

The Oversexualization of Women in the Media

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16 February 2016

When the name Valeria Lukyanova (see Appendix) is mentioned, not a lot comes to mind. This name belongs to the woman who has transformed herself into what is known as the “real-life barbie”. It is clear to see in photos of Lukyanova, that she has large breasts, a thin waist, slender limbs, and a seemingly flawless face. An article written by K. Dray, Deputy Editor for Closeronline, a magazine that discusses current events, (2014) quotes Lukyanova’s words “The only surgery I had was the breast surgery”. Lukyanova, as well as many other ‘Barbies’ have gained popularity as the ideal image of a woman. This is the wrong image that the women of the world today should aspire to be similar to. Lukyanova is viewed as a sex icon.

In the world we live in today, too many women are viewed as icons for sex. The oversexualization of women has become a worldwide epidemic. It is transforming the female body into something that can be disrespected by men and forces women into feeling their body will never be good enough. The oversexualization of women has infected many aspects of our society, reaching all the way down to young children. The media uses many mediums to advertise the bodies of women in an unrealistic light. The oversexualization of women is gaining momentum and not for the better. By looking at the history of oversexualizing women, examples of oversexualization in the media, and the negative effects of sexualization of women, this paper will argue that the oversexualization of women in the media has distorted the way women are viewed and has created a false image of the female anatomy and disprove research that that opposes the oversexualization of women.

Background of Oversexualization

Oversexualizing the body of a woman is an issue that has occurred for many years. In the context of this paper, oversexualization refers to the female body being portrayed as a sex object by the media. The problem of oversexualization arises when it seems the line (the media turning

the female body from a respectable human to a sex object) has been crossed. The largest contributor to the sexualization of women is the media. The media has placed females on a pedestal of sexual innuendos, catcalls, and sexual appeal. Actresses, singers, and models have been put in the limelight all based upon how 'hot' they are. Magazines and television shows have made it seemingly acceptable for men to feel as if they have power over women. Women are not an object that can be used, abused, or controlled for the pleasure of men; however, in today's world it seems as though that is the norm. The oversexualization of women is going to continue escalating if reform is not implemented.

History of Oversexualization of Women

In order to truly understand the oversexualization of women, the history must be discussed. The media began sexualizing women from as early as the 1960's and possibly even earlier. Barron's Notes by A. Astrachan discuss the theme of sex in the book, *Brave New World* by stating that, "Sex is a primary source of happiness. The brave new world makes promiscuity a virtue: you have sex with any partner you want, and sooner or later every partner will want you. (As a child, you learn in your sleep that "everyone belongs to everyone else.")" (2015). Written in 1931, the goal was to prove that exposing children to sex at a young age would make them numb when they reached maturity; however, in the real world that is not the case. In modern times, children have been exposed to sexualization of women because of everyday access to any sort of media.

For as long as history has been recorded, women have been seemingly forced into the background and only to be used for the pleasure of men. Within the past century, women have fought for equality in the workforce, armed forces, and even the bedroom. The most important time for reform in the sexualization of women was during the sexual revolution which began in

1960. A leading national expert on women N. Cohen (2012) stated, “Enovid, the first birth control pill, went on the market in 1960. Unlike any other previously available form of contraception, the Pill was both reliable and controlled by a woman herself, requiring neither the consent nor the knowledge of her sexual partner.” The Pill gave women the power to protect themselves from pregnancy. This freedom given to women also led to empowerment. Several female activists began to fight for reform for rights since the world was changing.

An empowering moment for women and a sudden realization for men was when “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” was written in 1970. It was new information for the male gender, being told they were not needed for sex by women. All of the reform that happened in the 1960’s and 1970’s displayed family life in the United States as unequal and oppressing (Cohen, 2012). Women made several gains in the world during this time, but it also brought on a new terror: taking the experience too far. The world took advantage of the freedom of women and began to view them as objects for sex.

Oversexualization of Women in the Media

The media’s extreme oversexualization of women through mediums of communication and also play a huge role in harming the way women are viewed. The oversexualization of women has increased dramatically throughout the media with the recent decades. With the addition of cell phones, faster internet, and social media, the world is able to share stories or photos with just the click of a button. An article written by A. Montiel explains that “Feminist critics show how through the commodification of women’s bodies, media content -news, films, magazines- contributed to the ‘normalisation’ of sexual assault, rape and other forms of sexual violence and how they reinforced gender inequalities.” (2014). The cultural norm today is that

women can be looked at as sexual beings. Men often lose respect for women because images in the media portray women in such a sexual light.

Female nudity in magazines has increased since the 1980's which takes away from female liberation and adds to the idea that women are available for consumption of men (Montiel, 2014). It seems in every aspect of the media, there is a woman dressed in little clothing or a girl who is dancing provocatively in a music video. Certain aspects of our society love objectifying the female body in any way they can. Many movies of the 21st century have a dramatic sex scene, which rarely shows much of the male body. It is more likely to see the female body, scantily clad or nude, because it is acceptable in our society. The popular songs on the radio contain lyrics that refer to an attractive woman or comment on the size of certain areas on their body. K. Sarikakis a professor at the University of Vienna in the Department of Communication explains:

There are business models of mainstream media based precisely on the perpetuation of objectification (such as 'lads magazines', music videos, aspects of the fashion industry and advertising). For these media industries, gender mainstreaming would constitute a conflict. In everyday media, the female body continues to be a revenue source, while gendered roles of male experts (e.g. politics, science) and females in social and entertainment roles (soft news, fashion etc.) present a well-established practice that is hard to change (2014).

Gender equality is a constant need, and may be one indefinitely if the topic of gender issues is not resolved. The media must stop oversexualizing the female body and using women for sex appeal.

Negative Effects of the Oversexualization of Women

With the media having such an influence on the minds of society, there are bound to be some negative effects when women become oversexualized. The media's effects have an especially large impact on young women. M. Collins, a student at the University of Dayton, states in a student journal, "Young adults, especially women, become very susceptible to the media's influence and the types of beauty it promotes." (2014, p. 1). This beauty is mostly done by altering a model's face and body with makeup, lighting, and photoshopping. The end result is to make women look more desirable. The negative effects the media has on women in the media are vast and can be very detrimental to the female population.

Self-Esteem. Magazines, like *Seventeen Magazine*, often target women (tween girls to adults) with articles that give tips to "get fit quick," making females feel their bodies are not up to par when compared to women in magazines, which results in lower self-esteem. *Seventeen Magazine* is targeted toward teenage girls, whose minds are still quite moldable. Filling the magazine with photos of flawless girls puts the constant voice in the back of young girls minds that they must look like these models. In the journal "Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing" by M. Collins "conducted a study to examine the effects of this type of media coverage on adolescents. The study found that the young adults tested were, indeed, negatively impacted by exposure to these types of stereotypical portrayals of the ideal 'thin women...'" (2014, p. 2). This proves the skinny stereotype for females is lowering the self-esteem of the young women in society today, even if these female consumers are already at a healthy weight.

Young females feel the pressure of these seemingly perfect models on their shoulders every day. Magazines containing photos of toned women with ideal proportions force young women into the thought process that in order to be successful, they must look like the models in

magazines. The media is not being mindful of the sensitive and still growing emotions, personalities, and bodies of women in our society. The self-esteem of women is torn down daily by mediums that depict the "ideal, perfect body".

Image. The image of the ideal woman has changed quite dramatically within recent decades. The image of the average woman has become more sexualized. The media shows only the provocative body parts of women, not their personalities. In an article written by P. Donovan, a distinguished retired professor at the University of Buffalo, she stated, "A study by University at Buffalo sociologists has found that the portrayal of women in the popular media over the last several decades has become increasingly sexualized, even "pornified." The same is not true of the portrayal of men" (2011). This is a prime example of what the media is doing to the image of the female body. The images shown in magazines, commercials, and movies are no longer of women in natural states. They are women wearing little clothing and captions describing them as 'sexy' or 'hot'.

The image of the average woman has changed as well. It is no longer about the full figure. The goal has always been to look like models and famous women, but these well-known women are skinny to the point of nearly unhealthy and in photographs, are photoshopped to accent certain attributes and thin other already thin sections. M. Coy, deputy director of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University, writes in an article, "Measures that have been developed to analyse sexual objectification are twofold. The first focuses on portrayals of women as bodies e.g. exposure of body parts, sexualised clothing and dancing, women engaged in self-touch and the extent to which cameras and the gaze of other performers zoom in on women's writhing, gyrating bodies." (2014). Especially noticeable in music videos, the most obvious part of many songs are women dancing provocatively and

focusing mainly on their bodies. Seeing these types of videos frequently generalizes women into a category that they are only useful in sexual situations. The media is forming an image of women as sex objects, and nothing else.

Disorders. The constant feeling that women need to be skinnier and prettier has driven some to very dangerous measures. Within recent years the topic of females with eating disorders has become more prominent. Young girls have especially become obsessed with being as thin as possible. Some of the most horrifying examples are found in popular social media websites. The social media website, Tumblr, has become a free-for-all of girls posting photos of their goal weights and very noticeable ribcages. Eating disorders have become such a concern that the website implemented a help system to assist girls if they want help. C. Pennington, a professor in the School of Medicine at the University of Connecticut, discusses in an article, “A new study estimates that approximately a half million teens struggle with eating disorders or disordered eating.” (2015). This is a shockingly high number. Young girls see the skinny bodies of actresses and models and have become infatuated with the thought of looking exactly like them. They turn to purging or starvation to achieve these body types. Eating disorders are extremely unhealthy and can be very detrimental to one’s health.

Another problem that has developed due to the media oversexualizing women is the struggle of depression in girls. These girls feel their bodies are not good enough, so in tandem with eating disorders, comes severe depression and self-harm. Girls are fighting hard enough to maintain sanity, and the media’s never ending amount of photos of women who resemble objects of sex do not help their self-esteem.

Crime and Violence. Due to the amount of pressure put on women to have the ideal body, they often lose their self-worth. With the loss of self-worth, women and girls are more

likely to condone sexual interaction. A. Montiel, vice-president of the International Association for Media and Communication Research, supplies a statistic discovered by the UN, “Women and girls are 80 percent of the people trafficked annually. 79% are trafficked for sexual exploitation” (2014). This staggering statistic proves that the morale of women has dropped, and a likely culprit is the media. The media also makes violence and crime against women seem like a norm.

Allowing more and more images of oversexualized women creates an atmosphere that will continue to debilitate women. P. Donovan, a retired professor at the University of Buffalo, quotes E. Hatten, a professor at the University of Buffalo, Department of Sociology, ““Sexualized portrayals of women have been found to legitimize or exacerbate violence against women and girls, as well as sexual harassment and anti-women attitudes among men and boys,” Hatton says.” (2011). The media allowing female models, actresses, and performers is going to greatly affect the normal woman of society. The violence and crime against women will only become worse if the media is allowed to oversexualize women.

Allowing the media to oversexualize women has negatively affected the way women view themselves. The world is sitting back as the female body is being demoralized. The negative effects the oversexualization of women will only increase and worsen if action is not taken. Women are dealing with unrealistic expectations for what they should look like. The media is directing these oversexualized images in younger audiences as time goes on, exposing them to sexual encounters at ages that are much too young. Women in society must be respected, and with every photo of a half-naked woman plastered on a magazine for the world to see, a little more respect is taken.

Opposing Side of the Oversexualization of Women

There is some research that states the oversexualization of women does not exist. An article written by A. Peters, a staff writer for *Fast Company Magazine* states, “It would be a simple change to make. Still, it's worth noting that researchers haven't definitively proven that unrealistic figures have a negative effect on little girls; in one recent study of 300 preschoolers, higher levels of exposure to Disney princesses actually correlated with a better body image” (2014).

This study may have discovered that preschoolers were not affected by the impossibly skinny waists of Disney princesses, but flaws in research are an easy find. The fatal flaw of this study is the children being studied. They are preschoolers. At that age, the mind simply does not comprehend the idea of a skinny waist, large breasts, and a flawless face. These children have not yet reached puberty nor have they been truly exposed to the influence the media has in the case of the oversexualization of women. Preschoolers are not going to notice anatomically disproportionate bodies of Elsa and Ariel. They are going to notice the dresses, magic, and hair. They will make comments based on the beauty of these Disney princesses, not on the unhealthy body proportions of the princesses. The ideal image of women cannot be judged by humans that simply cannot comprehend such an intense topic.

Conclusion

Overall, the media has taken the female body and has transformed it into a commodity for oversexualization. By showing the history of oversexualizing women, the forms of oversexualization in the media, and the negative effects that oversexualization has on women, as well as finding flaws in research trying to prove the oversexualization of women does not exist, it is clear to see that there are definite injustices against women today. It is time for the world to

take a step back and realize what oversexualizing the female body is doing to women in society.

The bodies of women must be looked at like a human being, not an object for sexual pleasure. If we allow women and young girls to feel like a normal human, that will allow them to be more confident, to be prosperous in life, and more likely to succeed. The scary part is the world today is media-saturated, and the people do not control the message.

Works Cited

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- Coy, M. (2014). Sexualised sexism: popular culture, sexualisation, and violence against women & girls. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/resources/63/sexualised-sexism-popular-culture-sexualisation-and-violence-against-women-amp-girls>
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Peters, A. (2014, November 12). Here's what Disney princesses would look like with normal waistlines. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from <http://www.fastcoexist.com/3038358/heres-what-disney-princesses-would-look-like-with-normal-waistlines>

Annotated Bibliography

Astrachan, A. (2015). Brave new world by Aldous Huxley : barron's notes. Retrieved December 20, 2015, from <http://huxley.net/studyaid/bnwbarron.html#theme>

I chose this source because it describes the theme of sex in the book *Brave New World*. It is a quality source because the publisher has clearly read the book and done the research necessary to have created this page. It works with my paper because it discusses the idea of numbing children to sex but exposing them to sexual activity and thoughts at a young age. The problem is that in the real world, children see the sexualization of women at a young age, and it is clearly affecting them as they grow.

Cohen, N. (2012, February 6). How the sexual revolution changed america forever. Retrieved December 19, 2015, from http://www.alternet.org/story/153969/how_the_sexual_revolution_changed_america_forever

I chose this source because it discusses the 1960's for women. This was during the sexual revolution and when "the Pill" was created to protect women from getting pregnant. I found this source to be reliable because it has many statistics and information of occurrences and changes that began for women in the 1960's. It fits with my paper because it discusses how the sexual revolution of women opened many doors for change. It helps me bring in the idea of oversexualization of women throughout history and how it has escalated.

Collins, M. (2015). Slenderize me: youth's infatuation with images in the media. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from

<http://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1038&context=lx1>

I chose this source because it discusses the way the media makes girls feel like their body is never good enough. The journal explains that women's self-esteem has dropped with the media and magazines placing fit women with the "perfect" body in them. I found this source to be

reliable because it is a journal by a college student that was peer reviewed. It has many powerful points throughout the entire journal. It works into my paper because it talks about the media's negative effects of oversexualizing women. It has a lot of information about the self-esteem of girls being affected by models in the media.

Coy, M. (2014). Sexualised sexism: popular culture, sexualisation, and violence against women & girls. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/resources/63/sexualised-sexism-popular-culture-sexualisation-and-violence-against-women-amp-girls>

This source is useful because it gives insight to the world of music videos. It discusses the fact that women are often only in music videos to have sex appeal. Rarely do they have large amount of clothing and on top of that, they are dancing provocatively. The source emphasizes the issue that the media is creating by constantly making women sex objects. It fits in my paper because it is a perfect example of what the media is doing to women. It allows me to focus on a certain area of the media so I have a specific example. This source is credible because the author is a deputy director at the London Metropolitan University. The author has taken time and done the research necessary to make the article accurate.

Dray, K. (2014, April 8). Twenty things you didn't know about Valeria Lukyanova, the human Barbie.

Retrieved December 19, 2015, from <http://www.closeronline.co.uk/2014/04/20-things-you-didn-t-know-about-valeria-lukyanova-the-human-barbie#image-20>

This source is used for my introduction of the oversexualization of women. I use it to introduce the way the media idolizes the idea of the perfect woman. It depicts Valeria Lukyanova as the "real-life barbie" and how she has accented features. It is a reliable source because it is from a

popular magazine that had an interview with Valeria. It works well with my paper because it is the perfect introduction to the oversexualization of women in the media. People view Valeria as seemingly flawless. I also wanted to describe that she has altered her body somewhat to get the look she has.

Donovan, P. (2011, August 10). Study finds marked rise in intensely sexualized images of women, not men. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from

<http://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2011/08/12769.html>

This source is valuable to the paper because it discusses the increasing amount of oversexualized images of women in the media. It explains that the male gender has not been oversexualized nearly as much as well. The source is reliable because it is written by a retired professor from the University of Buffalo. The argument in the article has many critical points and facts that ensure accuracy. It fits well into my paper because it gives yet another example that the media has increased the oversexualization of women over the decades, but has not done the same to men. The source allows me to emphasize that the ideal image of women has changed, and not for the better.

Montiel, A. (Ed.). (2014). Media and gender: a scholarly agenda for the global alliance on media and

gender.

I used this source for many statistics about the oversexualization of women and supported facts by scholarly sources. Many different authors worked together (edited by Montiel) to create a compilation of valuable information. It is a scholarly source with many credible authors that have done extensive research to create journals and articles. It works into my paper because it

has a lot of information about oversexualization. It contains many surprising statistics that describe the effects of the oversexualization of women.

Pennington, C. (2015). Retrieved February 15, 2016, from

<http://today.uconn.edu/2015/02/the-impact-of-social-media-on-body-image/>

I chose to use this source in my research paper because it discusses the effect the media has had on disorders of young girls. The article discusses the astonishing number of girls that have eating disorders that can be linked to the models they see in mediums of media. This is an accurate source because it is written by a professor at the University of Connecticut. The article fits with my paper because it validates another negative effect of the oversexualization of women in the media; disorders. It puts the issue into perspective to help the reader understand the seriousness of the oversexualization of women.

Peters, A. (2014, November 12). Here's what Disney princesses would look like with normal waistlines. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from

<http://www.fastcoexist.com/3038358/heres-what-disney-princesses-would-look-like-with-normal-waistlines>

I decided to use this source because it is an example of what the animation world has done to the female body. The article itself, attempts to contradict my points. It uses preschoolers in a research study to try and prove that Disney princesses bodies do not affect the self-esteem or body positivity of women. The source is credible because it has accurate facts and the author studied at UC Berkeley. This source flows well into my paper because it is the perfect example for my refutation paragraph. The study itself has flaws that I was easily able to pick out and prove their points were wrong..

Appendix

Valeria Lukyanova



The photo above is Valeria Lukyanova. Seeing an image of this woman helps the reader see that her proportions are in fact, quite Barbie-like. She has large breasts, a small and tight waist, and thin appendages. The photo adds to the issue at hand; the media focuses on “perfect” women, which negatively influences women of many ages in society.

Dray, K. (2014, April 8). Twenty things you didn't know about Valeria Lukyanova, the human

Barbie. Retrieved December 19, 2015, from [http://www.closeronline.co.uk/2014/04/20-](http://www.closeronline.co.uk/2014/04/20-things-you-didn-t-know-about-valeria-lukyanova-the-human-barbie#image-20)

[things-you-didn-t-know-about-valeria-lukyanova-the-human-barbie#image-20](http://www.closeronline.co.uk/2014/04/20-things-you-didn-t-know-about-valeria-lukyanova-the-human-barbie#image-20)