‘We’re all princesses now’: Sex, class, and neoliberal governmentality in the rise of middle-class monarchy

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Abstract
This article examines the idea of ‘middle-class monarchy’ emerging in Europe from the internationally publicised marriages of Kate Middleton to Prince William in the United Kingdom and Charlene Wittstock to Prince Albert in Monaco. Through a careful analysis of sexuality, class and race in three major British newspapers, we demonstrate how media discourses surrounding the marriages deploy European monarchies as sites of neoliberal governmentality. Deployed as transmitters of instrumental happiness and conceptualised as an individual choice and project achievable through the control of the body and realisation of one’s desires, Kate embodies the white postfeminist vision of a highly educated, post-liberation woman able to combine the roles of consumer, homemaker and dutiful wife. This contrasts to the foreign Charlene, whose apparent domestication in an old-fashioned marriage of convenience was pitied widely. Finally, the article examines the Closer topless photo scandal as an incident that both challenged and re-sedimented the sexed, raced and classed neoliberal obligations of individual happiness and self-control.

Keywords
Britain, happiness, Kate Middleton, Monaco, news media, postfeminism, race, royalty, sexuality

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Introduction

European royals are finding true love and marrying members of the middle-classes. Or so it would seem, as in the last decade, the Dutch, Spanish, Danish and Swedish heirs to the throne have married commoners.1 The most famous commoner spouse is undoubtedly the British Kate Middleton, who became Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge upon her marriage to Prince William in 2011. The Daily Mail’s (DM) declaration that ‘we’re all princesses now’ reflected a rekindled proximity felt between royalty and so-called middle-class monarchy (The Daily Mail, 18 March 2011). Kate has been credited with rescuing the House of Windsor from its unpopular post-Diana years by transforming it from an insular, rigid and outdated establishment to an open and modern institution in touch with the thoughts and feelings of average British citizens. A similar attempted revival was witnessed in Monaco, where Prince Albert II married Charlene Wittstock 2 months after Kate and William’s wedding. Much like the Windsors, in the recent decades the Grimaldis also suffered setbacks since the death of the glamorous Princess Grace. When Grace Kelly married Prince Rainer III in 1956, she brought back a degree of glamour to the House of Grimaldi while augmenting Monaco’s public image, which at the time was seen as a mostly gambling house for the rich. Since Princess Grace’s death in 1982, however, the tumultuous private lives of her children, especially the marriages, divorces and romantic relationships of Princess Caroline and Princess Stephanie, have dominated the news about Monaco. Publicity surrounded Prince Albert’s bachelor status after his accession to the throne in 2005 at age 47, but even more newsworthy was that he admitted to fathering two children out of wedlock.

Not surprisingly, both Kate and Charlene’s marriages are often seen as attempts to rehabilitate the public image of their respective royal houses, to bring them closer to ‘the people’ by marrying commoners, thus justifying their continued existence and purpose. Because today’s European monarchies lack formal political power, their function has been commonly described as ceremonial, serving as symbols of national identity, and historical and cultural continuity (cf. Blain and O’Donnell, 2003; Taylor, 2000). Yet, as we argue in this article, the British press coverage of Kate Middleton in recent years is much about the reproduction of national culture in general, as it is about affirming a certain post-industrial middle-class way of living and being in recessionary Britain. Paradoxically, this middle-class normalisation coincides with a renewed fascination with aristocratic elites discernable from the events like the 2011 royal wedding or the popularity of TV shows like Downton Abbey (Negra and Tasker, 2014: 10). Nevertheless, no critical research exists on the ways in which these contemporary discourses of monarchy in the British press are tied to ideals of neoliberal active womanhood and its qualities such as economic independence, self-regulation and happiness.

In an analysis of the reportage of three major British newspapers, The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph and The Guardian from September 2010 to October 2012,2 we explore how the discourses of happiness surrounding contemporary middle-class princesses are constituted through and intersect with discourses of gender, class and race. Following Michel Foucault (2002), our approach is archaeological and genealogical, meaning that we examine the conditions of possibility that transform knowledge into truth (p. xxiv) and, respectively, how power is exercised to produce particular subjectivities through
them (Foucault, 1990: 93–95). In other words, we seek to reveal the rationalities that underpin the formation of discourses and how they come into play against each other, leading to the emergence of new subjectivities and rationalities of governance (Foucault, 1980: 148–150). We are particularly interested in how royal subjectivity becomes infiltrated by gendered, classed and raced neoliberal modalities of selfhood and self-governance. This means not only identifying these discourses but also paying attention to ruptures and breakages in the construction of sexuality, race and class-bound subjectivities that shape the very socio-political functions of royalty. Accordingly, the genealogical approach allows us to demonstrate how the convergence of neoliberal and postfeminist rationalities has made the reinvention of ‘middle-class monarchy’ possible, rather than conceiving of the discourses as merely a consequence of Kate and Charlene’s commoner backgrounds.

In this schema, therefore, news media are not simply transmitters of representations that merely mirror or construct public opinion and identity (Hall, 1997; Van Dijk, 1991). Rather, news media are technologies of power that actively shape and regulate bodies and subjectivities in the governance of everyday life by persuading individuals to self-manage their behaviours, practices and habits (Foucault, 1980; Kittler, 1990). Extending the media analysis of monarchy beyond representational aspects (cf. Phillips, 1999), our focus is more on the political and pedagogical construction of the subject that, as Butler (1999) writes, ‘proceeds with certain legitimising and exclusionary aims’ (p. 5) in the quotidian regulation of life through power. As political scientists, we are therefore interested in positioning the phenomenon of ‘middle-class princesses’ in the political context of the predominant neoliberal and postfeminist governmentality of recessionary Britain.

Neoliberalism, postfeminism and contemporary princesshood

Postfeminism and neoliberalism can be characterised as governmentality, or political rationalities (Brown, 2005: 38), preoccupied with the celebration of freedoms of the self-managing individual. Articulated in this way, neoliberalism and postfeminism are not merely ideologies, but modes of governing everyday life that ‘produce subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social’ (Brown, 2005: 37) by ‘conducting the conduct of men’ (Foucault, 2010: 186). Neoliberal governmentality is characterised by the extension of market values into everyday values and practices, and the attempt to configure all social, political and economic phenomena to the economic calculus. Within this neoliberal administration of life, families have become tasked with the responsibility to govern themselves in ways that will maximise the human capital of its members by cultivating them into active, calculating, consuming and enterprising selves (Rose, 1998: 163).

Moreover, as David Harvey (2005: 37–38) argues, neoliberalism is also a class project. As Imogen Tyler (2013) elaborates, it produces and confers freedoms in a way that ‘restore[s] and consolidate[s] class power, under the veil of the rhetoric of individualism, choice, freedom, mobility, and national security’ (p. 7). At the same time, class is being ‘expunged […] from mainstream political vocabularies’ (Tyler, 2013: 153), while middle-class respectability is normalised and solidified as the standard to which to aspire.
through the renewed demonisation of immigrants and the working class (see also Jones, 2011; Skeggs, 1997). In recent years, the relentless enforcement of neoliberal austerity policies across the European Union has further deepened socio-economic inequalities along these lines (Picketty, 2014).

Against this backdrop, in this article we are interested in how British media discourses of the new middle-class princesses pedagogically ‘operate as a social mechanism for producing and regulating the subjective capacities of future citizens and … [the] pathway for the fulfillment of individual wishes and hopes’ (Rose, 1999: 155) through the production of discourses of happiness, fulfilment and self-cultivation. Happiness, as Sara Ahmed (2010) has argued, has effectively ‘become […] a disciplinary technique’ (p. 8), an instrument of power specific to neoliberal governmentality that seeks to minimise state control by empowering individuals to govern themselves instead. Indeed, the proliferation of happiness indices, self-help books, lifestyle programmes and positive psychology reflects today’s constant demand for subjects to cultivate and actualise autonomous and authentic selves through self-invention, transformation, management, enhancement and improvement (Ehrenreich, 2010; Rose, 1999: 230). This instrumental happiness obliges individuals irrespective of their socio-economic background to view their emotional life on an economic footing in terms of constrains, interests and investments aimed at shaping their own lives.

Feminist scholars have also demonstrated how neoliberal rationalities maintain not only class divisions but also are productive of specific sexual subjectivities entangled with postfeminism. Postfeminism can be understood as ‘a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the “pastness” of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned or celebrated’ (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 1). In a world where girls and young women are widely assumed to be free from the discrimination and oppression of the past, women’s achievement of happiness is ‘weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation’ (McRobbie, 2009: 57). Endless self-measurement and self-perfection, not only professionally but also physically, are taken to be the paradoxical means available to young women to achieve happiness and success in a postfeminist, free-market society. Being white and slender are features often associated with the capacity for self-realisation, upward mobility and intellect, while obesity, anorexia, bulimia and self-harm become signs of low self-esteem and failure (McRobbie, 2009: 96; Skeggs, 1997: 83). To neglect to control one’s body and mind is equated with a failure to control one’s life and therefore a failure to embody modern, liberated womanhood. Paradoxically, these ideals prevail despite predictions of long-term downward mobility for the middle-class, in light of which Diane Negra (2009) reminds us that postfeminism ensures ‘the acquiescence to normative modes of identity even while hyping aspirational consumerism’ (pp. 6–7). Postfeminism therefore often consolidates regressive forms of femininity while persuading women to engage in consumer culture through the internalisation of socio-economically ambitious neoliberal subjectivities.

This seems highly pertinent to the study of the Duchess of Cambridge, whose body weight and dress, for example, are constantly under scrutiny. The constant media surveillance of her body, we suggest, has become instrumental for the reproduction of these values, demands and subjectivities and is tied to the broader media production of the
newfound, happy middle-class existence with which she is accredited for introducing to
the House of Windsor. To be sure, this agential and empowered femininity is also played
out through the trend of ‘princessification’ apparent in a recent upsurge in the mass mar-
keting of princesses in consumer and visual culture. The marketing of princess-related
films, clothes, and other merchandise and the celebrity of super-rich women work to
strengthen ideals glorifying youth, beauty, style, inherited wealth and spending power as
central values of female social capital (Negra, 2009: 48–49). This construction of
empowered princesshood is also bolstered in contemporary Disney films, where prin-
cesses are characterised by their assertiveness, ambition, capability and independence
rather than passivity, affection or fearfulness (cf. Davis, 2006; England et al., 2011;
Stover, 2013). Today’s Disney princesses defy monarchical constraints and pressures to
marry according to status. They do not wait to marry just any prince that comes along,
but the right one (cf. Stover, 2013: 4). Marriage and romantic love nonetheless still con-
stitute the centre of ‘happily ever after’ for contemporary Disney princesses, who are
generally good girls that only rebel in order to win the hearts of their dream princes
(Worthington, 2009: 39). Traditional reproductive heterosexual femininity is therefore
still upheld despite the heroines’ newfound agency in the search for true love.

These narratives of female autonomy and agency were significant in the discourses
surrounding Kate and Charlene’s predecessors – Princess Diana of Wales and Princess
Grace of Monaco, both of whom are widely credited as modernisers of their respective
monarchies. The legacy of Princess Diana in particular is a necessary backdrop for under-
standing how Kate’s emotional and behavioural attributes have a site for the transmission
of white, bourgeois, neoliberal ideals of female self-care and self-governance. Much like
the Grimaldis, the Windsors suffered publicity setbacks since the divorce and death of
their ‘fairytale princess’. The 1990s are widely regarded as years of decline for the British
monarchy. References are still made to Queen Elizabeth II’s famous ‘annus horribilis’
speech in 1992, where she lamented the public collapse of the marriages of three of her
children and a damaging fire in Windsor Castle. As in 1994, Tom Nairn (2011) wrote that
the ‘soul has gone’ from the British monarchy, now cast as ‘the living dead’ (p. xx). After
the death of Princess Diana, other scholars also referred to the royal family’s ‘tarnished
image’ (Benoit and Brinson, 1999: 146), which further underlined the gulf between ‘them’
and ‘us’ – the monarchy and the British public (Seidler, 2013: 77).

These pronouncements reflect the extent to which Diana and the media attention sur-
rounding her broke new ground by opening a point of access for the expression of
thoughts and feelings as a way of speaking of and relating to the British royal family
(McGuigan, 2000: 5). Unlike previous royal weddings, the marriage of Lady Diana
Spencer to Charles, Prince of Wales in 1981 was widely labelled as a fairytale and ‘the
wedding of the century’ (Shome, 2001: 329). The British media and the nation were
captured by the sentimental tale of a girl (in reality the daughter of an earl) who seem-
ingly against all odds married the bachelor prince. An estimated global TV audience of
750 million tuned in to witness Diana’s transformation from an ordinary looking kinder-
garten assistant to a beautiful princess in a 25-ft train of ivory taffeta, who was carried in
a horse-drawn gilded carriage to her destined love. Whereas before love had been more
a matter of chance, in an unprecedented way royalty was now arguably expected to
marry with the same romantic interests as the rest of the populace.
Scholars have argued that Diana’s unprecedented public display of emotion and the immense public adulation she received reflected in part a public rejection of the ‘old emotionology of reticence and reserve … in favour of a new openness and honesty in emotional life’ (Parrott and Harré, 2001: 30). It resulted in a stark contrast between ‘out-of-touch’ royals and the adored ‘People’s Princess’, whose modern, approachable and compassionate public persona and expressions of female autonomy became a problem for the out-of-touch monarchy (Campbell, 1998; McGuigan, 2000: 8). After her divorce from Charles, the media glamourised her self-transformation from virgin princess to outspoken and self-improving divorcee by celebrating and idealising her feminine ‘openness’ – her fluidity, beauty, vulnerability, confessional nature, doting motherhood and generosity to worthy charities. These public confessions of self-help and coping promoted a ‘desired image of femininity’ (Blackman, 1999: 4) – a capacity to be an autonomous, expressive and independent woman.

Indeed, in the period between the separation of Diana and Charles in 1992 and Diana’s death in 1997, the more willing she was to talk to the press about her problems and sense of personal inadequacy, including her bulimia, depression, ‘crowded’ marriage and the deceit and mistreatment she had received from her in-laws, the more popular she became as the ‘People’s Princess’, reworking the marriage from a fairytale wedding into a ‘virgin sacrifice’ or ‘arranged marriage’ (Attwood, 1999: 316). Diana took on the role of a public patient, who became increasingly ‘incite[d] to speak about’ her private problems ‘through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail’ (Foucault, 1990: 18).

By idealising a flexible, fluid and adaptable female body and self that transformed in tandem with the opportunities and challenges that life presented (Saukko, 2006: 164–166), these discourses reinforced the normalisation of certain locations of white femininity. Through them, the meaning and place of women ‘as symbols of motherhood, as markers of feminine beauty, as translators and preservers of bloodlines, as signifiers of national domesticity, as sites for the reproduction of heterosexuality’ (Shome, 2001: 323) were launched and relationships with racial, sexual, classed, gendered and nationalised ‘others’ were negotiated and guarded. According to Raka Shome (2001), the outcries following Diana’s romantic association with the Egyptian playboy Dodi Al Fayed and the Muslim Pakistani doctor Hasnat Khan signified an ‘excess, spilling out beyond the racialized boundaries of the nation, threatening to contaminate its essence’ (p. 325). It was a reminder of how ‘a misplaced and mis-imaged white femininity can dangerously disrupt the logic of national domesticity’ (Shome, 2001: 327). Thus, while Diana embodied the postfeminist subject that rejected fate and engaged in constant struggles for self-liberation, the expressions of this modern femininity were only possible within a given racialised national imaginary, essentially ‘white national patriarchy’ (Shome, 2001: 328).

These studies on Princess Diana reflect what we see as the emergence of the contemporary apparatus of royalty that conforms to and upholds certain configurations of gender, class and race characteristic to neoliberal order in contemporary Britain. British monarchy came to be posed as an affective and institutional problem that thrust the royal family’s private lives and feelings into the public domain and recast them as subjects of self-governance.

In the following sections, we examine how in the period around the engagement and marriage of Prince William to Kate Middleton, the media discourses of Kate and
William’s relationship, as well as Kate’s emotional and behavioural attributes, were invested with white, feminised and bourgeois neoliberal ideals of self-care and self-governance. The British press also followed closely the wedding of Prince Albert to Charlene Wittstock, which we use as a foil to further analyse the rationalities by which former royal practices of arranged marriages of princes to passive, obedient female consorts became condemnable and pitiable as inevitable causes of unhappiness. The depiction of the South African–born Charlene married into a continental European royal house served in the United Kingdom as a negative example of a foreign repressed and domesticated femininity of the past far removed from the liberated consumerism of the British Kate, further consolidating the latter as an exemplary and empowered neoliberal and postfeminist subject.

To further complicate the discourses of freedom and self-realisation surrounding Kate, the final section analyses the media scandal that arose after the French publication of topless photographs of Kate in 2012 while she and William were touring the Far East in order to grasp the disciplinary techniques that regulate this subjectivity. While the discourses produced by different newspapers were otherwise fairly similar, the photo scandal propagated more of a variety of responses surrounding the Duchess’ sexual propriety and right to privacy. We purport that it was an incident that challenged, yet in the end reaffirmed, the neoliberal imperative to be happy through self-governance, while engraining self-control and respectability as indelible aspects of British neoliberal and postcolonial white femininity.

Kate Middleton and the bourgeoisation of royal affect

According to Ahmed (2004), ‘emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power’ (p. 4) as it endows the subject with meaning and value. From the moment that Kate and William’s engagement was announced on 16 November 2010, the British press established direct links between their stable and loving relationship and Kate’s middle-class normalcy. The media described their love as filled with devotion, loyalty, support and ‘quiet, unostentatious normality’ thanks to the ‘first middle-class Queen’ who would ‘save the monarchy from itself’ (*The Daily Mail*, 17 November 2010). Their ‘normal and level-headed’ togetherness was contrasted to Diana and Charles’ fraught relationship. As *The Daily Mail* reported, ‘Kate and William were unmistakeably in love’ (*The Daily Mail*, 17 November 2010); their ‘body language [spoke] of intimacy and desire’ of ‘two young lovers, comfortable in their skins and with each other’ (*The Daily Mail*, 21 November 2010). In a relieved tone, *The Telegraph* wrote that ‘thank heavens, no one is stupid enough to use the word fairytale this time round’ (*The Telegraph*, 18 November 2010). Compared to Diana, ‘practically a child bride’ who ‘got her notions of love from Barbara Cartland – the very worst place to find them’, Kate and William were almost 30 and ‘good mates as well as lovers’ paving the way for ‘a marriage of equals’ (*The Telegraph*, 18 November 2010). The bourgeoisation of the next generation of royal affect was thus also an ideological position, normalising an idealised postfeminist white heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2004: 128–129) where Kate, the royal bride, was perceived as a mature actor in her own emotional life, and the royal couple was emotionally self-reflexive and communicative.
In each of these news stories, the chances of a successful and happy marriage in the royal family were measured against the bourgeois ‘emotional economy of the family’ (Rose, 1999: 159). Kate’s normal middle-class family was contrasted with Diana’s turbulent and maladjusted aristocratic childhood. For The Telegraph, it was in fact ‘the Royal [William] who is getting the superior deal here, marrying a girl from a nice, middle-class family, undamaged by divorce’ like Diana, who suffered from a broken home and aristocratic hands-off style of parenting. While Diana was ‘unguided by steady parental example’ (The Telegraph, 18 November 2010), Kate’s ‘secure and loving childhood’ (The Daily Mail, 20 November 2010) and ‘first-class education’ (The Daily Mail, 20 October 2010) in top public schools provided her with ‘strength’ (The Guardian, 26 April 2011) and ‘confidence’ (The Telegraph, 16 October 2012a). Indeed, as The Guardian reported, she was an ‘ordinary, hard-working, athletic and easy-going’ young girl, not a ‘snooty Sloane’ who was ‘on track to be the New Diana’ (The Guardian, 21 October 2010). Hence it was believed that Kate, as ‘a perfectly normal, attractive, intelligent and sensitive woman, is precisely what the Royal family needs’ (The Telegraph, 16 November 2010b). Kate was celebrated as a rational, calculating and self-governing woman, thus very much the neoliberal subject that could ensure a prosperous and happy future for the decaying house of Windsor.

The consensus in the media was therefore that Kate would fulfil the expectations of a modern-day queen consort in a way that would compensate for the affective imbalance left by Diana. Although for some Kate ‘seemed to have little ambition to succeed on her own two feet beyond a part-time job with a fashion company and helping out with her family’s mail order business’ (The Daily Mail, 20 November 2010), those concerns took second place to the speculation regarding the degree of stability and normality she would bring to the monarchy. The Guardian, for instance, presumed that Kate would not be ‘throwing herself down the stairs for husbandly attention or moodily rollerblading through the castle corridors, sobbing to popular ballads. There would be no mischievous posing at the Taj Mahal’ (The Guardian, 1 May 2011). Likewise, The Telegraph applauded her bourgeois prudence and respectability (Skeggs, 1997), her ‘decorous and discreet way … [of] being under the spotlight’ (The Telegraph, 16 November 2010b). Even before the engagement, Kate’s unwavering commitment to William demonstrated over 8 long but discreetly conducted years of dating earned her the nickname of ‘Waity Katie’ (The Daily Mail, 2 April 2010). The lack of drama in their relationship was captured by a comment in The Daily Mail according to which ‘William and Kate are in danger of becoming the world’s most boring couple’ (The Daily Mail, 20 October 2010).

Undoubtedly, the Middleton’s stable and ordinary family life was also seen as a positive and healing influence on William who had allegedly survived and grown into a well-adjusted man despite the conflicts between his parents. Reportedly ‘traumatised’ by his parents’ dysfunctional marriage, William finally had ‘a family – Kate’s family, that is – that [was] filled with all the ease and loyalty that he never knew at home’ (The Daily Mail, 20 November 2010). William himself was also seen as better equipped for marriage than his parents. ‘William is not his father’, The Daily Mail stated. Compared to his father, the self-centred and cold Prince Charles, William was depicted as attentive, thoughtful and caring – a man who even did his own washing up ‘unlike his father, who seldom gets his hands dirty beyond dead-heading his roses’.
Moreover, despite being a ‘child of divorce’, the press asserted that William still believed in marriage and congratulated him for going about it more cautiously than his parents. Indeed, ‘William and Kate waited until they were ready’, The Telegraph (16 October 2010) wrote approvingly.

In sum, Kate’s stable and loving family background was repeatedly compared to that of Diana in order to emphasise her suitability as an ideal bride for William. She would bring a ‘normal’ middle-class emotional economy into the royal family, curing it of the dysfunctional pattern that was exposed during the Diana years. Consequently, the primary measure of successful marriage was not only in the fulfilment of duty but also happiness, for only by being happy would Kate and William be able to conduct their respective duties.

Instrumental happiness and self-care: the making of a ‘modern princess’

The royal family’s acceptance of Kate as William’s bride was not, however, a straightforward affair. The press admired Kate’s discrete behaviour throughout the 9 years they dated prior to their marriage, but also they scorned her lack of a ‘proper’ job. Kate’s normal upbringing rendered her commoner status an asset to backward royal life, but the Middletons were also disparaged as pretentious social climbers (Church Gibson, 2011: 358). By the time Kate Middleton became the Duchess of Cambridge, a Guardian commentator paused to comment how ‘[the story photographers tell about] Kate Middleton was very different to that of other celebrities. Each picture is framed to highlight hope. It’s eerie. In every one, the sky is blue’ (The Guardian, 25 June 2012). The Daily Mail’s premonition that Kate understood that ‘respect is hard-earned, not automatically given’ (The Daily Mail, 17 October 2010) seemed to be confirmed. In this section, we take a closer look at how the often contradictory middle-class values of hard work and domesticity and neoliberal practices of enterprise and self-improvement were integral to the media’s acceptance and appraisal of the new princess-to-be.

After the engagement was announced, any doubts about ‘Waity Katie’ and her middle-class family’s affectations were set aside and media accounts began to produce narratives of exactly how Kate achieved such perfection and why she deserved the public’s admiration. The Guardian may have criticised the press media image of a blissfully happy Kate, but The Daily Mail and The Telegraph nonetheless constructed Kate, an ‘intelligent and efficient perfectionist’ (The Daily Mail, 17 November 2010), as a resourceful subject making full use of her natural gifts of charm and intelligence. Media articles depicted Kate as a middle-class neoliberal subject par excellence, whose skills, education, possessions and position were detached from class privilege and attributed instead to the hard work and commitment of her and her family. Her versatile self-mastery meant she was able to juggle several lives with qualified ease; she could still be ‘her old shopping self in West London, mooching around Topshop in Kensington High Street and going to her favourite hairdresser, Richard Ward, in Sloane Square’ or be a domestic goddess as a ‘military housewife in windy Anglesey’ (The Daily Mail, 3 October 2011). The DM wrote that she was ‘like any other housewife’, ‘equally at ease in these aisles [of Waitrose], settling into her new life as a housewife, donning a comfy cardigan and heading out to the supermarket for supplies while the husband’s out from under her feet’ (The
Kate was the personification of postfeminist achievement, mobilising a ‘female managerial capacity and choice [that] remakes domesticity around these qualities’ (Negra, 2009: 118), that is, the accomplishment of a fine balance between enterprise and housewifery, leisure and work, and guilt-free consumerism and a conservative sexual division of labour.

Several feminist scholars have noted how contemporary postfeminist discourse frequently links achievement, hard work and success to beauty, excessive consumption and self-care (Negra, 2009: 120; Whelehan, 2010: 156). Kate became yet another example of this mechanism at work. On the one hand, looks alone were not enough. The Daily Mail wrote that ‘it will take more than just great looks to be a princess’ (The Daily Mail, 20 November 2011). To become a proper princess, Kate had to prepare herself ‘for hard work’ and get herself ‘a proper job or meaningful role’ inside the royal family (The Daily Mail, 2 October 2010) as well as to demonstrate ‘whether she had Diana’s genuine desire to give something back’ (The Daily Mail, 20 October 2010). On the other hand, she had to take care of herself by acquiring ‘dignified behaviour and looks’ (The Daily Mail, 23 April 2011) and an ‘understated aplomb’ (The Daily Mail, 2 May 2011) style described also as ‘the relaxed girl-next-door charm’ (The Daily Mail, 16 September 2011) conveyed through her preference for mid-market High Street brands over tailor-made designer clothes.

As Nairn (2011) argues, female royal attire ‘has to create “niceness,” acceptance – an asexual charm free from the sharp edge of real fashion’ (p. 30). The approval of Kate’s attire derived not so much from its niceness as its respectability that according to Beverley Skeggs (2004) upholds middle-class values ‘through associations with restraint, repression, reasonableness, modesty and denial’ (p. 99). The press emphasised her penchant for high street brands (signifying economic restraint) as well as an ability to dress in a way that was nonetheless ‘classic, stylish and a tad conservative’, suggesting sensibleness and humility (The Telegraph, 16 November 2010). Kate was not a typical ‘sneering … style-setter’ who dressed ‘edgily’ (The Telegraph, 16 November 2010) in ‘expensive and often uncomfortable and ridiculous clothes’ (The Daily Mail, 16 September 2011) nor should she be. She was represented as a modern woman who rejected both the extravagance and impracticality of past royals and the excess of fashionistas for the happy comfort, convenience and prudence of a simple and classic, and most of all a respectable, wardrobe that the average British woman could afford. Kate therefore became not only a royal figure that British women could identify with, but aspire to become through the right combination of behaviour, hair style and dress.

Kate’s clothing was not the only aspect of her appearance that was under scrutiny. She also had to be prepared to care for her health and body. As the wedding approached, the media commented on her ‘alarmingly thin’ (The Daily Mail, 9 March 2011) appearance while drawing parallels to the pressures that contributed to the development of Diana’s bulimia during her honeymoon. Indeed, The Daily Mail commented that ‘the last thing you want to do is to end up like Diana on her wedding day’ (The Daily Mail, 9 March 2011). After the wedding, the media continued to monitor her weight and constantly speculated on a much-expected pregnancy. In March 2012, The Guardian still speculated on Kate’s ‘pencil-thin appearance’ and its possible causes such as ‘separation from William or her childlessness’ (The Guardian, 20 March 2012). Kate’s body was therefore another signifier of the status of her emotional life and a measure of her ability to control it.
Paradoxically, weight control also signified skilful self-mastery. *The Guardian* criticised *Cosmopolitan*’s reporting of Kate’s ‘Dukan diet’ of ‘seven days of pure protein and later two “celebration meals” a week’, the resulting message to readers being that ‘if women don’t look like Beyoncé or Kate Middleton, their flat stomachs a testament to their stamina then, it seems, they are not working hard enough’ (*The Guardian*, 10 June 2012). Kate, it seems, either had superhuman quantities of self-control or lacked them. In a world where a woman’s body constitutes ‘the external signal that tells others that she cares’ and where ‘her labour and investments into her body are … descriptors of the self’ (Skeggs, 1997: 83), being thin or too thin was a cautious exercise in self-control and self-realisation, in which one could either fail or succeed.

Charlene Wittstock’s normative unhappiness

Just 3 months after Kate and William’s wedding, another royal wedding took place in Monaco when Prince Albert married Charlene Wittstock, a South African Olympic swimmer and daughter of a sales manager and competitive diver, in July 2011. It was an event that according to *The Daily Mail* ‘many thought would never happen’ (*The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011) given the 52-year-old Albert’s multiple affairs with world-famous supermodels and actresses and his two illegitimate children – a daughter with an American real-estate agent and a son with a Togoan air-hostess. When his engagement to Charlene was announced in June 2010, hopes were raised: Monaco might finally get a new heir and a happy ending. When their wedding day approached, however, it was rumoured that Charlene had second thoughts and had tried to flee Monaco three times back to South Africa. Consequently, the British media discourses of the Monaco wedding starkly contrasted with Kate and William’s fairytale-like wedding.

Feminist scholars have shown how lately the idea of gender equality has been touted by Western states ‘to maintain the sense of “us” as a national community’ (Holli, 2003: 19) and equate inequality with backwardness and intolerance found elsewhere (Lewis, 2005: 536). Indeed, far from a loving bourgeois marriage, for the British press Charlene and Albert’s wedding harked back to the old days of arranged marriages long renounced in ‘progressive’ Britain and now primarily associated with racially other immigrant communities (Chantler et al., 2009). Thus, when Albert’s engagement to 32-year-old Charlene was announced in June 2010, there was no mention of transcendental love. Rather than the deep compassionate solidarity and friendship shared by Kate and William, Charlene and Albert’s engagement was explained to the British public as a duty that had to be fulfilled. As *The Daily Mail* wrote, ‘Albert has never settled down in the past, but knows that the time is now right to produce the next ruler of Monaco’ (*The Daily Mail*, 24 June 2010). *The Guardian* more explicitly explained the financial and juridical necessities for the marriage: ‘the stability of the prince’s family’, it explained, ‘is crucial for Monaco’s numerous banks and its financial sector which craves security, not social unrest’ (*The Guardian*, 26 June 2011). Moreover, pressed by historical agreements, if Albert did not produce a legitimate heir, Monaco would return to French control.

The marriage was therefore framed as utilitarian and instrumental – a necessary alliance to provide an heir and secure Monaco’s future. In this unhappy existence, Charlene’s role was to be the future mother of Albert’s legitimate heir. Compared to her British
counterpart Kate, celebrated for her ‘intelligence’ and ‘efficiency’ (*The Daily Mail*, 27 July 2011), it was Charlene’s beauty and style that defined her worth, feminising the other as exotic but emotional and vulnerable, and masculinising the British national self as intelligent and agential (Chatterjee, 1989). Portrayed as an ‘impressive-looking creature’, a ‘lively blonde glamazon’ with ‘broad shoulders and an athletic figure’, ‘fine features, wide eyes, and high cheekbones and [...] elegant chignons and well-cut frocks’ (*The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011), Charlene was seen as possessing the appropriate looks, body, health and style with which to carry out her roles as consort and mother to the heir. Akin to the passive and domesticated heroines of the past who patiently prepared for marriage, she was reported to have waited in Monaco for the proposal ‘with no formal status or career’ (*The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011) for 3 years. ‘Making no false claims about her background’ in this ‘the sunny principality once famous for its shady characters, a miniature royal world that is as much Dynasty as dynastic’, *The Daily Mail* (*The Daily Mail*, 18 March 2011) reported that Charlene’s own career turned few heads. Instead of being a modern self-sufficient and self-making worldly woman, she was a Grace Kelly mini-me, an insecure woman ‘following in Princess Grace’s footsteps’ who ‘had forged a link between Monaco and the movie world’ (*The Daily Mail*, 31 October 2010; *The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011). Hence, as a woman without her own ambitions or aspirations, her future innovation would be ‘to create a strong bond between Monaco and the fashion community’ (*The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011) in what was depicted as an archaic land of wealth, privilege and pleasure.

In a principality characterised as the idle playground of the world’s super-rich elite, Charlene similarly seemed to lack any will-power of self-actualisation, a perception that was amplified by her uncertainty about how to dress and talk, inability to speak French or to bond with Monaco high society; she allegedly only had two friends in Monaco (*The Guardian*, 26 June 2011; *The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011). Depicted as ‘being terrified of becoming a laughing stock in the palace circles by showing up in over-the-top outfits’, Giorgio Armani and Karl Lagerfeld were reported to have ‘taken her under their wings’. In short, rather than an intelligent and enterprising young woman like her British counterpart Kate, Charlene was like a Stepford Wife: ‘a fun-loving eco-minded sportswoman and humanitarian’ (*The Daily Mail*, 28 June 2011) who spent her days hiking, swimming, looking beautiful and championing Albert’s various charitable causes.

A couple of days before the wedding the media reported that Charlene had tried to escape to South Africa three times after learning that Albert had yet again fathered an illegitimate child. The media coverage of the subsequent days transformed the Monégasque monarchy into a regressive and oppressive institution from a foreign and therefore ‘other’ time and place. Titled now as ‘the bolted bride’ (*The Daily Mail*, 1 July 2011), Charlene denied the rumours as ‘categorical lies’ (*The Daily Mail*, 2 July 2011) but it did not prevent the UK press from describing the wedding kiss as ‘very uneasy’ – Charlene’s ‘tense’ and ‘tearful’ looks during the wedding and Prince Albert’s failure to comfort his bride brought back memories of Prince Charles’ public indifference to Diana (e.g. *Daily Telegraph*, 2 July 2011; *The Daily Mail*, 4 July 2011; *The Daily Mail*, 1 July 2011; *The Guardian*, 9 July 2011). As *The Guardian* reported, ‘it had been impossible not to note that the couple had looked painfully serious throughout the formalities’, concluding that ‘the apparent fairy-tale seemed to veer from its Cinderella narrative into
Rapunzel territory’ (The Guardian, 5 July 2011) or a ‘Brothers Grimm’s version of fairy-tale romance’ (The Guardian, 9 July 2011). When the media found out that the newlyweds had stayed in different hotels during their ‘publically labelled’ honeymoon, speculation re-emerged that their marriage, in old aristocratic fashion, was just a ‘business arrangement’ or ‘pregnancy pact’ (The Daily Mail, 13 July 2011) to produce a legitimate heir before the couple could go their separate ways. Even then, for the staff at The Guardian this was a poor business transaction, mockingly stating that ‘being Princess of Taxileiana wasn’t really sufficient compensation for being married to that lecherous sack of potatoes who labours under name of Prince Albert’ (The Guardian, 7 August 2012).

To their detriment, Charlene and Albert were thus positioned far from the middle-class heteronormative family form based on romantic love and associated with happiness and self-fulfilment (Lewis, 2005: 547). The antiquated marriage practices of Monaco ignored, if not destroyed Charlene’s happiness. ‘The event may have recognised her as special enough to be a princess, but had it recognised her need for personal happiness?’ (The Guardian, 9 July 2011), The Guardian inquired, reflecting the extension of the demands to self-fulfilment and self-care to royal persons evident in the discourses surrounding Kate. Charlene, lacking the capacities and potentialities of a post-liberated woman, became the embodiment of the ‘problem that has no name’ (Friedan, 2010: 9) characteristic of a 1950s domesticated and subservient womanhood. Anything but the ‘empowered, assertive, pleasure-seeking, “have-it-all” woman of sexual and financial agency’ (Chen, 2013: 2) that defines postfeminist subjectivity, Charlene was more like the marooned and unhappy suburban housewife: a lonely, insecure and depressed woman who was dependent on husband’s money and her father’s protection. In this day and age, The Guardian wrote, ‘marrying into a super-rich family should not be regarded as a fair exchange for a woman being treated like chattel’ (The Guardian, 5 July 2011). In short, the construction of Charlene as imprisoned in an archaic, dysfunctional and loveless marriage filled with loneliness, gossip and infidelity only worked to heighten the emancipated feminine middle-class happiness personified by Kate, whose blossoming existence was the linchpin of a British progressivism where female empowerment entailed conspicuous consumption and blissful monogamous domesticity.

Losing control and getting Closer: Kate’s topless holiday photos

Although Kate came to embody enterprising postfeminist subjectivity, this did not mean that simply any behaviour was acceptable on the basis of her progressiveness or empowerment. On the contrary, we argue in this final part that the Closer topless photo scandal exposed the disciplinary techniques that produce and maintain the careful discursive mix of emancipation, progress and respectability in the first place. On 13 September 2012, the French magazine Closer published grainy photographs of the Duchess of Cambridge sunbathing topless on holiday at the privately owned Château d’Autet in France. Clarence House issued a statement saying that ‘the incident is reminiscent of the worst excesses of the press and paparazzi during the life of Diana, Princess of Wales’ (Clarence House, 14 September 2012). Four days later, the Duke and Duchess, who were touring the Far East
at the time, filed a criminal case against the magazine. The next day further circulation
of the photographs in France was banned, although photographs were nonetheless pub-
lished later in Ireland and Denmark, but not in the United Kingdom.

Press reports focused heavily on the extent to which Kate was to blame for the blow
to her marital bliss through her lack of self-care. Several articles defended Closer maga-
zine, declaring that for the famous there was no such thing as privacy and that Kate’s
private life, her body and her emotions were available for public consumption by default
owing to her celebrity status. ‘The price of fame’, as The Telegraph wrote, ‘is loss of
freedom’ (The Telegraph, 22 September 2012). The newspapers also reported other pub-
lic figures, all male, blaming the Duchess for the incident. For example, long-serving
Labour MP Austin Mitchell stated that ‘those who don’t want to be photographed
shouldn’t strip off’ (The Telegraph, 20 September 2012) and Donald Trump tweeted that
‘Kate Middleton is great – but she shouldn’t be sunbathing in the nude – only herself to
blame’ (The Daily Mail, 19 September 2012). Kate’s topless pictures thus exposed not
only her breasts but also a lack of controlled, clear-headed thinking. Topless sunbathing
in public became an act of indecency dissociated from progressive and liberated woman-
hood, as it could have been alternately interpreted. By exposing her breasts Kate had ‘put
herself in a position where she loses her dignity’ (The Daily Mail, 14 September 2012b)
and thereby lost some of her personal virtue or respectability.

Invoking a bourgeois moralism according to which respectable femininity must remain
untarnished by sexuality, The Daily Mail wrote that ‘the Duchess does deserve privacy …
but women shouldn’t go topless in the first place, anywhere, ever!’ (The Daily Mail, 19
September 2012). Another article purported that ‘there is something blatantly exhibition-
ist, but also smug and superior’ about ‘flaunt[ing]’ her breasts. This sentiment was repeated
2 days later in an article with survey results framing toplessness a foreign form of contin-
ental European sexual indecency, claiming that ‘just 14 per cent of British women
sunbathe without their bikini tops on’ (The Daily Mail, 21 September 2012). Speaking for
the public, as it were, the headline declared, ‘We would NEVER go topless like Kate!’
(The Daily Mail, 21 September 2012). All of the sudden Kate was an irresponsible, overtly
sexual, vulgar, unthinking and even immoral woman – the opposite of the respectable and
self-controlling British female subject deserving of the pursuit of happiness. If the happi-
ness of the Cambridges was affected, Kate was personally responsible.

This does not mean that no one defended Kate’s right to privacy. On the first day the
news broke, some Telegraph articles also called for the press to ‘Stop hounding the
Duchess of Cambridge’ (15 September 2012). A Daily Mail journalist praised Kate’s
self-restraint as the scandal unfolded noting, ‘it is sometimes easy to forget that the
Duchess of Cambridge wasn’t born into royal life, such is the composure with which she
fulfills her new role. Her coolness … was truly remarkable’ (The Daily Mail, 14
September 2012c). The sense of fortitude and self-discipline of the targeted woman who
refused to be victimised was only to be applauded, as if victimisation was a choice to be
made free from social structures and power relations.

The media furor surrounding Kate’s topless photos took a notably different tone from
the furore cause by the publication of pictures of a naked Prince Harry playing strip bil-
liards with a group of women in Las Vegas published just a month earlier. There was no
discussion of the violation of Prince Harry’s bodily integrity or his lack of self-discipline.
The questions of privacy and propriety took a second seat to the broader and explicitly political question of press regulation, which had been a highly visible topic all year due to the Leveson Inquiry into press ethics. Prominent politicians took part in the ensuing discussion. For example, former deputy Prime Minister Lord Prescott reportedly said that the Sun’s publication of the pictures ‘proved that self-regulation of the press is dead’ (*The Guardian*, 24 August 2012). The incident was dismissed by *The Daily Mail* as a youthful male frolic: Harry ‘is single, and his whole demeanor, his raison d’être, is to be a little bit wild. He has a stressful job that means he has to be able to let off steam occasionally’ (*The Daily Mail*, 19 September 2012). By contrast for Kate ‘it goes without saying that … a degree of modesty anywhere outside her own master suite with the drapes drawn is strictly non-negotiable’ (*The Daily Mail*, 19 September 2012). The double standard set for royal men and women meant that Harry’s nude frolic was shrugged off with a ‘boys will be boys’ dictum of acceptance, but that Kate’s topless sunbathing was seen as fundamentally indecent and reckless.

*The Guardian* was the only newspaper to reflect more critically on the *Closer* scandal. One writer parodied the media’s sexualisation of Kate’s body:

> Have you seen the pictures? You should. I am reliably informed that they show not one but two equally-sized lumps of human fat and tissue arranged across the chest area of a 30-year-old woman who is married to a man who might, one day, become king. (*The Guardian*, 21 September 2012)

*The Guardian* also derided the hypocrisy of the British press. While the exposure of Kate’s breasts was seen as outrageous, at the same time Kate was pictured in the Solomon Islands meeting people and ‘giggle[ing] on seeing the naked breasts of ceremonial dancers’ (*The Guardian*, 18 September 2012). The postcolonial irony was not lost on the newspaper, for whom Kate’s ‘laughter-struck response to Oceanian nakedness looks like that of a Victorian missionary’s wife who had never seen such profane effulgence before’ (*The Guardian*, 18 September 2012). As in the colonial past, Kate’s progressive ‘frontier’ white womanhood that enabled her to become ‘a representative of her race, class and nation’ (Boisseau, 2004: 5) on the global and national stages became constituted through white bourgeois values of respectability, temperance and purity (Repo and Yrjölä, 2011: 49–50). For Kate to reveal her breasts and hence an untamed and feral sexuality was equivalent to reducing herself to the status of the dark colonial savage woman, much like a Hottentot Venus (Schiebinger, 2008: 168). The requirement to conceal feminine sexuality was therefore bound inextricably to her status as a white British colonial-class woman.

*The Guardian* went further to ask why photos of breasts were any less intrusive than the constant speculation of her potential pregnancy. One article challenged Clarence House’s statement according to which the publication of the photos ‘sets the clock back fifteen years’, as *The Guardian* remarked: ‘no palace functionary has complained that the obsession with her impregnation sets the clock back 500 years’ (*The Guardian*, 16 September 2012). It exposed how behind the celebration of the middle-class royal female lay a neoliberal, neocolonial and postfeminist discourse that rekindled a 1950s domesticated femininity, repackaged in the discourse of emancipation and free choice that
acquits any role of patriarchy, sexism and racism in its production. The discourse of emancipation legitimised the constant surveillance of Kate’s body, as well as the personal blame piled on her when she overstepped the norms of respectable white, middle-class femininity and sexuality. In doing so, they nonetheless reproduced certain sexualised national stereotypes. For example, according to The Guardian, ‘while the French slobbered over Kate’s breasts, a genteel British media made do with studying her womb’ (The Guardian, 16 September 2012); they criticised the hypocrisy of the British press but the statement was also suggestive of the defilement of Kate’s pure and refined representative British body by an alien French bad-mannered licentiousness (Allen, 2010: 450–451).

The Guardian made a further link between the Closer scandal and the phenomenon of Internet voyeurism directed at naked female bodies: ‘Kate is not alone. Young women everywhere – famous and non-famous – are increasingly becoming victims of voyeurism in our Internet age’ (The Guardian, 22 September 2012). The article interviewed US law professor Mary Anne Franks, who argued that the connection between Kate and ‘revenge porn’ and ‘creep websites’, where men post photos of women caught unawares, was that ‘they all feature the same fetishisation of non-consensual sexual activity with women who either you don’t have any access to, or have been denied future access to’ (The Guardian, 22 September 2012). In these websites and for the men maintaining them, female bodies, especially breasts, ‘are public property, fair game – to be claimed, admired and mocked’ (The Guardian, 22 September 2012). By identifying the problem in a broader patriarchal Internet and social media culture, The Guardian’s articles provided critical counter-narratives to the stories of the conservative press. Some of these blamed Kate for her loss of control as a woman who, rather than recognising the realities of her new public position, egotistically exhibited her breasts for anyone to see. By contrast, others defended her right of privacy and applauded her self-discipline in the face of emotional turmoil. The Guardian, however, did not focus its efforts on the critique of either Kate or the conduct of the French press, but questioned the broader institutional and cultural contexts (i.e. royalty, sexism, colonialism) in which the publication of topless photos came to be so scandalous. The supposedly new mutually loving, relaxed and open royal family in fact proved to be reliant on the delicate reproduction of neoliberal subjectivities that, once shaken by scandal, revealed the tensions in sex, race and class inherent to the idea of modern British princesshood.

Conclusion

During their 9-year courtship, Kate and her family were either seen as shameless social climbers (Church Gibson, 2011: 358) or alternatively their ascent was framed through ‘familiar narratives of humble beginnings and ordinariness made good’ (Bennett, 2011: 353). The latter narrative dominated after Kate and William’s wedding, and the surrounding discourses resonated strongly with the doctrine that the achievement of a heterosexual middle-class marriage and family life was a ‘primary indicator’ (Ahmed, 2010: 6) of happiness. Moreover, through Kate Middleton, the Windsors have come to inhabit the contradictory discourses of middle-classness and tradition not by marrying middle-class persons as such, but by becoming engaged in the reproduction of neoliberal governmentality.
By assuming certain sexed, classed and raced technologies of the self at the heart of neoliberal governmentality – such as carefully regulated consumption, self-control and readiness in the face of contingency, and demanding constant self-inspection and self-improvement – the media discourses surrounding the Duchess of Cambridge have a pedagogical function particular to a neoliberal climate in a recessionary Britain. Kate Middleton embodies the white, bourgeois obligations characteristic to post-industrial capitalism, demanding the fulfilment of a responsible and accountable life whereby one must constantly survey, adapt and reinvigorate one’s personal capacities, relationships and appearance. As we have argued in this article, this is not simply Kate’s commoner background as such, but rather the way in which her family, body and selfhood become invested with the raced, classed and sexual principles and practices of neoliberal governmentality, which dictate the conditions upon which success and happiness in love, work and life are possible and achievable today.

In particular, Kate was applauded for her respectable appearance, patience and discretion in entering an alliance that would ‘modernise’ and emotionally stabilise the royal family by infusing it with white bourgeois values, habits and feelings. At the same time, the media produced Britain as a progressive and meritocratic nation that contrasted to the old-world elitism and sexism of Monaco. Despite Charlene’s education and achievements as an Olympic swimmer in her own right, and that much like Kate her main purpose is to produce an heir, she was nonetheless seen as a subjugated and dependent woman from a past era, lacking agency, autonomy and security. The topless photo scandal in turn exposed the vigilance and intensity with which Kate’s body and behaviour were being monitored and disciplined, lest she display any conspicuous sexuality that would degrade her to the level of morally inferior lower classes, nations or races.

The emergent cosy, loving, relaxed, yet diligent and respectable bourgeois royal family both resulted from and is reinforced by sex, race and class-infused neoliberal doctrines of happiness, self-governance and self-mastery. The continued adulation of royal wealth and power is therefore possible not merely in spite of the exacerbated bifurcation of social class resulting from the pursuit of austerity policies in recessionary Britain but because the production of royal subjectivity increasingly conforms to enduring narratives of hard work, economic independence and self-improvement while externalising elitism, privilege, decadence and sexism as foreign or extinct.

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**Notes**

1. Despite the seeming novelty of royalty marrying members of the middle-class, European royals have married commoners in the past. Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, better known as the Queen Mother, was a commoner when she married the future George V. In the past half-century, also King Harald V of Norway; King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden; King Philippe of Belgium; Norway’s Crown Prince Haakon; Filipe, Prince of Asturias, heir to the Spanish throne; Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark and Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden all married commoners.
2. We specifically focus on British newspapers due to their extensive coverage of European monarchies, but in particular because of the extent to which Kate Middleton has become a global media phenomenon. As Blain and O’Donnell (2003: 5) have argued, one of the most striking phenomena of British press is its obsessive focus on royalty which however remains an under-analysed domain. To push for a more detailed and careful empirical examination of contemporary monarchy, a topic which especially among political scientists has been widely sidelined today, our objective was to gather material across political spectrum. Daily Telegraph is the leading broadsheet in the United Kingdom (circulation 1,753,489) and represents a right-wing populist stance, while The Guardian (circulation 198,803) is widely regarded as a platform for liberal and left-wing opinions (source: ABC Audit, Average Net Circulation 30 September 2013–27 October 2013). In total, we gathered 1207 articles from the newspaper’s web-archives using keywords ‘Princess Kate’, ‘Kate Middleton’, ‘Duchess of Cambridge’, ‘Princess Charlene’ and ‘Charlene Wittstock’, of which 854 were from The Daily Mail (783 Kate/71 Charlene), 168 from The Telegraph (145 Kate/23 Charlene) and 185 articles from The Guardian (176 Kate/9 Charlene). In the final analysis, we focused on 64 articles (35, The Daily Mail; 12, The Telegraph; 17, The Guardian) that we felt encapsulated the main debates around royalty, especially with regard to the values and assumptions ascribed to the princesses and their behaviour.

3. Before the 1981 royal wedding, love was not seen as essential for a successful royal marriage. Although Queen Victoria’s devotional love for Prince Albert in the previous century rendered amorous matches more common, they were by no means acceptable at face value: in 1936, Edward VIII abdicated in order to marry his beloved, the American divorcée Wallis Simpson, and in 1955, Princess Margaret, faced with constitutional opposition, gave up hope of marrying the divorced Group Captain Peter Townsend.

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