Ambivalent ambiguity?
A study of how women with ‘atypical’ sex development make sense of female embodiment

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What does it mean for a teenage girl to find out that her body is not developing in those ways that she might have expected? What does it mean for her to find out that she will not menstruate or be able to conceive, or perhaps not be able to have penile–vaginal penetrative sex?

Through an exploration of 23 young women’s narratives about finding out, in adolescence, that their bodies are not developing in ways that commonly are considered ‘typical’ for the female sex, this thesis engages with these questions. By drawing on feminist explorations of female embodiment, it discerns how young women make sense of their ‘atypical’ sex development and discusses how the women position their embodied selves in relation to others. In focus are the complex ‘juggling’ of reinforcement and resistance taking place in the interviews and the ways in which the women are striving to expand rather than dismiss norms about of female embodiment, heterosexual practice and in/fertility. The thesis provides new insights into an under-researched field and enables a problematization of the ways norms may shape bodies and relationships.

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