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â€™The thief of womanhoodâ€™™: women's experience of polycystic ovarian syndrome

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Abstract

Previous research on polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) has overwhelmingly been conducted within a medical or psychiatric framework, and has failed to explore women's own experience of the syndrome. Interviews were conducted with 30 women with PCOS recruited through a national self-help organisation. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed pervasive reports of feeling â€™freakishâ€™™, â€™abnormalâ€™™, and not â€™properâ€™™ women. These feelings were related to three symptoms commonly experienced by women with PCOS: â€™excessâ€™™ hair growth; irregular, absent or disrupted periods; and infertility. Smooth hairless bodies and faces, regular menstruation and the capacity to bear children were associated with femininity, and as a result of their symptoms women expressed feeling â€™differentâ€™™ from other women and less â€™feminineâ€™™. The results are discussed within a feminist framework and suggest that polycystic ovarian syndrome is a deeply stigmatising condition, â€™a theft of

womanhoodâ€™, with far reaching implications for all women, whether or not they conform to â€˜feminineâ€™ norms.



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Keywords

Women's health; Femininity; Polycystic ovarian syndrome

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