

‘A BODY I AM COMFORTABLE WITH’: THE INTERPLAY OF HORMONES AND SEX FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE

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Background: This study explored sex, pleasure and relationship-driven alteration of gender affirming hormone replacement therapy (HRT) among trans and gender diverse people in Australia.

Methods: In 2018, the *Australian Trans and Gender Diverse Sexual Health Survey* recruited people from every state and territory for an online survey of sexual health and well-being. Items on alterations to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) for sexual reasons were included; an inductive thematic analysis assessed free-text responses while descriptive analyses of fixed responses were undertaken.

Results: In total, 1,631 people ranging in age from 16-83 years old completed the survey; 954 (58.4%) had accessed HRT and 124 of those (13.0%) had altered use for reasons related to sex. Participants described both the rationale for and outcomes of altered HRT, which are organised into two themes. (i) *For themselves*: participants described altering their HRT for personal reasons, including to increase their libido and sexual pleasure. (ii) *For others*: participants described changes to HRT for specific others, such as sexual or romantic partners, on the advice of their doctor, or to satisfy perceived social expectations around sexuality. Several respondents reported altering HRT for fertility-based reasons or for sex work, which were variously constructed as personal and external motivations. Of those who reported sex-related HRT alterations, 71.0% were satisfied with the outcomes: many described new perspectives on their sexual selves, a sense of self-discovery, and desired adjustments to pleasure and libido.

Conclusion: Participants were largely happy with HRT alterations for sex-related reasons and reflected on internal (self) and external (partners, doctors, society) expectations and narratives of ‘normal’ sexuality, and the fluidity between those categories. The provision of guidance to safely alter HRT may help better-support the sexual lives of trans and gender diverse people.

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