‘Straight outta vagina’ — how depictions of violence and abuse towards women’s bodies in Western art, media and culture can be seen to influence and perpetuate the incidence of ‘obstetric violence’ in maternity care

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In the music video ‘Straight outta vagina’ by post-punk Russian feminist group Pussy Riot (2016), we are entertained by the repeated chorus: ‘Don’t play stupid, don’t play dumb, vagina’s where you’re really from.’ This anthem is a glorious counter to the pervasive culture of sexual abuse allegations, body shaming, exploitation, violence and abuse perpetrated against women, represented by the litany of appalling statistics for violence against women and girls (UN Women 2015) and characterised as ‘rape culture’ by some feminist theorists (Buchwald et al 2005).

This paper looks at how depictions of women in art, media, and culture, as well as in medical frameworks, consistently objectify, sexualise and violate women’s bodies, and suggests how this influences the incidence of ‘obstetric violence’ (OV) in maternity care.