PRINCESS OF PERFECTION: A STUDY ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN

ADOLESCENT FANDOM IN DISNEY PRINCESSES AND ADULT FANDOM IN KATE

MIDDLETON

by

Rebecca C. Hogge

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Matthew J. Smith

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty in Partial Fulfillment
of the Degree of Master of Science in
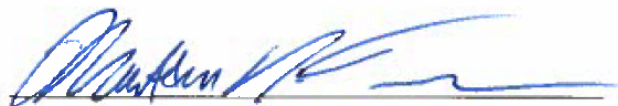Strategic Communication

Radford University

April 2019

Dr. Matthew Smith

Thesis Advisor

Dr. West Bowers

Committee Member

Dr. Matthew Turner

Committee Member

ABSTRACT

This study examined the connection between female adolescent exposure to Disney princesses and adult fandom in Kate Middleton. The interest of this study lied specifically in a small sample size of the women that make up Middleton's fan base who grew up watching and adoring Disney princesses. The study was conducted through a series of ethnographic interviews via Instagram direct message. Several themes emerged as a result of the analysis of the interviews, including a strong desire for a "rags to riches" life story, as well as interest in copying the clothing choices of the princesses in order to take on a personal sense of royalty. There was no finite conclusion; however, this study helps to build a foundation of future fictional and authentic princess research.

Rebecca C. Hogge, M.S.

Department of Communication, 2019

Radford University

Dedication

To Pop, I would have never attended graduate school if I hadn't heard that you were telling people how proud and excited you were of me because I was thinking of continuing my education while you were sick. Here I am now with a completed thesis for my master's degree. I hope you're just as proud.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Smith and Dr. Mike – thank you for showing me how much fun research and higher education can be when you can study what you love. I seek to follow in both your footsteps every day in my educational journey. What I have learned from you both will always influence me academically and professionally. I can't thank you enough.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 2018, websites still cannot manage to keep dresses in stock once photos of Kate Middleton surface online of her wearing them in public. In the last 7 years, Kate Middleton has boosted sales and manufactured soaring popularity for once quiet brands in a concept that has become known as "the Kate Effect" (Spencer, 2011). Given the popularity of Kate's fashion choices, it has now become a subculture of its own within her loyal fan base to copy her clothing choices (and even her looks). Middleton was introduced as the future queen-consort of the British throne on November 16, 2010, when she and Prince William announced their engagement. For some, this moment in time ignited a curious and lasting interest in Middleton that extends far beyond simply liking and sharing photos of her on social media platforms.

While Middleton has had a profound effect on women and adolescent girls all around the world, she is not the only royalty-related influence that adolescent girls and women have had exposure to, as Disney is more than well-known for its multi-billion-dollar profit in princesses. Beginning with Snow White in 1937 and then Cinderella in 1950, Disney princesses have become a household name and fixation for adolescent girls everywhere for over 80 years ("History Behind Disney Princesses," n.d.). Given the global exposure to Disney princesses in female adolescence, the question of whether this exposure has an effect on developing a fan interest in Middleton in adulthood is underlying. This could possibly help to explain another layer to Disney princess culture in that girls may be socially affected by exposure to Disney princesses at such a young age, that as a result their adult interests are affected. The literature below will help to further provide insight and perspectives into fan and celebrity culture, fairy-tale princess culture, and Kate Middleton fan culture studies.

1

Literature Review

Kate Middleton is undoubtedly a staple fixture in the world of pop culture, as are Disney princesses for both girls and adults. As such, we must first establish a theoretical background upon which these two entities exist. The first major theoretical concept discussed below is fan culture. Fan culture creates a basic understanding for the research on why people take interest in becoming fans of particular pop culture entities. This will create a foundation of why people become fans of Middleton and as such will transition into research on the study of celebrity culture, which further explains the public's fascination with celebrities. Finally, this study will look into existing research on fairy-tale princesses and their effect on early childhood development.

Fan Culture

Fan culture developed in the 1990s as a point of research. Fan culture studies give us an understanding of why "fans" flock to a particular fandom, the psychology behind why fans choose a particular fandom, the goings-on in a fandom, and the purpose behind the exchange of fandom-related materials and fan-created theories that take place within a fandom. The following research examines and explains the theoretical concepts of fan culture and the different facets that branch off of it.

Fan culture has a long and rich history and it simply emerged from a desire to make money. According to Hellekson (2018), a man by the name of Hugo Gernsback (who coined the term "science fiction") was editor of several pulp magazines that included early science fiction titles. Gernsback published a column in which he printed writers' names and addresses, which allowed for fans to write to one another (p. 66). Gernsback launched and promoted the Science

Fiction League, which linked fan clubs together under one umbrella. This moment in history solidified fan culture as an important fixture in American history.

Before the major works of research on fandom are explored, it is important to establish that fandom is a concept that is often stigmatized as what lower-ranking social order members of society participate in, together. According to Alvermann and Hagood (2000), the term "fandom" is mostly surrounded by this stigma: "a label to be attached to adoring audiences that are passive and manipulated by the mass media." However, fan culture warriors have begun to reject that concept, as they are not suffering from a psychological deficiency when they engage in building rapport between themselves and celebrities (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Finally, Alvermann and Hagood (2000) discussed other elements of fan culture, saying, "fandom is not just about consumption, it is also about the production of texts—songs, poems, novels, fanzines, videos, etc.—made in response to the professional media texts of fandom" (p. 438).

According to Grossberg (1992), we must acknowledge that fan culture is alive and well through popular texts: "People are constantly struggling, not to merely figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires" (p. 52). Given this, each text will mean something different to each fan because people have different styles of interpretation. Grossberg (1992) also added that even though fans are making sense of the texts provided to them, they're not cultural morons, as people are often aware of how they can be manipulated through cultural messages. Finally, Grossberg (1992) shared, "Fandom is, at least potentially, the site of optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary conditions for any struggle to change the conditions of one's life" (p. 65).

Henry Jenkins gave us the first true educational explanation and exploration of fan culture. In his book *Textual Poachers,* Jenkins (1992) gave a direct definition of the origins of

the word "fan": "of persons inspired by organistic rites and enthusiastic frenzy" (p. 12). In the beginning of his work, Jenkins (1992) used the term "Trekkers" (which are people who are fans of the hit show *Star Trek*) as a foundation to help us understand the curious subject of fan culture. Trekkers have long gotten a negative reputation, socially, for their "obsession" with the show. Of course, like fans of any other fandom, Trekkers are truly dedicated to the details of *Star Trek* that other watchers may not be concerned with (e.g., character theories, plot origins, etc.). The Trekkers attend conventions, collect collectibles, and of course live life based around the *Star Trek* universe. That has, as most fandoms do, earned Trekkers a slew of negative stereotypes that people outside of the *Star Trek* universe attach to them. Most often, as Jenkins (1992) pointed out, fans are negatively stereotyped as societal losers or weirdos who have a lack of understanding of their reality because they are so fixed on an alternate one (p. 10-12).

Jenkins (1992) continued by describing organized fandom as "an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (p. 86). Essentially, Jenkins (1992) is explaining here that despite the education of a fan scholar, the fan is the true beacon of wisdom where it pertains to his/her fandom. For example, a scholar may understand the psychology behind a particular fan, but a Trekker will undoubtedly surpass the scholar on knowledge of *Star Trek* itself. Jenkins (1992) went on to explain fan criticism in that fans see themselves in highly individualistic terms by refusing to conform to "norms" that are usually associated with their particular fandom. As such, fandoms survive based on the principle of picking apart and debating an already completed narrative. Fans thrive on the ability to bounce theories and ideas back and forth to one another about a particular television series or book (p. 88-89). As such, Jenkins

(1992) explained that there is a "right way" of reading or interpreting a fandom once you are a member of the fandom, meaning a fan must typically learn how to "employ and comprehend the community's particular interpretive conventions" (p. 89). Jenkins (1992) explained that Trekkers (even though the show is not a serial, but rather more individualistic episodes that work on an outline of events) consider *Star Trek* to be more like a serial as "no episode can be easily disentangled from the series' historical trajectory; plot developments are seen not as complete within themselves but as one series of events among many in the lives of its primary characters" (p. 99). Jenkins (1992) added that fans form generalizations about characters and their lives by working off of the totality of knowledge acquired from consumption of their particular television series overall. Given this information, Jenkins (1992) suggested that fans do not choose their fandoms based on their interests in a particular text or performer, but rather the focus on how social and cultural happenings of the fandom will benefit them individually, adding that "new" fans often become a threat to "old" fans as they view the new fans as a potential threat of competition for who loves the object of fandom more and what Jenkins described as "a shift in alliances" (p. 91).

Another important portion of Jenkins' (1992) work that correlates with the fandom of Middleton is Jenkins' concept of "Emotional Realism." While again Jenkins (1992) is using Emotional Realism to describe fandoms within a television setting, Emotional Realism is possibly a large feature of Middleton's appeal to her fans. Emotional Realism is the concept that Jenkins describes as "an interpretive fiction fans construct in the process of making meaning of popular narratives" (p. 107). This means that when we watch our favorite television program or read our favorite book series, we take away the experiences of the television or book characters and relate them to similar situations and experiences that happen in our own worlds. Women

across the world appear to draw Emotional Realism from Middleton based on her "commoner" upbringing based on her fans' attempts at directly copying her looks and following her every public move. While most of Jenkins' (1992) work focuses on *Star Trek* fans, his work is important and applicable to Middleton's fandom.

Echoing Jenkins' (1992) concept of Emotional Realism is Fiske's (2011) concept of Realism. While these two concepts share a name, they are both separate in their researcher's ideologies. In Fiske's (2011) book *Television Culture*, Realism was explained through a television series: "the 'Hart to Hart' [television show] segment is 'realistic,' not because it reproduces reality, which it clearly does not, but because it reproduces the dominant sense of reality" (p. 21). According to Fiske (2011), television creates for us an ability to see through a transparent window into another person's or persons' lives, or it acts as a reflection of our own. Overall, one perspective of Realism is described as "the belief in an objective reality that can be accurately experienced by the human senses: this reality is made up of an infinity of unique objects, people, places, and actions" (Fiske, p. 22). Thinking in terms of Middleton's 2011 wedding to Prince William, which was broadcast all around the world, Realism is a relevant theory in terms that many felt they were able to intimately share their wedding with the couple, bringing about a possible sense of Realism to the minds of millions of viewers and even more specifically, fans of Kate Middleton. This may be true considering that this was the very first time anyone got a glimpse of Middleton so up close and personal.

While Jenkins is the father of fan studies as a whole, much has changed in the world in terms of technology since the debut of *Textual Poachers* in 1992. In a study by Nikunen (2007), it was explained that the formation of new fan cultures is largely due to the advancements in technologies in the modern world. Nikunen (2007) explained that the reason is the popularity of

6

the internet and its ability to reach global networks. Nikunen (2007) stated, "Furthermore it seems that because of the new media technology fan cultures are more public than ever before which entails intermingling and increasing of fan practises and fanification of media audiences" (p. 125).

Adding to the concept of fan culture and technology, in Jenkins' later work "Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture," Jenkins (2006) noted that fan communities have always been virtual as they have been "imagined," long before the digital age came along. However, fans "were early adopters of digital technologies" (p. 138).

Similarly, in the research by Theberge (2005), the internet has proved to be the new dominating force in the fan culture world. Theberge (2005) noted: "

> What is perhaps most significant in the context of this discussion, however, is the way in which internet fan clubs provide both a medium and a forum for a kind of ongoing, reciprocal interaction between stars and fans, and between fans and the fan community, that is unprecedented in the history of fan culture. (497)

Blogging has also come center stage within the internet age, and Theberge (2005) explained that there is essentially a blending of public and private life for certain celebrities in the modern age as we are able to share details of essentially anything we want; because of this, fans are encouraged to engage in the same behavior as well. Finally, Theberge (2005) added that internet fan culture provides access to celebrities and other figures in ways that have never been attainable in the history of fan culture before.

The internet has allowed for another portion of fan culture to become even more popular, which is the concept of participatory culture from the work of Jenkins. According to Shefrin (2004), "As active participants, fans often appropriate corporate-generated imagery, and then

embellish or transform it with personal artistic expressions such as poetry, songs, paintings, scholarly essays, creative fiction, photographs, digital films, collages or clothing" (p. 13). Interestingly enough, Shefrin (2004) suggested that fans who are so immersed in their particular fan culture often end up developing behaviors, attitudes, and language related to that particular fandom. Shefrin (2004) also suggested that "active and loyal fans" will always be on the hunt for new products and opportunities to engage within the fandom.

Another facet of fan culture, which is heavily involved in Middleton's fandom, is fashion. According to Lamerichs (2018), "fans embody characters and signs to visualize their fandom, in order to identify more closely with a series" (p. 186). Lamerichs (2018) also suggested that fan fashion is growing as a phenomenon within different patents. However, fashion in regard to fandom is a relatively unearthed area of research that still needs to be explored more in-depth as to how fans interpret fandom fashion.

Celebrity Culture

As with fan culture, celebrity culture should be considered a branch of fan culture as the specific fandom in this branch is the celebrity him or herself. As Middleton is a celebrity, it is important to include research on celebrity idolatry, as it will help to better understand why Middleton's fans have chosen her as their point of interest. The following section will help smooth the line between fan culture and celebrity culture.

Generally speaking, it is important to recognize fan culture and celebrity culture as two concepts before Middleton's fan base is explained. According to Wohlfeil (2018), celebrity culture attached to the word "fan" is often frowned upon. Wohlfeil (2018) described the word "fan," which derives from the Latin word "fanaticus," which means "inspired by a deity" (p. 24). This term emerged in its contemporary concept in the late 19th century in the form of baseball.

The arrival of the Hollywood star system then began sharing the term "fan" with sports. Wohlfeil (2018) stated that regardless of what, we as individuals have all been a fan of something in our lifetimes. Therefore, Wohlfeil (2018) defined a fan as "a person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, activity, artwork, fashion-style or idea, whose behavior is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does NOT violate prevailing social norms" (p. 25). Wohlfeil (2018) noted that research on fans inside of celebrity culture is extremely rare, although studies are increasing in present day. Wohlfeil (2018) then went on to detail how fans contribute economically, saying that fans are very loyal to their particular fan-base and as a result are willing to spend exorbitant amounts of money on dedication to their fandom in the form of material objects. Therefore, as a result, marketing tactics lean towards creating products that are tailored to specific fandoms in an effort to identify with the fans' needs (p. 31-32). Finally, Hunt et al. (1999), Holt (1998), and Richardson and Turley (2006) then described the difference between a devoted fan and a fanatical fan, saying that fanatical fans take it far more serious than devoted fans in that while devoted fans have a normal life outside their fandom, fanatical fans let their fandom play a central role in their everyday life. Fanatical fans not only spend large sums of money on their memorabilia, but they have specific, what Wohlfeil (2018) refers to as "shrines," dedicated to their specific fandom, which can include things like rooms in their homes dedicated specifically to their fandom. Unfortunately, though, some fans, according to Wohlfeil (2018), are so immersed in their fan culture that it often prohibits them from being able to function with a personal identity unrelated to their fandom in everyday life, and this is what Wohlfeil refers to as the "dysfunctional fan" (p. 32).

  As discussed, there are many facets to the fan culture world, and celebrity culture (in which Middleton falls under) is arguably the most important. According to Marcel Danesi

(2015), celebrity culture is a staple in the study of popular culture as they are both the same thing. Celebrity culture stems back far beyond the television era to the time when radio and big bands were center stage. Danesi (2015) said that there is a notable difference between fame and being a celebrity. The example in the text provided was a doctor may be world-renowned, but that does not necessarily equate him or her to celebrity status. It is really notable music, television, and movie stars who are most often the people we refer to as "household names." Danesi (2015) went on to say that the newspapers began with writing stories, which created publicity for celebrities of the time. Following the newspaper, the radio became the next medium in which celebrities could become more recognized, and then finally before television came along; entire magazines spent their time devoting their work to nothing but celebrity culture. Given that social media has now taken the stage, this has opened the door for celebrity culture to become an even more popular and important portion of popular culture (Danesi, 2015). Danesi (2015) said that in present day, the people who become the most popular are labeled as "icons." Danesi (2015) used the Marilyn Monroe example. It is widely known that film star Marilyn Monroe had a tumultuous existence and passed away at the tender age of 36. However, she is absolutely immortalized and glamorized today by people all over the world. Oddly enough, Danesi (2015) quoted researcher Chris Hodges (2009) in that celebrities have taken precedence over religious figures in the modern age: "We all have gods, Martin Luther said it, it is just a question of which ones. And in American society our gods are celebrities. Religious belief and practice are commonly transferred to the adoration of celebrities" (p. 85).

Danesi (2015) went on to discuss the "Mythologizing Effect." The Mythologizing Effect is the idea that we as a culture tend to look at celebrities like mythical creatures because of the way that the media portrays them to us. This stems from the era of the radio when all you could

capture were the voices of the celebrities, which earned it the term "magic box," and now encapsulates all forms of media. Danesi (2015) continued on to say this is why common people are so thrilled to meet a celebrity, because it is almost like meeting a mythological creature. Danesi (2015) added that the untimely deaths of celebrities often help to really cement their icon status. An excellent example of this phenomenon would be Princess Diana. Princess Diana was known for her humanitarian work and her deep connection with people all around the world, which then earned her the nickname of "the People's Princess." Death is not the only way to achieve icon status, as longevity in the spotlight will also cement that; Danesi (2015) used the Rolling Stones and Madonna as two examples.

Cashmore (2006) addressed the modern fascination with celebrities: "Celebs today are praised, dignified, and often ennobled by rapturous fans. Often, the objects of the fans' praise seem to have done nothing to justify such reverence" (p. 79). Cashmore then added that the peculiarity of celebrity culture revolves around praising celebrity figures simply for existing, rather than praising achievements that might warrant true affection. As mentioned above, Cashmore (2006) also suggested that people who involve themselves in celebrities' lives help them to make better sense of their reality. Cashmore (2006) added that fans incorporate celebrities into their "imaginary social worlds," as they enjoy in great amounts the gossip and experiences (p. 82). Fans' obsessions with celebrities are seamlessly weaved into their everyday lives so that they remain a rewarding addition (p. 82). Finally, Cashmore (2006) explained that celebrities have a profound influence over fans' ethical stances and personal values (p. 84).

According to Pringle (2004), celebrities are a fixture with public fascination: "The increased opportunities to glimpse into their private lives via intrusive media, means that people can get even closer to their idols and spend considerable sums of money doing so" (p. 5). Pringle

(2004) also mentioned that if celebrities were not so important to us as a culture, then it would be impossible for celebrities to garner the mass number of fans that they do. Most importantly, Pringle (2004) shared that "in the end there is a deep need in human society to generate these iconic figures, worship them and then very often pull them back down to earth" (p. 5).

While merchandise specifically geared toward a celebrity fan base (like Taylor Swift T-shirts with her image on the front) sells in large quantities, there is a separate type of merchandise that also sells, but for a higher price tag: personal possessions of celebrities. Celebrity possessions, according to Newman, Diesendruck, and Bloom (2011), oftentimes sell for large amounts at auctions. Newman et al. (2011) suggested that one possible explanation why people are willing to spend large amounts of money on celebrity possessions is that "celebrity possessions are valued because of their associations. Objects that were once owned or touched by specific people remind us of those people" (p. 215).

Interestingly enough, Scodari (2008) shared that the celebrity role of someone like Princess Diana is "to make you feel you know them, that you have some mysterious but no less powerful link to who they are" (p. 153). This, Scodari (2008) explained, is why there was such a mass outpouring of mourning for Diana when she was killed in a car accident. Scodari (2008) also explained that "through such melodramatic identification women who feel 'trapped and powerless within society' find acknowledgement of their predicament" (p. 153).

Unlike Princess Diana, Middleton is of a generation that can access her at any point in time. In the internet age, as Sternheimer (2011) put it, "delving into celebrities' personal lives has become a low-cost product as many traditional forms of media struggle for revenue" (p. 214). Sternheimer (2011) continued in saying that the internet age is a steady stream of celebrity updates at viewers' fingertips. Even certain television programs provide a ticker with live

updates of celebrity gossip. Celebrity gossip has even infiltrated our traditional online news sources. We are surrounded by it. Interestingly, Sternheimer (2011) explained that we are bombarded with celebrity gossip not because the media wants us to be concerned with it, but because our traditional outlets are losing money fast and celebrity culture may attract the readership these outlets need to survive (p. 220-221). This could possibly help to explain the overwhelming demand for Middleton's royal wedding coverage in the months leading up to her 2011 wedding.

Newman et al. (2011) found that people seek to purchase and keep a celebrity's personal effects as a result of contagion relating to the item. A good example Newman et al. (2011) provided is an auction that sold the personal items of the late Jackie Kennedy Onassis and her late husband Jack Kennedy for exorbitant amounts. Items included Kennedy's rocking chair, which sold for $400,000, and Kennedy's golf clubs, which sold for $700,000.

Similarly, Batchelor (2014) used George Clooney as a point of reference to make his point about the branded celebrity. At one point, Batchelor (2014) explained that Clooney is used as a marketing tool to take the money out of consumers' pockets. Batchelor (2014) also shared that what the public loves about Clooney is his authenticity because of his relatable nature, and therefore this has more than helped Clooney establish his icon status. Batchelor (2014) also stated he has established his status as icon through his heavy devotion to his philanthropic works. Outside of this, the public has never had a reason not to like him. This, of course, could also help to understand Middleton's fame, as she is often branded as "normal" and "just like us" (which will be described to follow). Next, this study will examine the existing literature on fairy-tale princesses and the psychological effects they have on adolescent girls.

Fairy-tale Princess Studies

We cannot further the exploration of a possible link between fairy-tale princesses and the fandom of Kate Middleton without first understanding the science and social infatuation with childhood exposure to fairy-tale princesses, most important and prominent of fairy-tale princesses being Disney princesses.

Hains (2014) addressed the cultural fixation of raising our girls with the fairy-tale mindset by explaining that princess movies are shaped in a way that reinforces to young girls that they should act passively and maintain their beauty. Hains (2014) also focused on the fact that most Disney princess movies seem to put the princesses in their traditional gender roles with their priorities focused on appearance. Finally, Hains (2014) explained that Disney still markets their princess products with the same weak and passive persona that has always existed, which is a stark contrast between the new princesses' on screen personas. Hains (2014) also pointed out that these princesses have serious staying power as they have dominated for decades and we are still allowing our girls to grow up "immersed in decades-old stories with outdated messages about women's roles in society and culture, about who can be a princess" (p. 20).

In a similar study by Coyne, Birkbeck, Linder, Nelson and Rasmussen (2016), the correlation between gender stereotypes and body and princesses was observed. Unsurprisingly enough, Coyne et al. (2016) discovered through their research that young female exposure to Disney princesses does in fact raise the likelihood that young girls are more likely to display higher levels of stereotyped behavior. Coyne et al. (2016) pointed out that while there is nothing wrong with wanting to behave in a gender-specific way, it may end up being potentially problematic if girls begin to adhere to the idea that their opportunities are limited, or they develop a sense that they are not meant for rough and tumble activities because they feel the

need to stick with their preconceived notions of femininity. Interestingly enough (and most importantly), Coyne et al. (2016) cited Dinella (2013), adding that women who chose to identify as a "princess" tended to forfeit on an arduous task, maintained a lesser drive for a good work ethic, and were more concerned with superficial attributes about themselves. Furthermore, Coyne et al. (2016) suggested that the higher the level of gender-stereotyped behavior was in female adolescence, the higher the likelihood was of this affecting female adulthood.

Another study by Jule (2011) explored a similar concept of the effect of Disney princess culture on young girls. In this particular study, Jule (2011) focused on how the Disney princess brand affects the gender identity development in young girls. Jule (2011) expressed that "princesses accomplish very little other than being beautiful" (p. 33). As other research has echoed, Jule (2011) also explained that the Disney princess is often passive and objectified, with her most important feature being her looks. Most of the princesses have a similar appearance in that they are slender, with beautiful long hair, and flattering facial features. Jule (2011) went on to say that competency and intelligence are not at the forefront of a Disney princess's job. Meanwhile, for young boys, superheroes are more intelligent and very task-driven, and are of course meant to save the world from mass destruction. Jule (2011) noted how rare it is that a Disney princess ever has that type of job description and that both princesses and superheroes create messages about what gender should look like for boys and girls. Oftentimes in Disney movies, even if it is not a princess movie, the movie features a male lead, and eventually when a female does enter, it is often a case of the female "aspiring" to be a princess and being rewarded for her beauty (Jule, 2011, p. 34). In conclusion, Jule (2011) cited Kaiser (2003) as saying that "children from birth to age 6 watch at least one DVD movie per day" (p. 34) Therefore, Jule (2011) cited the See Jane media group in that the group believes that the presence of more

15

variety in female characters in children's early media exposure is incredibly important for both male and female development.

Researchers Cook and Main (2008) were interested in the concept of princesses and why they are such an important focal point for young girls' play. According to Cook and Main (2008), the princesses in the original fairy tales are not the same princesses that we see in modern media now. Putting Disney aside, some of the princesses we see today (Fiona from "Shrek," Leia from "Star Wars," and Eowyn from "Lord of the Rings," to name a few) tend to break some of the traditional roles we usually see women in. However, the male-dominated landscape is not gone. Cook and Main (2008) noted, "Real princesses have long been style icons, whether actual trendsetters or merely enticingly arrayed in jewel collections…they exert a continuous upward pressure on style aspiration" (p. 405). Cook and Main (2008) added that social classes distinguish themselves from other social classes unintentionally and intentionally. In addition, they stated:

> The transformational aspect of the princess role thus enables small girls-and maybe their adult counterparts as well-to assess the taste formations of aspirational class categories; and, it should be added, to enact the behaviors licensed by the social powers conferred within them. (406)

In conclusion, Cook and Main (2008) found that of the girls who were observed during the research, to describe princesses became a little confusing, as to them, princesses do not exist outside of their play spaces (414).

Similarly, Newman (2018) examined the relationship of how much mothers allowed their young daughters to interact with Disney princesses. Interestingly, out of the mothers who were interviewed, the theme of wanting to limit their daughter's exposure to Disney princesses was

particularly popular. The reason primarily had to do with fear of creating a world for their daughters that does not exist (i.e., a fairy-tale world where nothing bad can happen to them). Finally, we must now apply what is known about fan culture, celebrity culture, and Disney princess culture to Kate Middleton.

Kate Middleton

Middleton had recently joined the Royal Family in 2011 and it was then she acquired celebrity status by extension of the Royal Family. According to John Baimer (2011), the British Royal Family is a "celebrity heritage brand," which is simply a brand that has stuck around long enough to remain in common consciousness. For example, the British (and any other realm she rules over) have the Queen, and Americans have Coca-Cola. Baimer (2011) explained that the Royal Family has graduated from being less "product-like" to more "brand-like" because of the emotional attachment that budded over the years. Baimer (2011) added, "As marketing scholars have observed, the 'consumption' of the British Crown can create a sense of self—a sense of identity—for individuals and groups; this is similar to many other corporate brands" (p. 521).

In a similar study, Balmer, Greyser, and Urde (2006) explained the essential elements of royalty that contribute to it being considered a corporate brand. One of the elements to be considered is being royalty. Being "royal" automatically sets you apart from the rest of a population. As royals are typically anointed under their constitution, they are permitted titles such as "Your Royal Highness" and "Your Majesty," which create a barrier between royalty and commoners. Another branding element that is often used to describe Middleton is regality. Balmer et al. (2006) stated that "for a monarch, the implication is not so much that every action and activity needs to be regal...but rather that a monarch's behaviour should not be un-regal" (p.

145). Finally, Balmer et al. (2006) added that fascination of royal families lies in many cultures as people are intrigued by the "clothes, the romances, and the parties" (p. 150).

A study by Hamilton, Hewer, and Logan (2013) researched how fashion choices can affect one's celebrity status through the lens of Kate Middleton. Interestingly enough, Hamilton et al. (2013) shared before discussing the findings, "Kate Middleton's public persona is manufactured behind the scenes by a team of highly influential tactically selected cultural intermediaries" (p. 379). Hamilton et al. (2013) of course expressed that while most of the outward choices Middleton makes are plotted and carefully devised, her fashion choices are ultimately left to her own choosing (p. 379). Importantly, Hamilton et al. (2013) found that media outlets have connected Kate as being an approachable, everyday girl by wearing looks the general public can afford and wear just like her. Similarly, a dress worn by Middleton for a charity fashion show during her years at college sold for a cool 78,000 pounds (roughly 102,000 USD), which as a result established Middleton as a celebrity fashion icon. This is because the dress sold for far above what it was originally worth because it had a symbolic meaning to the beginning of William and Kate's relationship (p. 379).

Of course, Kate's relatable nature would not be considered if it were not for the role to which she has ascended. Kate has been branded since her engagement as the "normal girl," which basically is the idea that Kate went from being an average girl to a real princess. This is something most girls grew up wishing to be. Kate came from a middle-class background with no aristocratic lineage to her name; therefore, most common girls and women latch onto her and find her easily relatable because she, like the rest of us, grew up enduring the everyday struggles of life. The study, overall, found that magazines fashioned Kate into the girl everyone dreams of being, with words used to describe her like "humble," "fairy-tale princess Kate," "regal Kate,"

"the people's Kate" (remember princess Diana was referred to as "the people's princess"), and "girl next door Kate" (p. 379-381). The findings of this study help to create a basic understanding for how Kate's "relatable" persona was crafted in the media from the very beginning.

Similarly, an article from the *Daily Mail* really helps to better clarify the effect Middleton has in the fashion world. Spencer (2011) shared that in 2011, Middleton wore a (roughly) $400 black coat from the brand Libelula to the wedding of a mutual friend of her and William. The coat completely sold out within hours of the pictures surfacing online. The coat then garnered a waiting list of 300 people. Spencer (2011) also added that Kate is truly the first duchess to create such madness when it comes to fashion history. At one point, fashion retailer Reiss (a favorite of Middleton's) was selling one dress per minute (the dress worn by Middleton in her engagement portraits). Interestingly enough, Spencer (2011) added that even Princess Diana took years to reach the level of popularity with fashion that Kate garnered within the first month (this of course bearing in mind Diana was from the pre-internet days). With this literature in mind, it then opened the door for exploration into whether or not there is a correlation between childhood interest in Disney princesses and adulthood fandom in Kate Middleton. The research approach is described in detail in the following section.

Methods

This study consisted of a series of ethnographic qualitative personal interviews and observations of online social media engagement conducted through Instagram direct message of different self-identified fans of the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton. In particular, one of the participants was selected as she had been featured in articles from the *Daily Mail* and *Vogue* in which her participation in Middleton's fandom had been highlighted through her use of her

personal social media accounts. The remaining participants were selected based on if their account was dedicated entirely to sharing information related to Middleton. The participants were all females with ages ranging between 18-40. The number of followers was taken into consideration, but was not a determining factor in whether or not participants were asked to give an interview, as it was completely based on whether the user focused her posts on Middleton. The only plausible tool for research in this study was ethnographic computer-assisted interviews because of the widespread location and selective availability of online fans of the Duchess of Cambridge. Below, the process of conducting the ethnographic internet-based personal interviews and observations is explained in detail.

For this study, it is important to first address what ethnography is and how it was the most useful method of research. Ethnography allowed for a deeper understanding of the happenings within the Middleton-fanbase subculture. The research in this study was conducted online through the social media platform Instagram, by means of ethnographic interviews and observations of user activity. According to Whitehead (2002), ethnography is defined as the examination of meanings, processes, and socio-cultural situations within cultural systems. This method of research is classified as a qualitative method in which the researcher observes and takes notes of a particular culture's everyday happenings over a period of time, to then analyze those notes in an interpretive process of creating meaning behind the observations. For this study in particular, participants' Instagram accounts were first observed based on their level of engagement with Middleton-inspired posts and information (i.e., posts replicating Middleton's outfit, or posting photos of engagements she had attended recently). Second, participants were interviewed over Instagram direct message, and the answers to each participant's interview were analyzed to interpret the meaning behind the insights they provided.

The data in this study concluded with information and insights that led to several drawn conclusions in relation to a connection between adolescent Disney princess exposure and adult fandom in Kate Middleton. Numerically speaking, the data collected was dependent on user willingness to participate in the study, but the ideal range fell between 10-15 individual interviews and ended with exactly 12 interviews. Once the interviews had been conducted, the next phase was examining each interview and recording notes of interviewee responses to create an understanding that helped to build a bridge between childhood Disney princess exposure and fandom of Kate Middleton in adulthood. According to Salmons (2012), online personal interviews are a great tool for researchers who wish to meet geographically diverse study participants. For this study, an unstructured design was most appropriate, which Salmons (2012) described as a conversation between participant and researcher.

Online personal interviews with an unstructured design have a step-by-step process of creating questions and conducting the interview. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008), there are two simple ways of conducting online interviews and one way in which this study was conducted was through online chats. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) first suggested that the researcher start with writing the interviewee a question via email, and then waiting for a response. The next method is through online chats, which are more instantaneous than email with the interviewee answering instantly as opposed to waiting for a period of time for an interviewee's response. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) also suggested that computer-assisted interviews are very important and advantageous, as they provide the researcher with a detailed, verbatim record of the exchanges between the researcher and interviewee, and thus provide the researcher with an immediate ability to analyze the information.

A request for approval of research to the Institutional Review Board was filed to ensure security and safety of each participant before the study was conducted. Once approved, each interviewee was greeted with a generalized explanation of the point of the study. Once the interviewee agreed to participate in the study, she was then asked the following questions (with follow-up questions dependent on each interviewee's response):

- How long have you been a fan of Kate Middleton?

- Why have you created an online platform in which to interact with others through the lens of Kate Middleton?

- Do Kate's fashion choices affect your own wardrobe?

- Do you try to purchase each piece of clothing Kate Middleton wears when she's first spotted wearing it?

- Did you grow up watching Disney princess films?

- Did you love the Disney princess movies enough to want the associated merchandise with the princesses (i.e., dolls, clothing, books, accessories)?

- About what age did you grow out of your Disney princess phase?

- Do you still enjoy watching Disney princess films?

Once the interviews were completed, the information was taken from the digital record of the online interviews and compiled into a spreadsheet in which each participant was anonymously assigned a letter of the alphabet to correspond with each individual answer to each question (for example, the first participant was assigned the letter "A," which identified that participant's answer to each question on the spreadsheet). After each of the participant's answers were compiled in the spreadsheet, the first phase of analysis involved searching for common words or phrases shared within the answers to the same questions. This allowed for the next

phase of analysis to begin, which was creating categories (venn diagram-like) between Middleton and Disney princesses and searching for any themes or insights that overlapped. Finally, the data was then further stratified by taking the overlapping information and drawing conclusions and potential explanations for this phenomenon.

<div align="center">

Results and Analysis

</div>

The thoughts and comments that were gathered from the one-on-one interviews with Middleton fans brought about results that were unexpected, but help to explain larger phenomena within the minds of Middleton's fans. There were several themes that emerged from the conversations with interviewees and below those themes are discussed in detail to help shed light on the interest in fictional and real princess culture.

Rags to Riches

The first and largest theme that emerged from the participant interviews was the overall concept of "rags to riches." This is an age-old phrase that for the most part many people attach to the picture-perfect fantasy of being an everyday member of working-class society and then by good fortune becoming someone of lavish wealth (and fame, for some), whether overnight or over the course of time. Interestingly, the Disney princess Cinderella boasts a "rags to riches" storyline, and Cinderella was the princess mentioned most throughout the interviews. Throughout the Disney princess portion of the interview questions, some of the participants brought up that they loved Cinderella as a child or owned a Cinderella doll of some sort, all with Cinderella not having been mentioned previously in the interview. This was especially prevalent when participants were asked whether or not they grew up watching Disney princess movies, with a few responses including the mention of Cinderella:

- "Yes! Absolutely! Cinderella was my favourite!"

- "also love Cinderella and The Little Mermaid."

- "Yes Cinderella and Snow White."

These are some of the same respondents that shared they are still infatuated with Disney princesses even in adulthood. The most interesting connection within this theme is the unnoticeable correlation between Cinderella and Middleton's "rags to riches" life stories.

Cinderella, of course, is arguably one of the most popular Disney princesses as she is one of Disney's oldest with a release date on the animated film of 1950 (which became one of the highest grossing movies in 1950 and was re-released five times in theatres in the decades following due to overwhelming popularity). Cinderella's popularity within Disney even prompted the corporation to erect a Cinderella castle that stands as one of Disney World's largest structures throughout the entire theme park and debuted on the same day the Disney World theme park opened. The Cinderella castle remains one of the most highly sought-after attractions among park visitors, even after almost 50 years as Cinderella's castle is even featured in Disney's logo. With this in mind, one would begin to wonder how an adaptation of French writer Charles Perrault's tale could become such an important staple in American culture.

In Cinderella's fairy tale, she is seen as an incredibly kind-hearted spirit who lives a great life with loving parents until her mother dies and her father remarries. Upon her father's passing, Cinderella's stepmother turns wicked and casts Cinderella to the attic to then become a servant for both her and her stepsisters. As the story progresses, Cinderella patiently and kindly tolerates the cruel treatment she receives in hopes that one day her situation will change. Cinderella, thanks to her fairy godmother, transforms the rags she wears into a glorious ball gown to attend the ball thrown by the prince. As fate would have it, Cinderella was the only one in the ball who

manages to capture the prince's attention, and the story ends with Cinderella and the prince living happily ever after.

It is worth mentioning that Cinderella is not the only Disney "princess" to undergo this "rags to riches" shift interestingly, as one participant brought to light that her favorite Disney movies is in the movies *The Princess Diaries I* and *II*. The plot of *The Princess Diaries* follows dorky-esque teenage girl Mia (suffering through all the woes of teenage life), only to discover from her distant grandmother that her deceased father was the future king of a foreign country. Thus, Mia has a choice to make whether she wants to follow in her father's footsteps or maintain the "normal" life she had always been living. Mia, of course, chooses to accept her role as princess and future heir to the throne. While these are both Disney movies with two entirely different characters and plots, the underlying premise of living life normally to suddenly falling into fame and fortune is the foundation of both movies, and incidentally, Middleton's own personal story.

Now, on the other side of the princess coin is Middleton's childhood and personal life. Middleton grew up with two loving parents, learning to attend to the demands of everyday life just like every other working-class citizen. Middleton did not come from aristocracy and as a result earned the title of "commoner" by the media throughout the years. As mentioned before, Middleton met Prince William while the two were both attending St. Andrew's University. The pair began dating during college, going through the normal ups and downs of a relationship (including a breakup). The two finally announced in 2010 after years of dating that they would be getting married in the spring of 2011 and Middleton would become the next queen-consort of the British Monarchy.

Comparatively, Cinderella and Middleton both lived the "rags to riches" phenomenon and as one respondent shared of Middleton, "she's living the dream so to speak...she got her prince!" Other respondents were quick to mention how Cinderella and Middleton impacted them:

- "[speaking of Middleton's wedding] I was instantly hooked. It was her grace, elegance, and natural beauty. And the idea of this modern 'Cinderella' story."

- "I kept all my dolls still in their boxes, collected things in adulthood over the years hoping that I would pass them onto my daughter if I had one. Now that I have a daughter I've been buying princess things for her too."

Therefore, when analyzing both Cinderella and Middleton and why members of Middleton's fan community have taken such a strong liking to Middleton, the concept of coming from working-class and in time becoming someone of opulent wealth is very strong. As children who were exposed to Cinderella at an early age, these participants developed a love for the Disney princess (so much so that for some it has carried over into adulthood) and her story of becoming a princess. As a result, the argument can be made that Middleton is a sincere version of Cinderella in reality for some participants within Middleton's fan community. In the past, it was very common for royals to marry nobility of lower ranking or other foreign dignitaries, as we saw with Queen Elizabeth and Princess Diana, but the world gazed with curiosity at Prince William as he chose to marry a commoner.

As a follow-up question, participants were asked exactly why they like Kate. After shuffling through the thoughtful and lengthy responses, many respondents shared that they felt they were able to relate to Middleton because she still seems to hold on to her same persona and remembers, for lack of a better term, "where she came from." Some of these relatability comments include:

- "She is relatable, having not come from a royal or noble background, and seems to really embody strong core values and appears to be incredibly down-to-earth."

- "She's relatable, she's down-to-earth."

- "I think she is a great role model."

- "I think she's very down to earth."

It was very apparent throughout participant responses that Middleton, although a member of the Royal Family, still evokes a sense of normality to her followers in which they find they can easily relate to. Middleton's commoner background is a large draw for some of the respondents because like Cinderella, Middleton lived a very "normal" life before she became a member of the Royal Family. It can be theorized that because Middleton lived an authentic variation of Cinderella's story, these participants (and possibly other members of Middleton's fan community) have been given the hope that because it happened to a "normal" girl like Middleton, it could happen to them too. Therefore, Middleton can be seen as a sign of hope for their own "rags to riches" story.

While taking into account that the 12 respondents in this study do not account for Middleton's entire fan base, it does shed light on a phenomenon that unbeknownst to most, ties Middleton and Cinderella together. Interestingly, within this theme blossoms the term "Replikating," which explains how fans exercise their interest in Middleton and further helps to embody the possible feeling of "it could be me."

Replikate

As with most fan bases, Middleton has a dedicated following of fans that practice and interact with one another in their own unique way. Some fan bases watch their sports teams together while others engage in deep discussion over their shared favorite television show. With

fandom in mind, think back to Jenkins' (1992) explanation of "Trekkers" and how Star Trek fans practice their fandom. Jenkins (1992) shared that Trekkers concern themselves with details and information that other watchers may not be interested in, like character theories and plots of different episodes. For Kate Middleton, there is a fan-created concept called "Replikating," which makes up a great majority of her fan base. Middleton's fans appropriately named their fan base after their shared love of copying the clothing choices Middleton makes. In Middleton's case (just like Trekkers and their keen interest in keeping up with otherwise unimportant details of Star Trek), Replikaters are likely first to identify and purchase (those who can afford it) an article of clothing Middleton wears within the same day or a more affordable item that closely resembles the original one Middleton wore. It is entirely worth mentioning that the few participants who did not label themselves a Replikater actively mentioned they did not start their Instagram accounts on the basis of sharing Middleton-based closets, but instead more on interest in sharing photos and information related to Middleton's personal life and royal engagements.

This term was discovered throughout the responses of almost all participants. Most participants use their Instagram accounts specifically to share their Kate-inspired closets, so they used the term Replikate in their responses to interview questions. The term Replikate is an obvious and very clever combination of the words "replicate" and "Kate." Those who refer to themselves as Replikaters are users who specifically seek to copy Middleton's wardrobe as closely as they can, meaning they either purchase the exact item Middleton wore or an item that closely resembles that item. These users then take to Instagram to share their Replikates in the form of a side-by-side comparison of themselves wearing their Replikate and a photo of Middleton wearing the outfit they were seeking to copy. When users post these side-by-side photos, they caption them with the term "replikate" (see Appendix B).

Throughout some participant responses, it became clear that participants refer to Middleton's fan community as Replikaters. These users have built an online fan community (much like a great deal of other fan bases) in which to share their Replikates with one another and build relationships with other Replikaters. Some participants shared that they turn to the Replikate community because their friends and associates lack an interest in royal affairs, so they use Instagram as a tool for building connections with other people who share their interest in Kate Middleton and copying her clothing. Some participants even shared that they participate in the Replikate community citing political reasons, as one participant explained:

Argentina, where I live, has a very controversial relationship with Britain, because of the Falklands War. There is no one in my environment who I can share my fanaticism. In replikaters I found friendship despite where you came from, or what like.

Similarly, another participant shared, "I made my tumblr around the time of Charlotte's birth because I'm friends with a lot of Republicans and didn't want to upset them royal reblogging." The significance with these two quotes lies in that even though both participants are so heavily interested in Middleton, they found other means of sharing their interests and building relationships with people who also shared their interests despite the political conflicts it may present within their personal relationships. It is very clear that through the use of social media, and as some participants have mentioned, Replikaters are able to foster and develop friendships within one another based on their shared interest in and love of Middleton.

Considering the participants (and other self-proclaimed Replikaters) exercise their fan interest in Middleton through purchasing and wearing items worn by Middleton, one would begin to wonder if Replikaters purchase clothing items worn by the duchess only because she wore them and not out of their own desire to reflect their personal style. Interestingly, when

asked, "Do Kate's fashion choices affect your own?," half of the respondents explained that

Middleton does have an effect on their clothing choices, but they still maintain their own sense

of personal style:

- "Yes, but only in the sense that if I see something she wears and I like it, I might buy it or try to find something similar. There are plenty of items she wears that I don't care for. I think there are people buying things just because she wore them and might not actually think whether it work for them personally."
- "I'd say they somewhat do...I still have my own style and 'replikate' as a hobby."
- "Yes I would say so. Not Hugely in that I don't go out and buy whatever she wears, but her style definitely influences me."

The other half of respondents cited Middleton as their determining factor for their fashion

choices. The participants who rely solely on Middleton for their own fashion choices explained

that Middleton has merely helped to improve their personal sense of style in general:

- "Yes! I tend to gravitate more towards the brands she wears and purchase them for my own wardrobe."
- "Yes. I think we have a similar style anyway but occasionally she's worn things that I wouldn't have chosen but are now a part of my wardrobe, like hair bows, butterfly clips and dresses with leg slits."
- "Yes, she certainly helps me dress outside of my normal comfort zone."

It is clear that though the level of which Middleton's fashion choices affect Replikaters' personal

style varies, Middleton still influences the personal styles of those seeking to replicate her

clothing choices in general. This concept of Replikating also reflects research mentioned earlier

in the literature in that Lamerichs (2018) explained (in terms of television characters) that fans

seek to epitomize characters to give a visual to their fandom. In this sense, the same principle applies as Middleton's fans are seeking to look like Middleton through her fashion choices. While Lamerichs (2018) explained that fan couture is new in terms of fan research, fans use their fashion choices as a way of growing closer to their chosen character or celebrity. This concept of desiring to grow closer to a chosen character or celebrity leads into the next theme throughout the study similar to Replikating, which is childhood princess costumes.

Princess Costumes

Replikating within Middleton's fandom is not the only known experience of copying another person or character's clothing. In fact, Replikaters' interest in choosing to participate in Middleton's fandom through the art of "Replikating" may possibly have begun when they least expected it in their developmental years. Most of the participants explained that they grew up with Disney princess-affiliated merchandise (e.g., books, movies, stationary, bedding, etc.). Specifically, a few respondents willfully shared they had Disney princess costumes in their childhood years. Each Disney princess has a dress that they are typically pictured in, like Cinderella's blue ball gown or Aurora's pink gown (see Appendix A), and so Disney capitalized on that by creating child-size versions of these dresses that young girls can dress up in. Interestingly, one participant shared in response to whether or not she had any Disney princess merchandise: "No, but not for lack of trying! I really wanted a princess dress when I was little but my parents said it was too expensive." A couple other Disney Princess dress comments included: "Yes I [sic] Mum used to buy my Disney Princess related things like cups, dresses, books, etc.," and "I don't necessarily remember it all, but I know I definitely had the costumes, dolls, and stationary." The sole purpose of purchasing and wearing Disney princess costumes in childhood is that children are then able to take on the "feeling" that they *are* that specific

princess. It is the same feeling children have when they put on a Batman or Spider-man costume and actively run around pretending to "save the day."

The same concept of a child wearing a princess costume to "become" that princess can very easily help to explain a portion of Replikaters' interest in Middleton through Replikating in adulthood. For some, it is a nice thought to think you may suddenly end up a member of the Royal Family, but for others (namely Replikaters and other Middleton fans), it appears a hobby to feel as close to royalty as possible by copying a great majority of the looks Middleton chooses to wear in public (and even in private when paparazzi photos of her are released). A presumption can be made from the Replikaters' answers that in the quest of wanting to "copy" Middleton's looks and clothing, Replikaters are taking on a notion that they themselves have transformed into royalty simply by wearing the same things as Middleton. This transformative concept is similar to the study by Newman et al. (2011) in that people seek to purchase and keep items related to celebrities because of their associations (and in some cases, items that once belonged to celebrities because of the contagion factor). In this case, Replikaters are seeking to copy Middleton's clothing choices because of the association with Middleton that they form and therefore feel like a transformed version of royalty themselves. This theory would also heavily help to explain "the Kate Effect" (Spencer, 2011), which is the overwhelming public demand for Middleton's clothes that have caused several websites to crash within minutes and/or small businesses to close because of their inability to meet the demand. The Kate Effect was mentioned earlier in the literature, but in relation to the Replikaters' desire to have a transformative experience, it is quite possible that Replikaters are those who made the Kate Effect become as large a phenomenon as it was and is.

Overall, fans go about participating and interacting in their fandoms in different ways. For the Replikaters, one way Replikating can be interpreted is that it is an adult version of dressing up as Cinderella or other Disney princesses out of a desire to transform from who they are and into an experience of what it may feel like to be royalty. This concept of a transformative experience leads into the final theme discovered throughout this study, which would help to further solidify the idealization of princess culture in that Middleton is no longer human, but instead a "perfect" princess.

Princess of Perfection

The final piece to this study relates back to Cinderella (and even *The Princess Diaries*) in terms of understanding fans' interest in Middleton. The entire plot of Cinderella is played out before our eyes with the ending leaving us with a glamourous version of Cinderella's new life. We see Cinderella quite literally make the transition from rags to riches. In this concept, it is quite possible that for some people (as mentioned before), Middleton may serve as an authentic Cinderella, meaning that those who find themselves as fans of Middleton may unconsciously attach Cinderella's fairy-tale ending to Middleton's own real rags to riches story. They may see Middleton as quite literally living "happily ever after," negating all the negative aspects of real life (like most older Disney princess films have cultivated). Therefore, it is possible to assume that participants may have unconsciously taken what they know from Disney princess films and attached it to Middleton's experience in the Royal Family.

The most interesting idea within this concept is that all of the participants, when asked why they like Middleton, answered the question essentially by saying (aside from the relatability piece) that she is classy and seems very genuine. This almost implies that Middleton is consistently happy in the public eye. As one participant said, "I like her elegance, grace, and

classic style. I feel like Kate is one of the few in the public eye who remain humble and grounded, bringing a genuine warmth and compassion with her wherever she goes." Similarly, another participant shared:

> I love her work, her passion, her interests. I like how she's really studying early mental health. I love how she's starting national conversations about mental health. I love the fact she spends too long on walkabouts. I love how no one actually has a bad word to say about her. I adore her ball gowns. I love her little smile.

Middleton is obviously a member of the Royal Family, which is, for all intents and purposes, a brand. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, Baimer (2011) explained that the British Royal Family is a "celebrity heritage brand," which simply means it has been around so long, it has become a part of common consciousness. Baimer (2011) related the Royal Family to the Coca-Cola can and its symbolism in American culture. Baimer (2011) finally explained that the Royal Family creates a sense of identity for people given the emotional attachment to it, much like other corporatized brands.

The Royal Family is a brand that has been working to make great strides at marketing themselves as relatable to the people in recent years, especially following the negative press they received in the wake of Princess Diana's death. So, it is very interesting to consider that Middleton's fans almost seem to attribute Middleton to near perfection, even though her "ideal" public persona is more than considered a requirement for her role as future queen-consort to the British Monarchy. This "perfection" ideal that participants seemingly attach to Middleton could be in great part due to how the role of a princess is communicated through Disney princess movies in early childhood. Most Disney princess movies (mainly those that appeared before and during the 1990s) often end with the princess and her prince (or some form of royalty) dancing,

getting married or "riding into the sunset," then leaving the viewer to decide how the princess spends her days in royal bliss with her new husband. Interestingly, this is how viewers were left after the marriage of Middleton to Prince William. Therefore, it appears that the lines between real life and perfection have been somehow blurred between Disney princess fantasy and Middleton's authentic experience. So, even though the rest of us outside of the Royal Family understand the struggles and normalcies of everyday life, somehow with Middleton's transition into being a member of the Royal Family, she gave up all of those things in exchange for perfection and a "happily ever after."

Another avenue of this concept could be that Middleton's life, even though from afar, provides a method of escapism for her fans in terms of perfection. Because each Disney princess had a happily ever after (and by extension so did Middleton), looking at Middleton's life through rose-colored lenses may be an easy experience for her fans. Since Middleton lived the metaphorical "Cinderella story," it may invite participants and other fans to interpret her life as a mode of escapism from their own reality and everyday woes. To break this concept down even further, being a princess is usually considered living in the lap of luxury. The way our culture and fairy tales have portrayed princesses to us is through their riches: undeniable true love, the carriages, the dresses, the palaces, the servants, and any other luxurious items that play well into the concept of lap of luxury (see Appendix C for a visual comparison between Cinderella and Middleton's weddings). Therefore, Middleton's wedding was the first glimpse into the royal luxury she would experience from then on, and everyone around the world got a taste of it. Middleton's wedding to Prince William was nothing short of luxurious, including all of the items mentioned above. Because this was the only glimpse of Middleton's personal life post-Royal Family we have been exposed to, it is easy to assume that as a result, princess-adoring fans have

attached the princess-perfection concept to Middleton, beginning with her Royal Wedding. To imagine life as a real princess through Replikating and keeping up with Kate in general, participants and other fans may be able to push past their own struggles and escape their reality by living vicariously through Middleton. Similarly, earlier in the literature it was explained that people involve themselves in celebrities' lives to better help them make sense of their own reality (Cashmore, 2006).

This perfect-princess concept was mentioned earlier in the literature similarly as the Mythologizing Effect (Danesi, 2015), which states that we see celebrities as mythical creatures because of how they are portrayed to us in the media, and when someone actually meets that celebrity, it is like meeting a mythical creature. For Middleton, she embodies this concept in that unlike other celebrities who share the very intimate details of their lives on social media, Middleton (per royal protocol) is not allowed to share anything truly intimate. Therefore, just as with the perfect-princess concept, Middleton is an authentic mythical creature.

Even though Middleton is a celebrity, it is hard to imagine her as anything other than what she shows the public, given that she (like most participants shared) is so kind and gracious during her royal engagements. So, this undoubtedly has had an effect on her fans as there was not (not to any surprise) a single negative comment about Middleton within the interviews. One participant even delightfully shared, "She just seems like a caring and kind person who will be a great Queen Consort one day!" Therefore, there is some form of escapist princess-perfection that is attached to Middleton even though her public persona has been carefully crafted by her public relations team (including her wardrobe).

Discussion

All of the participants' answers related to both Middleton and Disney princesses indicated a larger phenomenon between both. In the analysis phase, it became very clear that the interest in Disney princesses and Middleton stems beyond both parties and more toward the idea of the "it could be me" rags to riches dream. As explained earlier, there is a particular fascination with the concept of coming from a working-class background and then shedding that life to become someone of opulent wealth and fame, which is the underlying foundation of Cinderella and Middleton's stories. Even though this study only reached 12 participants, out of the 12 people who were interviewed, it was unanimous that Middleton is a figure of relatability for them. These participants were all exposed at some point in their childhood to Disney princesses. So, in adulthood, Middleton's journey from living life as an everyday girl from a non-aristocratic background and meeting the future king of England, only to end up marrying him, is a theoretical narrative that is appealing in terms that if it could happen to Middleton, then it could happen to them.

Although there is no direct answer from this study alone whether or not exposure to Disney princesses' perfect "happily ever after" ideal extends into adulthood and continues on within Middleton, there is a connection between interest in princesses and the "rags to riches" phenomenon. This concept would have been less valuable if Cinderella had not played a valuable role throughout the interviews. Cinderella was the princess most-mentioned amongst the participants (with a few citing other princesses as their favorite) and that was the piece of the puzzle that helped to further draw a connection between Disney princesses and Middleton. As a result, it can be interpreted that one particular explanation for this phenomenon is the idealization of a life-changing situation in which one would get the "happily ever after" scenario in her own

37

life. As explained above, particularly with Replikating, the closer one may feel to Middleton, the closer she may feel to actually being royalty in herself. So, it appears that both the Disney princesses and Middleton are fictional and absolute versions of a deeper conceptual ideal that is appealing to some people, and in particular, Middleton fans.

As far as Middleton is concerned, she became the staple fixture for young women who desired the "happily ever after" story, and it can be theorized that if going from a commoner to a member of the Royal Family could happen to an everyday "normal" girl like Middleton, it could happen to them too. Therefore making Middleton appear relatable to them as they make the connection that she once lived a life like their own, so she must understand the normal and daily struggles of everyday working-class life.

It is also worth adding that another possible avenue of why these women find themselves drawn to Middleton is because, as some participants shared, she purchases items from affordable outlets that make it accessible for them to purchase as well. This also ties in with the relatability factor, as many participants mentioned Middleton's "down to earth" quality, which can partly be assumed they are referencing her consistent pattern of re-wearing and purchasing items that almost anyone could afford. Overall, it appears like Middleton is a tangible, adult version of a Disney princess. While the science behind why this interest in princess culture is not known, this research will hopefully serve as a building block to understanding the overall effects of adolescent exposure to Disney princesses in females in their adulthood.

Limitations

There are two important limitations within this study. The first would lie in the timeline of the research, which then affects the sample size. This study had a window of 2 months to conduct all ethnographic interviews (which was shortened by numerous issues with approval for

research application) and originally had intended to reach a sample size of 15-20 participants. However, given the condensed timeline, the sample size of potential interviewees was significantly decreased. Therefore, all 12 participants in this study do not account for a large portion of Middleton's fan base. Second, in any interview setting, according to Alshenqeeti (2014), interviewees are only going to reveal what they want, and as a result these opinions may subjective shift over time, not completely holding truth.

Future Research

This study opens the door for a different look at the long-term effects of adolescent exposure to Disney princesses in terms of adulthood hobby interests. Even though this study focuses on the fan culture aspect of exposure to Disney princesses, it does aim to support the idea that the pop culture aspects with which we engage heavily in adolescence may be responsible for what we take interest in as adults.

As a result, another route that has yet to be researched is the actual "rags to riches" phenomenon, through the lens of royalty. This would highlight whether or not this phenomenon is strictly related to royalty, or simply the nature of coming from nothing and becoming something, in itself (regardless of being in the spotlight or not). This would also be particularly interesting to divide between men and women and compare the results, as this study relied solely on female participants.

Lastly, an extension of the "rags to riches" phenomenon is whether or not there are other psychological elements that play a role for people who are fascinated by this phenomenon. As there were a few participants whose favorite princess was not Cinderella, but still take interest in Kate Middleton, there is a possibility there is another psychological element that affects the thought processes of those who adore both Cinderella and Middleton. Particularly, future

research may consider taking what is known about the idealization of princesses and using Middleton through the lens of the Mythologizing Effect, and examining Middleton's fan base in terms of whether or not they apply the concept of perfection to her role as Duchess of Cambridge based on the way the media has portrayed her life and what we know about her.

Conclusion

This study sought to discover if there was any connection at all between growing up as a fan of Disney rincesses, invested in watching and playing with Disney Princess movies and merchandise, and then later becoming a fan of the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton in adulthood. While a definitive answer was not discovered as to whether exposure to Disney princesses in adolescence has an effect on the brain in terms of later developing another princess interest in adulthood, there are several major themes that arose from this study that will help to further this research in the future.

The "rags to riches" phenomenon played an incredibly valuable role within this study in that it was the common denominator between Cinderella and Middleton (and even Mia Thermopolis from non-Disney princess, but Disney movie, *The Princess Diaries*). The concept connects these two fictional and real people in that they both lived as "normal" people who then became royalty. Although undiscovered what interested participants in Cinderella, it became very clear that interest in Middleton lied through her relatable, "down to earth" persona, which can be assumed was a result of her non-aristocratic upbringing.

References

Alshenqeeti, H. (2014). Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review. *English Linguistics Research, 3*(1), 39-45. doi:10.5430/elr.v3n1p39

Alvermann, D., & Hagood, M. (2000). Fandom and critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43*(5), 436-446.

Artifice. (n.d.). The history behind Disney princesses. Retrieved from https://the-artifice.com/history-behind-disney-princesses/

Balmer, J. (2006). The crown as a corporate brand: Insights from monarchies. *Journal of Brand Management, 14*(½), 137-161. doi:10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550031

Balmer, J. (2011). Corporate heritage brands and the precepts of corporate heritage brand management: Insights from the British Monarchy on the eve of the royal wedding of Prince William (April 2011) and Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee (1952-2012). *Journal of Brand Management, 18*(8), 517-544. doi:10.1057/bm.2011.21

Barlow, A. (2014). *Star power: The impact of branded celebrity*. Santa Barbara, CA.

Bloom, P., Diesendruck, G., & Newman, G. (2011). Celebrity contagion and the value of objects. *Journal of Consumer Research, 38*(2), 215-228. doi: 10.1086/658999

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2009). Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Cashmore, E. (2006). *Celebrity culture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A., & Birkbeck, V. (2016). Pretty as a princess: Longitudinal effects of engagement with Disney princesses on gender stereotypes, body esteem, and prosocial behavior in children. *Child Development, 87*(6), 1909-1925. doi:10.1111/cdev.12569

Cook, J., & Main, W. (2008). What is a princess?: Developing an animated tv program for

    small girls. *Australian Feminist Studies, 23*(57), 401-415.

    doi:10.1080/0816464080226346

Danesi, M. (2015). *Popular culture: Introductory perspectives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman

    & Littlefield.

Deutsch, J. (2015). Why the story of Cinderella endures and resonates. Retrieved from

    https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/does-world-need-yet-another-c

    inderella-180954549

Ebrahim, H. (2014). Are boys at Pixar afraid of little girls? *Journal of Film and Video,*

    66(3), 43-56. doi:10.5406/jfilmvideo.66.3.0043

Fiske, J. (2011). *Television culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hains, R. C. (2014). *The princess problem: Guiding our girls through the princess-obsessed*

    years. Retrieved from https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18565282-the-princess-

    problem

Hallemann, C. (2018, June 10). Kate Middleton just wore a surprisingly affordable dress to

    watch Prince William play polo. *Town & Country*. Retrieved from

    https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/tradition/a21252562/kate-middleton-zara-

    blue-striped-dress-polo-match

Hamilton, K., Hewer, P., & Logan, A. (2013). Re-fashioning Kate: The making of a

    celebrity princess. Retrieved from

    https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281436605_Re-

    fashioning_Kate_The_Making_of_a_Celebrity_Princess_Brand

Hellekson, K. (2018). *A companion to media fandom and fan studies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

& Sons, Inc.

Harwood, E. (2017, February 22). How the "Kate Effect" may have shut down this popular

brand. *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved from https://www.vanityfair.com/style/

2017/02/kate-middleton-effect-issa-engagement-dress

History. (2009). Disney's Cinderella opens. Retrieved from

https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/disneys-cinderella-opens

Internet Movie Database. (n.d.). The Princess Diaries. Retrieved from

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0247638/plotsummary

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers.* Great Britain: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New

York, NY: New York University Press.

Jones, B. (2018). *A companion to media fandom and fan studies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley &

Sons Inc.

Jule, A. (2011). Princesses in the classroom: Young children learning to be human in a

gendered world. *Canadian Children, 36*(2), 33-35. Retrieved from

https://www.academia.edu/18699799/Princesses_in_the_Classroom_Young_Children_Le

arning_to_be_Human_in_a_Gendered_World

Lamerichs, N. (2018). *A companion to media fandom and fan studies*. Hoboken, NJ:

Wiley & Sons Inc.

Lewis, L. (1992). *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media.* New Fetter Lane,

London: Routledge.

Nikunen, K. (2007). The intermedial practises of fandom. *Nordicom Review, 28*(2), 111-128.

doi: 10.1515/nor-2017-0213

Newman, M. (2018). My little princess: Exploring mothers' experiences of their daughter's

    parasocial relationships with Disney princesses. *Visual Inquiry: Learning & Teaching*

    Art, 7(2), 141-151. doi:10.1386/vi.7.2.141_1

Ng, V. (2013). How Disney princesses became a multi billion brand. Retrieved from

    http://www.mcngmarketing.com/how-disney-princesses-became-a-multi-billion-dollar-br

    and/#.XJA1KdpKiUk

Pringle, H. (2004). *Celebrity sells.* West Sussex: England: John Wiley & Sons.

Salmons, J. (2012). Designing and conducting research with online interviews. Retrieved

    from https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/43888_1.pdf

Scodari, C. (2008). Frozen in time: Gender, fan culture, and a young widow's icy terrain.

    International Communication Association, 1-27. Retrieved from

    https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230366379_Frozen_in_Time_Gender_Fan_Cul

    ture_and_a_Young_Widow's_Icy_Terrain

Shefrin, E. (2004). Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom: Mapping new

    congruencies between the internet and media entertainment culture. *Critical Studies*

    in Media Communication, 21(3), 261-281. doi:10.1080/0739318042000212729

Spencer, M. (2011, June 12). We want what Kate's wearing! The sellout effect of the high-street

    duchess. *Daily Mail*. Retrieved from

    http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-2000304/Kate-Middleton-The-sellout-e

    ffect-high-street-Duchess-Cambridge.html

Sternheimer, K. (2011). *Celebrity culture and the American dream: Stardom and social*

    mobility. New York. NY: Routledge.

Theberge, P. (2005). Everyday fandom: Fan clubs, blogging, and the quotidian rhythms of

the internet. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 4*(30), 485-502. Retrieved from

> https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279482854_Everyday_Fandom_Fan_Clubs_Bl

> ogging_and_the_Quotidian_Rhythms_of_the_Internet

Turner Classic Movies. (n.d.). Cinderella (1950) - Full synopsis. Retrieved from

> http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/70937/Cinderella/full-synopsis.html

Walt Disney Productions (Producer), & Geronimi, C., Luske, H., & Jackson, W. (Director).

> (1950). *Cinderella* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Productions.

Walt Disney Pictures (Producer), & Musker, J., & Clements, R. (Director). (1989). *The Little*

> *Mermaid* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.

Walt Disney Pictures (Producer), & Marshall, G. (Director). (2001). *The Princess Diaries*

> [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.

Walt Disney Pictures (Producer), & Marshall, G. (Director). (2004). *The Princess Diaries II:*

> *Royal Engagement* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.

Walt Disney Productions (Producer), & Sharpsteen, B., Hand, D., Morey, L., Pearce, P., Jackson,

> W., & Cottrell, W. (Director). (1938). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [Motion

> picture]. United States: Walt Disney Productions.

Walt Disney Productions (Producer), & Geronimi, C. (Director). (1959). *Sleeping Beauty*

> [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Productions.

Walt Disney World News. (n.d.) Cinderella castle at Walt Disney World Resort fact sheet.

> Retrieved from https://wdwnews.com/fact-sheets/2013/03/16/cinderella-castle-at-walt-

> disney-world-resort-fact-sheet/

Whitehead, T. (2002). What is ethnography? Methodological, ontological, and

> epistemological attributes. Retrieved from

http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/workingpapers/epiontattrib.pdf

Wohlfeil, M. (2018). *Celebrity fans and their consumer behavior: Autoethnographic insights into the life of a fan*. doi:10.4324/9781351173483
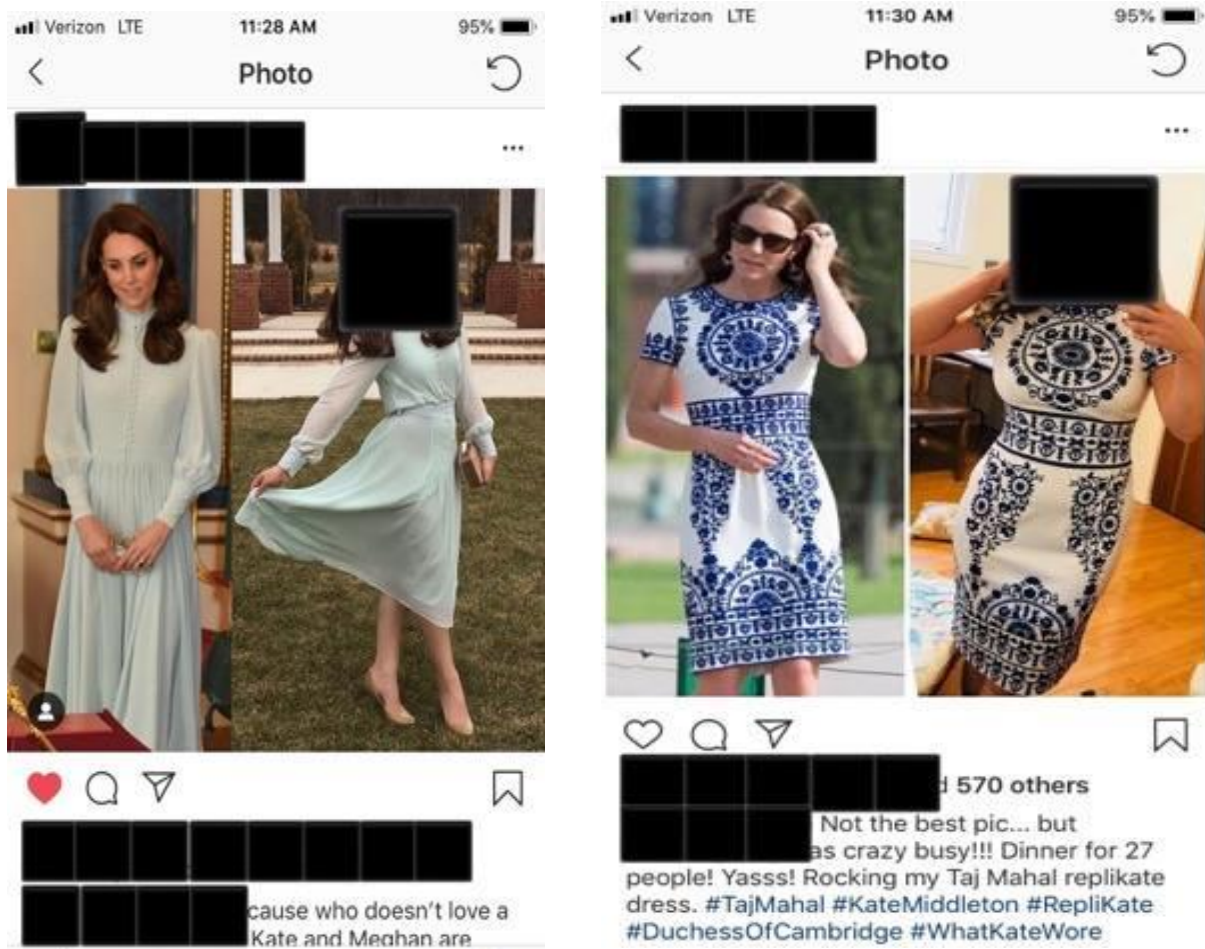
Appendix A: Standard Disney Princess Dresses

Retrieved from http://mentalfloss.com/article/53135/faces-behind-disneys-11-princesses

Children's Disney Princess Dresses

Retrieved from https://thekingdominsider.com/want-strong-female-costume-halloween-disney-princess/

Appendix B: Replikates

Hogge, r. (2019). Retrieved from www.instagram.com

Appendix C: Cinderella and Middleton Comparisons

Retrieved from https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/cinderella-wedding/

Retrieved from https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/style/celebrity-fashion/huge-clue-ralph--russo-12467703

Retrieved from https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiLid36tb_hAhUlnOAKHUU7Dw0QjRx6BAgBEAU&url=http%3A%2F%2Fanimatedfilmreviews.filminspector.com%2F2012%2F11%2Fcinderella-1950-faithful-adaptation-of.html&psig=AOvVaw1taQOpcq6GlIfN9ylBm7RE&ust=1554775964117513

Retrieved from https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/04/prince-william-kate-middleton-royal-wedding-princess-diana