without makeup or fully in a state of when I wake up. Seeing me when I first wake up in the morning is something that comes with a high degree of trust and fear. There's only a few people that see me without makeup in-person. I'll post pictures without makeup, but they're always in good lighting and stuff like that.

But [00:11:30] except for roommates and people I've lived with or the scant few relationships I've had, most people don't get to see me without makeup.

Ally: So home, like bed zone with your Switch?

Persephone: Just being a cave gremlin, a cave troll, yeah.

Ally: How has it felt to be in the game sphere and be kind of an openly trans person? What has the reaction been like if you've talked [00:12:00] to any fans or even coworkers and people you meet out while in the job kind of world or at cons or whatever?

Persephone: Well, in my day job, the only people that really know are the people that saw my paperwork because my paperwork isn't complete as far as my name change and stuff yet. No one else asks. No one asks. No one's asked me for years or assumed for years as far as I know, unless they've seen that paperwork as far as the day-job goes.

I [00:12:30] am out publicly, but it's mostly with the creative stuff I do. And it's interesting that you mention fans because I think when I was on D20, Dimension 20, a lot of people really vibed with the fact that I was trans that I was playing a trans character, so much so that I actually used to get really, really mad. I haven't talked about this publicly, but I've ranted about this to Brennan and stuff. A bunch of people were being like, "The first trans person on D20." I'm like, "Ally is right there, you [00:13:00] fuck-face! Just because Ally isn't binary trans doesn't mean shit."

Ally: Oh my god.

Persephone: It'd be one thing if you're like the first trans femme person or the first trans woman, but the first trans person? Suck a dick.

Ally: I know. This is really getting at a huge thing that we want to talk about on this podcast, which is like, am I trans enough? Are there rungs on the trans ladder and is non-binary part-trans?

Persephone: Well, so here's the thing, and you might not know this actually. [00:13:30] Part of my professional tool set outside of content creation or acting and stuff is that I'm actually a civil rights and queer and Black educator and sensitivity consultant and trainer.

Ally: Amazing.

Persephone: It depends on the individual, but non-binary identities do fall under the umbrella of trans experience. Some non-binary people or agender folks don't necessarily like to call themselves transgender. It's because it involves the word

gender and [00:14:00] the movement of gender when they'd rather just be outside of it. But when you're talking about it in an academic sense or an overall sense, these people do fall under the trans umbrella and are perfectly able to call themselves trans.

And the idea that there's something that is trans enough is such absolute fucking bullshit, just complete and total trash thinking. And specifically, I'm going to call out white trans women here specifically because they do this shit all the time where they're like-

Ally: Oh my god.

Persephone: "My identity is threatened [00:14:30] by non-binary people because my situation's what's okay and theirs is not," and these same people don't understand any sort of appearance-based discrimination for any other reasons other than being trans, which also gets my goat, but there is no such thing as trans enough. The identities that fall under the umbrella of being trans are wide and varied and there's as many different kinds as there are different kinds of people and how people define their [00:15:00] gender or their transness is completely different to one another. You can take, especially two or three non-binary people, put them next to each other in a room and their ideas of their own gender will be completely different. They will not be the same.

Ally: Oh my God. Totally, yeah.

Persephone: I also think it's the same people that are like, "Did you transition medically?" And I'm just like, "Ugh." There are non-binary folks that transition medically. There are binary folks that transition medically. There are cis people that use [00:15:30] the same hormones we do to validate their gender. Just look at all these fucking bodybuilders on testosterone supplements. It doesn't make you better than anyone else.

Ally: Wow! Yes. No, you're totally right. There are so many gender-affirming choices that cis people make, for sure.

Do you mind, would you like to talk about transitioning medically or how that was for you?

Persephone: Sure. I mean, I'm still in the middle of it. I've been on and off hormones due to various [00:16:00] insurance issues and also my own idiocy because I have ADHD and let my prescriptions lapse, so off and on. Since I'm currently on, thank God, because guess what? They have mail-order services now. They may not take my insurance, but at least I don't have to deal with doctors anymore.

Ally: Oh my god. Amazing.

Persephone: Also, moving states didn't help either because the rules are kind of different between California and Massachusetts and Planned Parenthood doesn't take my insurance in this state. They did over there and I had a trans doctor at one point [00:16:30] who retired, and then I lost my script for a half-a-year because I couldn't find another provider near me.

Ally: Oh my god.

Persephone: She was weird though. She was an elder trans, and I mean that you should respect your trans elders because there's not enough of them, but in the sense of, "You must always be stealth, no one can know," and I'm just over here being like, "Hey, I'm trans!" You know? Very much like that.

Ally: It was a different time for them. Oh my god, yeah. I completely get that.

Persephone: It was. And I mean, it's [00:17:00] still a safety thing. There's still people that are stealth and I guess I'm semi-stealth at work because I don't talk about it.

Ally: Yeah, definitely.

Persephone: But as far as transitioning medically, I've run the gamut. I've had so many surgeries, both covered by insurance and not covered by insurance. I destroyed my credit because of the first ones I tried to get covered by insurance because of arguments between two insurance companies not wanting to cover it. That destroyed my credit.

Ally: No!

Persephone: Yeah. They eventually did, but not before the damage was done.

Ally: Ugh.

Persephone: [00:17:30] Currently, the one surgery that I haven't yet done, even though I've crowdfunded for it, is bottom surgery. But I crowdfunded last year, I believe it was, for several different surgeries including bottom surgery, and I ran out of money halfway because I misjudged what inflation would've done to the prices, and by the time I got official quotes and also I was denied for a few surgeries and had to replace them with other ones because I didn't have-

Ally: Wait, what?

Persephone: Yeah, so when I got my body contouring stuff done, I was originally [00:18:00] going to basically get a fat transfer, like a BBL but for your hips, because I am a stick with tits or like a rectangle with tits more now, and they were like, "We

can't actually do much of anything with you and your body fat." So instead, I had to get a procedure for implants that was triple the cost, which was hell.

Ally: Wow, wow.

Persephone: Yeah. So I'm currently trying to figure out how I'm going to do bottom surgery. I had made my decision to get it done, but there's still a part of me like, "What's going to happen if you do?" Because [00:18:30] it's not as simple as you get the surgery, you recover, you have a vagina. No, there's so much maintenance that goes into it.

Ally: That's like a two-parter, right, bottom surgery?

Persephone: It can be. It depends on which type you get. There's so many different procedures for trans femme bottom surgery now.

Ally: Interesting.

Persephone: The one that I want really is the most recent one where it actually produces its own lubrication. It's like the most modern procedure.

But yeah, [00:19:00] I've had facial surgeries done twice. The first time left divots in my skull, which is an ongoing issue. I've had breast implants.

Ally: What?

Persephone: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It wasn't good. I'd name names, but I have about six months before the statute of limitation runs out and I'm still debating whether I'm going to sue.

Ally: Oh my god.

Persephone: So fun facts, y'all!

Ally: I mean, yes, this stuff is complicated.

Persephone: It is.

Ally: How do you ground [00:19:30] yourself or given that this is just way too much to have on a person's plate and is very unfair, how do you navigate it? How do you keep yourself motivated and sane? What are the moments that carry you through?

Persephone: I think honestly, it's just that I am too fucking stubborn to give up. I'm just too stubborn to stop or let anything hold me down, like bitchily stubborn.

Honestly, [00:20:00] the weight of all this and the surgeries really gets to me. I had two procedures in the last six months and one of them was six surgeries in one. The recovery process is very brutal. It wears on you, just the weight of all the things you have to do. It'd be one thing if it was just so that you look at yourself and feel right, but it's not just that. It's so that the world looks at you and doesn't see anything wrong, which [00:20:30] is the exhausting part.

Ally: Wow. Yes. Is there a difference there, do you think, for you between what you're looking for in yourself or looking right versus this kind of external gaze and what it's requesting from how you present?

Persephone: I do, mostly because it's a combination of things like beauty standards, but I'm also half-black. Though I don't deal with as much beauty standard bullshit as darker skinned black women [00:21:00] do, there's still this expectation of whiteness as a beauty standard, as a European features as a beauty standard, that I will not and refuse to entertain trying to match, so that's different from my expectations of what I see of myself.

It's also how femme or how masc you're seen as is cultural and can change from area to area. Here, I might be viewed as a woman, but I might be viewed [00:21:30] as super masculine in an East Asian country or something, like Korea or Japan, but my idea of what I want to be is also still affected by cultural standards, but there's a few things that I refuse to entertain.

Ally: Yeah, totally. Like those kind of European beauty standards.

Persephone: Yeah, like you must have a perfectly straight nose with a flipped up tip or you must be pale.

[00:22:00] I am pretty racially ambiguous, but I do not look white even though I'm half-white. Could I, if I went to surgeons, look more Caucasian? Yes. Am I going to do that? No. But at the same time, I got to be real. I am two months out from facial surgeries, like revisions, and after the recovery, I'm looking at myself like, "I don't think it was enough," but I've also reached my limit, not just money-wise, but of what I'm willing to [00:22:30] do because it's exhausting.

Ally: Totally. I remember we were talking a couple of weeks back about surgeries and gender-affirming care and who it's for in this kind of way, and I was talking about how I was so glad to get top surgery, but also I'm curious if I would've gotten it if there wasn't just such a hyper fixation on boobs [00:23:00] in general and how awkward it made me feel.

Persephone: Yeah. I think my transition would be different without the lens of the world looking in on us as some evil monstrous creature. I do think it would be different. I don't know if I would've gotten boobs. I definitely still would've removed my beard. I know that for sure. I would definitely still be removing my

beard, even though it took me forever to get to it. I would definitely still be doing that, but I don't know. I feel like a lot of the body work I have, I might have [00:23:30] not done or not entertained.

I think that there would still be things that I would need to do to feel comfortable myself, like some of the facial surgeries and stuff, but I don't know if I would've been as obsessive about, "I must have hips so that I don't look like a box." I think in a world where gender was seen as more malleable and more accepted, would I be so adamant about being trans femme?

I feel like I would still [00:24:00] be femme and I feel like I would still be trans femme, but I think I'd probably lean more towards she/they, like a non-binary femme, still a girl, but doesn't care. I feel like I would do a lot more playing with gender because I do enjoy playing with gender. I do drag looks, both drag queen, drag king stuff, and when I voice act, there's no limits to what I'm willing to do with my voice because I'll do anything from up here to all the way down here. It doesn't matter [00:24:30] to me.

So I'd probably play with that a lot more in my day-to-day just for fun, but I also don't think that I would identify that way now just because of the way that my life has gone and the way that I have sort of built myself up. You know?

Ally: Yeah, totally. I'm really interested in your use of the word play. Do you feel like there's really dire things [00:25:00] that you're having to deal with and some people have the luxury of being able to play with gender?

Persephone: I mean, I still have the luxury of being able to play with gender. That's what drag is.

Ally: Yeah, that's true.

Persephone: Playing with gender in an extreme way and making comedy or art with it is just what drag is. I feel like I do have that luxury. I just don't feel like I want to play with it as much because of the things that are going on with the world as far as my day-to-day presentation and stuff.

[00:25:30] But do I think that some people have it easier than me? I mean, I am still Black even though I'm light-skinned, so that layer of it does affect things. It also affects how I'm seen as a woman because blackness, especially femme Black people, are often viewed as more masculine, so that does color things and make things more extreme for women like me, especially people who are darker than me.

Do I feel like I have it the worst of everyone in the world? No, no. I am, [00:26:00] in a few ways, highly privileged as a trans person and then not as much in others. You know?

Ally: Yeah. I guess that's important to count, take a moment and be like, "Okay. In these ways, I feel very privileged." Sometimes I feel that way when I talk to earlier generations of trans people too where I'm just kind of like, "Ah. Right. It is a degree easier for me in a lot of ways."

I want to talk about [00:26:30] you DMing, and Twitch streaming, RPGs in general. Do you feel like that's given you an opportunity to play with gender? I know you mentioned you played a trans woman, but...

Persephone: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I play with gender all the time in games, especially when I'm DMing, I give masc or femme voices depending on what the character is, what their gender is, who they are. I don't limit what my range is. So you can have a knight who's masculine like this or a beautiful [00:27:00] princess who talks like this or a witch and speaks like this all the time, ha.

I'll go all out for those things and that's when my gender doesn't affect it because I know it's entertaining and I know it's something that I can do that not everyone can do, so it's like, why not play with that? And I do that for when I play classic RPGs and stuff, I'll voice the game all through. Sometimes I do that with my friend, Anor. We [00:27:30] have this segment called Beauty and the Beard where we'll voice act different things. Right now, we're doing Phoenix Wright and I'm playing both a lot of the femme characters and Edgeworth, so I have a character that talks like this, and then I have Miles Edgeworth, so it's very fun.

Ally: Yes. I love the role of fantasy when it comes to transness. I think that is a very researched and talked about topic online, but it just is true that it gives you so much space to [00:28:00] explore gender among so many other things.

Persephone: Oh, yeah. My first foray is into exploring gender, besides always playing female characters in video games, were not even Dungeons & Dragons. It was actually World of Darkness and LARPing when I started playing femme characters and stuff, so those were the things that really, really convinced me that you are probably going to transition.

I used to be like, "If I transition," [00:28:30] because there was a period of time where I was very gender-fuck and very much wearing heels and makeup every day, but still, "I'm a guy. I'm definitely a guy," and then it slowly became like, "If I transition, if I transition, when I transition," and then I caught myself one day at work thinking, "When I transition," and I just stopped and I was like, "Oh, okay. I guess that's a thing now." I remember that realization distinctly. I was like 23 or 24, yeah.

Ally: Were you excited or were you scared?

Persephone: [00:29:00] I was terrified, I think.

Ally: Yeah, totally.

Persephone: Yeah. What was it like for you?

Ally: I think similarly, I was very like... This therapist that my friend saw for a while talked about this thing that sometimes people do. The analogy that he used was throwing your hat over a fence because you know you're going to have to go over there to go get it, throwing something [00:29:30] that you really like over there. Little moves like that where I would put myself in a position where it was like, "Oh, I'm telling more and more people that I feel non-binary." Okay, now I'm Googling, "How does one go about getting top surgery? Oh, now I'm watching all these YouTube videos." So I was just inching myself forward in this way and getting new info that I knew was going to make me just want to do it more, but I couldn't help myself.

But similarly, I think it was also super [00:30:00] scary to have to be in a relationship, be in a "lesbian relationship," and then be like, "I'm hoping to bring in these more masculine things to our relationship," or, "I'm wanting to surgically remove my breasts." Just some things that felt like really scary conversations and that's not even including Republican parents.

Persephone: Oh, god. Yeah. Do you have Republican parents?

Ally: [00:30:30] Yeah, my mom's super Republican, but my brother is also gay and she has a Bible study that she leads at her church about how you can be gay and Christian.

Persephone: Mm, well, at least there's that.

Ally: So she's an ally, yeah.

Persephone: So you want to hear something pretty fucked up?

Ally: Hm?

Persephone: My mom is a bisexual woman who was raised in a commune in Boston who, after I came out as trans, eventually kicked [00:31:00] me out. We're on good terms now, but she kicked me out a few months after I came out. And keep in mind, I had been dressing femme the entire time, but she just could not handle it. She gets it now I think. We've talked a lot about it, but she did not for a long time. I didn't actually talk to her for a few years.

So I get it. Even my mom, who's the most accepting liberal, and I do mean liberal both in the good and meh sense, person can really struggle [00:31:30] with something that they don't understand.

Ally: Yes, absolutely.

Persephone: I also don't think that people need to understand it. They don't. They just need to know it exists and that we are who we are and that's it, really.

Ally: Yeah, I definitely agree. It feels hard, especially with a parent because they have just been there and they've really formed their opinions about who you are, what they expect of you, so it does seem particularly [00:32:00] earth-shattering for parents in this way where you're like, "You didn't know everything."

Persephone: Mm-hmm. The other thing too is that when I was a kid, I used to play dress-up as a girl all the time. I would walk around telling people I was a girl until it got bullied out of me by kids in kindergarten. That was a known factor. My mom has so many photos of me just dolled up in makeup and stuff, and I was always in her makeup and things.

Although I will say, that's a phase that a lot of kids go through. It doesn't necessarily mean they're trans. [00:32:30] It's how they sort of learn and experience with the world, so let your kids explore.

Ally: Yeah, totally. I always took my dad's razors and shaving cream and would cover my face in shaving cream and shave with the guard on the razor, like the cap.

Persephone: That's so adorable. That's so cute!

Ally: Now I've been on T for two years, waiting for that to be a reality, haven't grown any facial hair.

Persephone: Oh, honey.

Ally: I just shave my bare skin.

Persephone: There's things you can do. A lot of both cis and [00:33:00] trans men I know will use Rogaine on their face to fix their facial hair.

Ally: Oh, you know what? I have heard that. I've heard that. And also, Just For Men dye, you can dye the little... Whatever is growing, you can dye darker and so it will look a little more prominent.

I feel like you have a lot of tricks. It's like hacks. You've hacked certain things.

Persephone: Yeah. I should make a hack YouTube video, "Five-minute gender hacks."

Ally: Make it!

Okay, so speaking for myself, [00:33:30] I would have loved to have transitioned earlier.

Persephone: Same.

Ally: I know not everyone feels like that, but do you feel like that would've been amazing for you as a preteen into teen with people? Yeah.

Persephone: Absolutely, 100%. I wish I transitioned earlier, wouldn't have needed nearly as much surgery and I would probably still feel more comfortable than how I appear now. And I know that I'm very feminine, but I'll look in the mirror sometimes and be like, "I'm [00:34:00] still clockable." I'm still clockable and I've had so much surgery. I know it's a mental thing, but I think that some of the people who have been able to transition early, Kim Petras, for example, half the people I know don't even know that she's trans. She completed her transition really early at 16 and I was like, "That's so cool." That would never happen here because she's German.

But the other thing too is people think that puberty blockers are irreversible, which they're [00:34:30] not.

Ally: They're not, yeah.

Persephone: And most people won't let you even start hormone-hormones until the earliest I've ever seen it done is 13. Usually, it's 16, 15 or 16, and actually, 13 is when you really should start them.

Ally: Totally. This is the important thing. I think that's a big portion of misinformation I think is people saying things along the lines of, "You're going to pump an eight-year-old full of hormones," and you're like, "What are you talking about?" No one is even put on [00:35:00] hormone blockers until puberty, which is when hormones come into the picture.

Persephone: Exactly. And the thing is, if they're put on hormone blockers, they can choose when they're older to go on testosterone, estrogen or whatever, and it'll have similar effects to what it would've had for puberty otherwise because they're on that blocker. If they're not on that blocker, that's when you get people like me, like you and stuff like that.

Although I will say, fuck you, because testosterone is so much more effective post-puberty than estrogen is.

Ally: Is it? Oh, I didn't know.

Persephone: It's so much more. It is, it is. [00:35:30] It does everything from bone shifting to fat transfer to a lot of things, and it changes your voice too. Estrogen doesn't

change your voice. You have to train it to be different. Estrogen will only change your voice if you're pubescent or prepubescent when you start taking it. That's when it has the most effects on the body and it will shift bone development and stuff like that, but if you're doing post-puberty, second puberty, taking it as an adult, it doesn't do nearly as much.

Ally: Yeah. It just makes me [00:36:00] like a really moody 30-year-old.

Persephone: Oh god, what is that? Oh, god. It's true that the brain state of trans people when they start taking new hormones, it's like that of a teenager, which is not to say that we think we're teenagers. It's just the development of the brain changes because you're changing the cycle of it. It just means our brains completely shifted and we're fucking out of our minds. You know?

Ally: Yeah. Do you take a shot? How is your estrogen? Is it like a pill?

Persephone: So I've done both [00:36:30] shots and pills and the shots are more effective for estrogen. Hardcore, they are. But I'm on pills right now because I'm so bad at timing and scheduling and ignoring alerts on my phone that I'll be like, "Did I take my estrogen shot? No." So it's easier just to take the pills in my day, but if you are starting estrogen, shots are really the way to go. They're more expensive, but shots of progesterone are really what you should be on. I started on pills and spiro, which is not great. [00:37:00] Don't go on spiro if you can avoid it.

Ally: Wait, why?

Persephone: A number of different factors. There's some studies showing that it causes sort of fat development in the way you don't want it, which I sort of experience in weird pockets. More specifically, it can ruin your sex drive. Progesterone doesn't do that as much and is more effective at blocking testosterone. Progesterone doesn't leach as much sodium out of your body as spiro does. Spiro, you will piss out all the sodium. You got to constantly do more sodium intake. [00:37:30] Progesterone, I don't think, has the same side effect of the salt leaking, but you're going to have to look into that.

People, don't take my word for it, but yeah, shots are more effective. But do whatever you can get or afford because it's going to be better than nothing.

Ally: Yeah, totally. I remember reading that also, that starting with shots is a little bit of a stronger start, so I think that really helped me choose shots. But wait, you take it every day?

Persephone: I do.

Ally: Okay, cool.

Persephone: Yeah, I take estrogen twice [00:38:00] a day, once in the morning. One pill in the morning, two at night. And then I take one pill of progesterone at night, and I also take Finasteride, which is like a hair DHT inhibitor so you don't lose your hair.

Ally: Yeah, totally. So do you have one of those pill organizers that's like days of the week?

Persephone: Bitch, you think I can be organized? That's a bold statement. Very bold. No, I am the most disorganized fuck. Unless I'm running a game or getting paid to be organized, I am a terror. My [00:38:30] desk is covered in makeup right now. Just covered.

Oh, shit. We didn't talk about name-choosing. I want to ask, why did you choose not to change your name?

Ally: I'm still deciding I think.

Persephone: Really?

Ally: Some names stand out to me, but I think Ally just did feel very gender-neutral to me, even though-

Persephone: You also want everyone to know you're an ally.

Ally: Yeah, exactly. It's literally spelled like ally. I was like, "Oh, I should just keep it."

Persephone: I'm a monster. That was a terrible joke. It's a terrible joke.

Ally: Sometimes the more I pass, the more I think about going back to Allyson.

Persephone: [00:39:00] Oh, the dichotomy?

Ally: Because the more masc I get, because then it's like a guy named Allyson, I think is... I mean, that is also a guy's name in some countries.

Persephone: It's a guy's name too. It's not common, but it's cool. That's cool.

Ally: Totally. I think that's cool. Okay, so wait, Persephone. How did you choose your name?

Persephone: So my full name is Persephone Jade Valentine, and the main reason is because it allowed me to keep my family nickname, which is PJ, because I knew my family was never going to call me anything else.

Persephone also suits me I think. It's [00:39:30] the goddess of the underworld in spring in Greek mythology, but it also means the destroyer, so it's good for me because that's what I do to all my relationships.

Ally: Oh my god.

Persephone: There's those things, like meme posts of how trans people pick their names, trans masculine, non-binary people are either an object or a drowned Victorian child, and then fucking trans women are either like Kate or like a cyberpunk jewel thief, [00:40:00] and I think you can all tell which one I picked.

But I took my new last name based on my dad's first name because my original last name is my legal father's last name, I'm not actually his child, and I wasn't going to take my bio dad's last name because it's a slave name, Baptiste, Jean Baptiste. So I was debating between taking my dad's first name, Valentino, as my last name, Valentine, or changing my mom's maiden name, which is Galloway. So I could have been Claudia Galloway, Vivian Galloway. I went through Winter [00:40:30] as a name. Madea was a really high one on there as another Greek name until I remember Tyler Perry. Can't do that. Nope. Circe was up there. I had a bunch of Greek names because I've been obsessed with Greek mythology for a long time.

There was no way that I was going to be Sam or Katie or fucking Brittany. I needed all the drama that my dead name did not give me, and this is just what I settled on.

Ally: It's so fitting. [00:41:00] Persephone Valentine is such a beautiful name. I love it.

Persephone: Thank you. I've grown very fond of it over the years and it's grown to suit me very well I think in certain aspects over time. It's really interesting. It's also like if you're cis listening to this and you don't like your name, change it. You don't even need to do it legally.

Ally: Just change it, yeah.

Persephone: Just fucking tell people what your name is. I have so many friends that have just decided to change their name. Some of them definitely came out as trans later.

It seems like more [00:41:30] and more people I know are coming out as either trans or generally queer or something else every day. If I have a straight friend, sometimes I'm looking at my watch like, "When is this going to happen? When is this going to happen?" Not always, but a lot of the time, especially with the friends that are what I call queer-adjacent where they're so surrounded by queer people, but they're the one token straight. I'm like, "Are you though? Are you though?"

Ally: Yeah. I'm like, "You did this on purpose. You created the space that you need."

Persephone: Are you though? When's this egg going to crack? But yeah, trans [00:42:00] people's names are wild and I fucking love that aspect of the culture that we have.

Ally: Yeah, totally. One of the many things that we just get to create, realities that we get to create, which is really cool.

Persephone: I wish it was easier to create.

Ally: It's very hard-fought. Exactly, exactly.

Persephone: Yeah. It should be easier to create these realities because they don't really threaten anyone. There's so much fearmongering about us like we're monsters. So much of it comes back to the fact that people think that transitions [00:42:30] are always sex-related. No, no.

Ally: Totally. Gender and sexuality is so conflated.

Persephone: They are, and in some ways, I get it, but in other ways it's just not good, which is not the same as saying that the T should separate from the LGBT whatever. Leave the alphabet soup alone.

Ally: Oh my god. The LGBTQIA+.

Persephone: LGBTQIA= alphabet soup mafia. Yes, god. Boots the house down.

Babette: [00:43:00] Wow. I loved so many things about that interview. Persephone highlighted so many of the real systemic struggles and barriers that trans folks, especially trans femme folks, go through, whether it's acquiring surgery or still feeling pressured to achieve some sort of feminine beauty standard.

What I especially loved about this interview is how she talked about D&D and her performing style as this type of play and escape.

Ally: [00:43:30] Yeah, definitely. I do think there's a lot of impossibility that you're faced with when you're trans, and I think a lot of what we got into in the interview is very real about it would be hard enough if you had to work this hard and face this much adversity to get exactly what you wanted, but it's actually not that easy. You have to work this hard to get something and then be like, "Is this actually what I wanted or is this just something to keep me safe?" It's just really fraught, [00:44:00] honestly, and so I totally see entering D&D where you just make your own world and you make the mechanics and you can strip it down a little bit and you can feel free and creative being so fun.

Because I feel exactly like her. I need a lot of recharge time with my personality. I do need to be on top of a pile of clean clothes on top of my bed playing Switch just silent, but I think stuff like D& [00:44:30] D gives you a really fun social version of that quiet, recharge time, but it's with other friends and it's very regenerative in that way.

- Babette: I feel like you've convinced me to play D&D, which is not something I ever thought I would do.
- Ally: Now, that's a Patreon exclusive.
- Babette: Right, exactly. Could you tell me about one of the characters that maybe you've played in D&D? Are they in the room with us right now?
- Ally: [00:45:00] Oh my god. Yes. I've played everything from a little peppermint stick of a boy in a Candy Land kind of game.
- Liam Wilhelmina: Hi, I am Liam Wilhelmina. I am a level two candy cane ranger. I'm currently on my hands and knees looking for interesting seeds.
- Ally: I played that trans guy, binary trans man running around New York City with a magic [00:45:30] teapot. I sound crazy. I love explaining this to you because I'm just like-
- Babette: Wait, what's his name? What's his name?
- Ally: His name's Pete. That's Pete.
- Pete: Yeah, I'm Pete. Just let me know what you're trying to track down because I'm sure I can get it.
- Speaker 1: Peter, mostly what I do here is I pull bullets out of gangsters that have been shot.
- Pete: In a way, I was kind of shot. You shot my tits off.
- Speaker 1: I will admit it was my first time doing top surgery.
- Pete: [00:46:00] You did a great job. I don't think you left that much stuff in there that you shouldn't have.
- Ally: He's out there. He has insomnia. He is trying to get some sleep. He has sleepy time tea. He has a little butterfly with him that is the Lunesta butterfly from those old commercials. That's his animal familiar. But then I play high-femme businesswomen.

Margaret Encino: Name is Margaret Encino. I'm a 24-year-old entrepreneurial [00:46:30] business woman and I work for UFTP, the United Free Trade Planets. I'm an executive. I'm actually very high-functioning and today has been a mad house. Okay?

Ally: My dream person/just all the women I seem to date, just type A, get stuff done, business pitch.

Now I've played so many characters. [00:47:00] It's been like five years of making the show, but I do really love the kind of clean slate aspect to it where you just get to make a whole new character and be like, "Okay, who is this person?" My ADHD really loves that. I love a new year. I love a fresh start. I love, "Okay, that all got really complicated. Let's control-alt-delete and let's start a new fresh page," but it's really, obviously it's a main major part [00:47:30] of my life now, but I couldn't recommend D&D more for trans and queer or just all people. It's just endlessly creative.

Gender Spiral is an original podcast from Audiation. This episode was mixed by Matt Noble. Music is composed by Chanell Crichlow. Art is by Joey Han with Graphics by Honey Hodges. The executive producers are Ireland [00:48:00] Meacham, myself, Ally Beardsley, my co-host, Babette Thomas, who's also our story editor, and Sandy Smallens.

Babette: Thank you to our guest, Persephone Valentine. You'll find a link to her Instagram in the show notes.

If you liked the show, please head over to patreon.com/genderspiralpodcast to support us and get access to fun stuff like our Discord server, bonus content, and complimentary merch. You might even find Ally's personal OnlyFans.

Ally: It's just pictures of my dog's paws. Everybody, calm [00:48:30] down.

You can also check us out at genderspiralpaw.com where you'll find a link to leave us a voicemail and ask us questions. Please tell us who you want to hear from, what you want to hear about, tell us stuff about your life. We might even use it on the show. And follow us @GenderSpiral. Subscribe wherever you get your podcast and stay tuned. We're releasing a brand-new episode every single week this summer.

Babette: Tune in next week to Gender Spiral.

Ally: Where you never have to spiral alone.

Speaker 2: Audiation.