

More than a Pretty Dress
Rhetoric of Style & Identity Construction of Stateswomen Fashion Icons

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines four stateswomen fashion icons—Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Diana, Princess of Wales, Michelle Obama, and Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge—and the way these stateswomen used clothing and personal style to create a public identity. Dress is a powerful tool of personal expression and identity creation and when we look at stateswoman style, we see the ways that dress gives them agency to negotiate the “official” identity that’s being placed on them. Personal style is the way we use personal adornments (clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, etc.) to form messages about who we are, who we dream we could be, and what our personal values are. It is a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others that, in return, offers a way to embrace, challenge, or subvert societal expectations and cultural norms. The choice to embrace, challenge, or subvert to the expectations is fluid, and the women continuously move back and forth between these states. I argue for the ways the selected women in this analysis make choices and negotiate such expectations on the national stage through their clothing choices.

While personal style does not construct our identities on its own, our dress is often the first indicator of our identity and personality. Dress, therefore, becomes one way to express our identity, even in situations where we are otherwise silenced. Stateswomen are “not body as advertisement”—as celebrities are—but “body as a source of agency.” For every woman, stateswomen included, clothing is a rhetorical statement that they make every day. These women exemplify the way choices can be made powerfully—because they are “like us” more than fashion icons. These stateswomen icons show the public evolving negotiations between personal and public style and

identity. They demonstrate the ways that clothing choices can be empowering ways to construct identity and use clothing as an identity statement. This is instrumental in helping average women of the public learn how they can use clothing as a rhetorical statement that creates agency and identity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STATESWOMAN STYLE AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

There are some women whose names always bring to mind images of fashion and glamour. Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly, Twiggy, or for more recent generations, Kate Moss, Elizabeth Hurley, or lately Cara Delevigne or Gigi Hadid. But some women transcend the pages of fashion magazines. Their images seem more relatable somehow. It's not just the woman who is iconic, but her outfits have achieved iconic status. One cannot see a pink suit and not think—however fleetingly—of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. A full white wedding gown with lace and frills and puffed sleeves immediately calls to mind a young Princess Diana arriving at St. Paul's Cathedral. These images live on long after the woman herself. And these images continue to influence future generations of women and their clothing choices.

Clothing selection does not happen in isolation. Each choice we make in deciding what to wear is determined, at least in part, by the social situations we expect to find ourselves in that day. A job interview, a first date, dinner with our family, each of these settings provides a different rhetorical wardrobe situation. Who we might see on any given day also influences our choices. A meeting with the boss, meeting the significant other's parents, going out with friends, each of these people will also lead us to make different wardrobe choices. As Crane states, clothing is “one of the most visible markers of social status and gender and therefore useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries, clothing is an indication of how people in different eras have perceived their positions in social structures and negotiated status boundaries” (1). Clothing is one of the

most important tools of personal expression we have. We see this in our own choices and the choices of others on a daily basis but rarely stop to examine it in greater detail.

There are some women, however, who seem to transcend time and social status and inspire other women with their clothing choices. These women tend to be described as fashion icons. They have an innate sense of style that cannot be taught, a confidence in their wardrobe choices that inspires. Fashion icons can come from many different areas of our social and cultural lives. Actors, models, or singers are the usual roles attached to fashion icons, perhaps because of their constant connection to the fashion industry. Women in these fields have a sense of glamour that is very appealing. Postrel defines glamour as “a pervasive, complex, and often life-enhancing force” (8). Postrel explains that glamour can both be something as well as do something. She states, “like humor, [glamour is] a form of communication that elicits a distinctive emotional response,” but in that response, which creates a sense of longing and projection, glamour can also be produced by many different objects (8). Postrel further states, “glamour does not exist independently in the glamorous object—it is not a style, personal quality, or aesthetic feature—but emerges through the *interaction between object and audience*. Glamour is not something you possess but something you perceive, not something you have, but something you feel. It is a subjective response to a stimulus” (emphasis in original 12). For fashion icons that come out of the entertainment industry, glamour is a major component of their iconic status and allure. However, glamour can also have a negative component. Postrel explains, “Glamour creates a ‘reality distortion field’...and because of its artifice, it is always suspect” (22). This could explain why although women like Audrey Hepburn or Kate Moss have achieved fashion icon status, a distinctive line

between us and them remains. They occupy a space that the average person feels they could never fit into. But there is another category of fashion icons that I wish to study in greater detail, stateswomen. I define this category in great detail below, but I've already given two examples above. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Diana, Princess of Wales, were both stateswomen through their official roles as First Lady of the United States and senior member of the British royal family respectively.

Stateswomen occupy a space different from the people they represent but not quite like other fashion icons, as there are more rules, expectations, and obligations placed upon stateswomen. These expectations make them more similar to the average person than a model or actor, and in turn makes them an intriguing choice to research. Kaiser states, "Fashion is not a thing or an essence. Rather, it is a social process of negotiation and navigation through murky and yet-hopeful waters of what is to come. Fashion involves *becoming* collectively with others...fashion materializes as bodies move through time and space. Time and space are both abstract concepts and contexts: the process of deciphering and expressing a sense of *who* we are (becoming) happens in tandem with deciphering and expressing *when* and *where* we are" (emphasis in original 1). Stateswomen fashion icons demonstrate through their clothing choices a process of negotiating and navigating their roles and expectations. Kaiser further states, "Fashion is never finished, and it crosses all kinds of boundaries. It is ongoing and changes with each person's visual and material interpretations of who he or she is becoming and how this connects with others' interpretations" (1). Over the public lifetime of a stateswoman, this ongoing process of visual and material interpretations is apparent to the public that watches these women, as we watch, their choices have the power to impact our own

wardrobe choices. “Fashion is also about producing clothes and appearances, working through ideas, negotiating subject positions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class), and navigating through power relations. It involves mixing, borrowing, belonging, and changing. But it is also about matching, creating, differentiating, and continuing. It is a complex process that entangles multiple perspectives and approaches” (Kaiser 1). Stateswomen fashion icons become unique and perfectly placed women to study this complex process, and the lessons learned can tell us more about how this process works in the lives of everyday women. I introduce these four women below, but first it is important to lay out definitions for the main terms I use throughout this analysis.

Dress, Fashion, and the Fashion System

It is important in this study that I distinguish between “fashion” and “dress.” There is a tendency by some scholars and critics of “fashion” as well as the fashion industry to conflate these two terms, though other scholars have attempted to define them separately. Joanne Entwistle, in *The Fashioned Body*, states, “Dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all known human cultures: all people ‘dress’ the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics or other forms of body painting” (6). This is different from fashion or “fashionable dress” which Entwistle says is, “dress that embodies the latest aesthetic; it is dress defined at a given moment as desirable, beautiful, popular” (1). Summarizing a significant amount of literature, Entwistle ultimately defines fashion as, “a general term which can be used to refer to any kind of systemic changes in social life, in architecture, or even academia; the ‘fashion system’ as it pertains to dress refers to a particular set of arrangements for the production and distribution of clothing... a special and unique system for the production

and consumption of dress that was born out of historical and technological developments in Europe” (45). Diane Crane explains in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, “Fashion has always had a social agenda for women, and clothing behavior is always socially motivated” (19). Crane explains that there are three distinct categories of fashion—luxury designer fashion, industrial fashion, and street styles (166). She states, “These three categories of fashion are weakly interconnected: street fashion has some influence on luxury fashion and vice versa, and both have some influence on industrial fashion” (166).

In *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson explains, “Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense *is* change, and in modern western societies no clothes are outside of fashion; fashion sets the terms of *all* sartorial behavior” (3, emphasis in original). However, it is Malcolm Barnard that presents the most useful discussion of these terms for the purposes of this study. In *Fashion as Communication*, Barnard spends a great deal of time exploring the etymologies and definitions of clothing and fashion. He finds that while words like “fashion,” “dress,” “costume,” or “style” are often used as synonyms, there are still differences among each. He states, “it could be said that, while all clothing is an adornment, not all adornments are fashionable...It could also be said that, while all clothing is dress, not all dress is fashion...And it could be said that, while all fashion is adornment, not all fashion is clothing” (10). Styles and fashions change constantly, but clothing and dress remains. Additionally, he finds that all of these words exist within the context of the other, so while scholars (myself included) might try to specifically define these terms, ultimately “there is no standalone definition; any and all definitions will refer to other words and gain their meaning from their place in that network, or structure, of

relations” (11). In an effort to make my arguments as clearly as possible I use “dress” and “fashion” as two separate terms and therefore must define them separately.

Throughout, I use “dress” to refer to the garments that we wear. Dress refers to the material object that is a garment worn by someone for the purposes of protection, modesty, and/or adornment. In most of the world, citizens by law are required to dress; that is, they must wear some form of dress so as not to be arrested for indecent exposure. This is different from “fashion.” In using the term “fashion,” I am referring to specific garments or styles related to fashionable dress. This is connected to another term I must define specifically, the “fashion system,” of which the fashion industry is a part of. Fashion, changing styles, the fashion industry, the advertising industry, the beauty industry, mass production of clothing, sweat shops, industrialization and globalization are all part of the larger “fashion system.” Throughout this study I use all of these terms separately. While there are legitimate feminist concerns about fashion and the fashion system and how it impacts women, and props up patriarchal notions of womanhood, femininity, and power (or lack of), those arguments do not hold when applied to a study of dress and women’s use of dress in their daily lives.

Stateswoman

For this analysis, I define stateswoman as any woman in an official, public role who does not also hold some form of political power but rather is connected to the public role through marriage or birth. I analyze two American First Ladies and two British royal princesses (each married to an heir to the British throne) but this term could also be applied to second born daughters of a monarchy or first-born daughters of a monarchy where only males can inherit, wives of presidents and prime ministers, or queen consorts

married to a king (whether he be ruling or representational). In each of these cases, the woman in question plays a significant public role and is obligated by that role to meet certain expectations but does so from a subordinate position that does not hold any actual political power. Stateswomen are different from political woman, who are elected into office or are heads of state as a ruling or representative monarch. Traditional stateswomen are responsible for upholding certain values, qualities, and expectations of their official roles. These include modesty, being dutiful (to their husband and to their country), subordinate, supportive wife/daughter, non-threatening to the establishment, traditional, and feminine. Clothing becomes an important tool for stateswomen to make statements or convey messages about what they think or feel about various topics and causes, even when they do not have the ability to make such statements verbally.

Icon, Influencer, and Trendsetter

Throughout this study, I use the term “icon” in the vernacular sense of “fashion icon,” a person who is known internationally, for their sense of style and the clothing they wear. I also consider there to be a difference between Icons and Trendsetter. A trendsetter can have an icon status, but most icons do not set trends, particularly stateswomen icons. In fact, I argue that it’s the perceived “normalcy” of the four women I examine and the connection the public has to these women through their clothing that builds the iconic status of these stateswomen. Instead of seeing these women as trendsetters, I examine them as influencers of fashion, though it is important to clarify that I am not using influencer in the same sense a “social media influencers” in digital marketing. In fact, stateswomen arguably have *more* influence over fashion and public style than traditional social media influencers as stateswomen typically have a

significantly larger following and outreach. As I show in the following chapters, stateswomen icons function differently from fashion icons or influencers who are not national representatives or ambassadors. While trends might develop out of something a stateswoman wears, they are typically not on the edge of what is new and different in fashion, in the way a model or fashion blogger might be. Because projecting a sense of being relatable is a key tool of being a stateswoman, her clothing choices should reflect a majority of the people she represents.

Style

Barry Brummett defines style as “a complex system of actions, objects, and behaviors that is used to form messages that announce who we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be considered akin to. It is therefore also a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others. And as such, style is a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society” (xi). Brummett is defining style generally, as it can be applied to all aesthetic aspects of life, from clothing to home furnishings to cars and beyond. Kurt W. Back, in “Modernism and Fashion: A Social Psychological Interpretation” in *The Psychology of Fashion*, defines style as it applies to clothing: “Style, in clothing as elsewhere is thus a combination of personal expression and social norms, influenced by dominant values. Clothing occupies a special place, as the manner of communication which is closest, metaphorically and literally, to the self. It covers what is to be private and shows the world the presentation a person wants to make. It is in part determined by social and cultural norms: fashion is a function of society and period (6). Back’s claim that fashion is a function of society and period is important to the analyses that comes in the following chapters. The individual women

who are examined are also operating within the parameters of a specific society and period, and their clothing reflects that. Both Back and Brummett, and others (Barnard; Barthes; Davis; Entwistle) agree that clothing and style have communicative properties. While some scholars (Lurie) have tried to argue there is an actual grammar to clothing, the majority (Barnard; Barthes; Brummett; Crane; Craik; Davis; Entwistle) agree that style cannot be examined as a specific language of clothing, but rather that style is a nonverbal form of communication that can give clues to, or enhance what is already known about, someone's identity. Back explains, "Thus, style is the form of communication, but it can be analyzed like communication itself. Unusual patterns of style reveal much about the person, while conforming patterns are redundant in the collectivity and do not transmit much about individuals. Certain aspects of style are common across different fields; they define the spirit of the times. Thus, style in fashion can reflect or even anticipate the visual arts (7). Speaking specifically of the rhetorical nature of style Brummett states, "Style is value laden because it is rhetorical and rhetorical because it conveys values" (50). Throughout this analysis I show the ways that stateswomen clothing functions rhetorically and convey the values of the countries they represent.

Public Style vs. Individual Style

Anspach provides a useful distinction between public style and individual style. She defines public style as, "the result of many individual tastes simultaneously but separately selecting the same thing" (242-43) whereas individual style is when, "a 'whole picture' of the individual is formed by combining separate items of clothing in a way that relates the parts to each other and to the physical person, personality, and the life of the

wearer. Each person who adopts a fashion interprets the meaning in her own way and sends the message on in altered form. Fashion has a way of so identifying with the wearer that it appears to be an integral part of the personality” (241). Anspach goes on further to identify and define national style. While she is speaking of national in terms of the United States, her definition equally applies to other countries and to both the countries represented by the women featured in this analysis, the United States and Great Britain. Speaking of national style, Anspach states, “Style as it is used here does not mean a particular cut, color, or line, and not a precise shape, but rather a look or spirit. The dress style of a nation is part of that unspoken language which reflects the nations inner core of beliefs; it is a collective representation of social identity—a national symbol. A national style is not static. The social phenomenon of fashion permits ever-changing forms to suit the changing values of the people” (244). Building on Anspach’s definitions I refer to public style as choices that represent the larger public being served by the role each stateswoman fills. Public style is their style that embraces and meets the expectations of the obligations and values their role represents. Individual style is style that represents the individual woman and her preferences, which may coincidentally embrace the expectations of her role but may also challenge or subvert those expectations. Throughout this analysis I demonstrate how the modern stateswoman style utilizes a blend of individual, public, and national style in the creation of public identity. As I examine each stateswoman I show how their choices represent either their public style or their individual style, and how they navigate the space in between.

Introducing the Women

As I noted earlier, the four women chosen for this analysis are Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Diana, Princess of Wales, Michelle Obama, and Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge¹. There were a few reasons for choosing these four women in particular. First these women were chosen for the unique similarities and overlaps among them. In many ways Michelle is the contemporary counterpart for Jacqueline, and Catherine for Diana. Jacqueline and Diana represent a past generation of stateswomen icons and Michelle and Catherine represent a new generation of stateswomen icons in the making. Though there are a number of former First Ladies that could have been chosen none are as similar to each other in the style they portray than Jacqueline and Michelle. Likewise, there are other foreign First Ladies and royals who would be well worth examining but none with as many similarities as Diana and Catherine. Second, by using these four women, with the similarities they possess, I am better able to map out general trends of stateswomen style which can then be applied to other women in stateswomen roles.

There are a number of other women who would be worth examining, and many who had been considered, and I would like to name and discuss a few of them here.

¹ From this point forward I will primarily refer to each woman by her first name. This is not intended to be disrespectful, rather I intend the opposite and wish to give each woman the respect she deserves. My decision is based on a few factors. I want to be sure that each woman's individual identity is preserved, therefore I do not want to refer to her by her married name only or by a maiden name that is not as well known to the majority of readers. This is further complicated by the titles of each woman, the royal titles make it difficult to refer to the women by an official title because while there is a difference between Princess and Duchess, both of my American subjects share the title of First Lady. Therefore, in an effort to avoid confusion by using similar titles or referring to them throughout by a last name that either subsumes their identity under their husband or back to their father, I will refer to each by her first name, in a desire to be as respectful as possible.

International First Ladies of presidents or prime ministers are typically not as well known internationally as American First Ladies, though they do have significant social influence in their own countries. However, Carla Bruni, former French First Lady, would be an interesting choice for future study. In addition to her public role as First Lady she is also a model, singer, and actor, and one of the original supermodels made famous by Gianni Versace in the 1990s. By then she already held a significant social and cultural role in France and beyond. But her additional career outside her public role during her time as First Lady, separates her into a slightly different category from the four women in this present study. A counterpart to Bruni would most likely be Melania Trump, but this project was started long before the 2016 US presidential election. However, a future study looking at the way stateswoman style is impacted by a previous career in the entertainment industry would be worth examining.

I also considered other royals, but similar to the First Ladies, members of royal families outside of Great Britain do not have the same international recognition. Queen Letizia of Spain and Queen Rania of Jordan both are known for their individual style, and would fall into the category of stateswoman, as they both are married to a ruling monarch and do not hold ruling power themselves, unlike Queen Elizabeth II. Queen Elizabeth II would not be considered a stateswoman, nor would I consider her a political woman (such as a female president, prime minister, or senator). Instead, ruling queens would have a category unto themselves. But while Queen Letizia and Queen Rania are known for their style, they do not have the same impact as American First Ladies or British senior royals, which caused me to eliminate them from consideration for this present study.

Another reason I chose Jacqueline, Diana, Michelle, and Catherine specifically for this study is because despite performing different roles in their respective countries, all four women essentially perform a similar role and share similar duties. Both Diana and Catherine were/is married to future Kings of England. And while Queen Elizabeth II is placed in a separate category from stateswomen, Diana and Catherine, as future queen consorts (or whichever title they would have had/will have) are similar to First Ladies as national representatives, but also have more international recognition than British Prime Minister First Ladies do since the Prime Minister changes frequently, but the royal family remains constant.

While royal families have existed throughout the centuries, in comparison, First Ladies are a relatively modern construct. Historically First Ladies have served as unofficial but important members of presidential administrations who have also been scrutinized and judged by the public they serve. The American public has long judged their projects, their roles and influence within the White House, and their clothing. Though every First Lady has served as hostess of the Executive Mansion,² the job itself comes with no specific list of duties or responsibilities. Graddy and Pastan explain, “Over different times and circumstances, every first lady has fashioned her own way of handling the White House and families, parties, politics, and public scrutiny. Each has crafted

² Historically the First Lady has not always been the wife of the President, Graddy and Pastan explain, “Since the founding of the United States, every president has had an official hostess. Without one, propriety into the twentieth century forbade the president from including women—the wives of congressmen and diplomats, for instance—at his parties and receptions. Since these social occasions provide opportunities for the president to build international relationships, win political friends, or further his legislative agenda, a hostess has been a vital member of his administration. If the president was a bachelor or a widower, or if his wife was unable or uninterested in filling the role of hostess, he chose another female family member or friend to serve that purpose” (13). The role of hostess of the White House in the past has been filled by daughters, daughters-in-law, nieces, and sisters.

significant roles for herself that she believed would allowed her to suit her own interests, the needs of the presidential administrations, and the *public's changing expectations of women in general and first ladies in particular*" (emphasis added 6). Over time, as attitudes and expectations of women in the United States has changed, the role of First Lady has evolved. Michelle had a very different role as First Lady than Jacqueline did. Michelle was very active in a variety of causes from childhood obesity to military families. Jacqueline's legacy was the restoration of the White House, which I argue is important but not as visible to the American public as the work that Michelle participated in, as Jacqueline took more of a behind the scenes approach and shied away from the spotlight. While members of the British royal family like Diana and Catherine are not publicly elected they still serve as representatives and hostesses, often entertaining visiting diplomats and state officials, either at Buckingham Palace alongside the Queen or at their private residence in Kensington Palace³.

The Smithsonian Institution began taking a serious interest in First Lady clothing in 1914 when it opened an exhibition titled Collection of Period Costumes and featured gowns contributed by friends and families of fifteen former First Ladies (Graddy and Pastan 7). The most significant contribution was by Helen Taft, who donated the gown she wore three years prior to her husband's inaugural ball, her support of the exhibition set a precedent for future first ladies, and a tradition that continues today and has greatly expanded the museum's collection (Graddy and Pastan 7). The long history of collecting

³ Diana lived at Kensington Palace during her marriage and remained there with her sons after the divorce. After Catherine's wedding to William, the couple renovated part of Kensington Palace to form their new apartment and the Palace has become their London residence. William and Catherine have, in recent years, entertained Michelle and her husband Barack Obama.

clothing worn by American First Ladies demonstrates a longstanding interest in these women and a significance of the clothes. I argue this interest is also reflected in the British royal family but because the royal family is not elected, they are able to keep more of their life private, and so collecting their clothing for display is a bit more difficult—though not impossible as will be discussed in the final chapter. Graddy and Pastan explain,

Several of the first ladies who donated their inaugural gowns to the Smithsonian Institution have admitted that they had a difficult time parting with the dress that represented one of the most important moments in their lives. Clothing holds memories, and because it is so personal, it may reveal aspects of a person that otherwise go undocumented...*History is not an abstraction of the past. It's real.* (emphasis added 15)

This fact could likely explain why members of the royal family have held on to the more personal garments they wore, like wedding gowns, rather than donate them to a museum for public display. The collection of clothing is important to the preservation of the history of these women—which I discuss further in the final chapter—and by studying their clothing and the choices they make in the way they dress and how they build their working wardrobe, we can better understand how clothing can construct identity. Stateswomen are representatives of the public they serve; their wardrobes are reflections of not only their personal style but the national style they represent. Their choices are judged on the basis of what the public would choose or deem appropriate for the event or situation, this is why “good” choices are celebrated and emulated, and “bad” choices are criticized so heavily.

While stateswomen and their style have long been a focus of the public, it has not been used as such a rhetorical tool prior to Jacqueline. Mamie Eisenhower’s style, primarily designed by Mollie Parnis, was well liked, but not utilized in the same way that

Jacqueline used her style. Though, Jacqueline did learn one lesson from Mamie, having her clothing designed primarily by one designer. On August 1, 1960, then editor of *Vogue*, Diana Vreeland received a 10-page letter from Jacqueline, asking for advice (Bowles 28). Jacqueline stated, “I must start to buy American clothes and have it known where I buy them—my own little Mollie Parnis!” (qtd in Bowles 28). Jacqueline was aware of how her campaign and potential First Lady image was already being crafted by her clothing. Over her brief time as First Lady, Jacqueline established the modern stateswoman look, departing from previous stateswomen.

In 1957, when Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited the White House for a state dinner, Queen Elizabeth and Mamie Eisenhower dressed similarly in full-skirted ball gowns, which had been the standard evening dress for the previous decade, just a few years later in 1961 when Jacqueline and President Kennedy visited Buckingham Palace for a dinner honoring the Kennedys, Queen Elizabeth wore a similar full, tulle gown. Meanwhile Jacqueline wore a Chez Ninon interpretation of a contemporary Givenchy evening gown, a silk shantung sleeveless gown that was gathered at the waist but fell in a narrow column to the ground. As Bowles states, the dress, “presented a startling contrast with the queen, whom [Jacqueline] was meeting for the first time...[the dress] represented an image of up-to-date elegance, subliminally reinforcing the Kennedy administration’s message of America’s forward-thinking dynamism” (135). Jacqueline would use her clothing carefully and strategically—which I will discuss in Chapter 3—to craft her image as First Lady, and set a new precedent for what stateswoman style could accomplish.

Each woman who came after Jacqueline would choose how they would craft their stateswoman style and they would all use clothing in slightly different ways. Diana used clothing as a political tool, sometimes as a weapon, and her style became an integral part of her public identity. Michelle and Catherine each found ways of acknowledging history and tradition while also put their own personalities into their styles. Each of these women found ways of keeping a sense of their self-identity in the specific clothing choices they made and in using clothing as a form of expression, as well as using clothing as a negotiation tactic of the rules and obligations—rather than allowing the rules and obligations to suppress them. Their clothing makes them seem more accessible to the public. Diana and Jackie were considered more popular than their husbands by the public, which could be linked at least in part to their clothing. The difference between menswear and womenswear is vast. Men in public roles have very limited choices or options in displaying their personality through traditional suits. Womenswear on the other hand has much more variety and gives women more ability to display aspects of their personality through their clothing.

Goals and Significance of the Study

Dress is a powerful tool of personal expression and identity creation. When we look at stateswoman style, we see the ways that dress gives them a power to negotiate the “official” identity that’s being placed on them. I argue for the ways that the selected women in this analysis embrace, challenge, and/or subvert the stateswoman role they are expected to play and the values their roles reflect on the national stage. The choice to embrace, challenge, or subvert to the expectations is fluid, and the women continuously move back and forth between these states. By studying these women, and the way they

use clothing, we can better understand how clothing functions in our everyday lives. The average person does not have the same types of events to attend that stateswomen do, but everyone knows the pressure of dressing for an interview, following a dress code at school or at work, attending a wedding or school reunion. These typical events come with inherent pressures related to our wardrobe choices. Looking to these iconic stateswomen to see the way they use clothing to meet certain expectations while also keeping their own identity can give us examples of how to do the same thing in our own lives.

I argue that Jacqueline establishes the modern stateswoman style. Throughout her short tenure as First Lady she deftly negotiated the expectations and values she needed to portray while using clothing as a form of nonverbal personal expression. She made proactive design choices, working closely with her personal designer and milliners showing a fashion forward focus that fit with the values she is expected to represent while also bending the rules where necessary to fit her personal style identity. Throughout her time in the White House Jacqueline never stepped out of line in her actions, within the historical contexts of the role of First Lady expectations, but frequently used her clothing as a tool to help shape her image. Dress allows an implicit way to challenge women's roles. While Jacqueline chose, more often than not, to embrace the expectations, I show how her successors in stateswoman style challenged—and at times—subverted those expectations through their clothing choices.

Brummett states, “We use style to make claims about ourselves and others to bring about desired results. When we put on jeans, we are not just clothing our nakedness, we are speaking a language formed in cloth” (xi). He defines style as “a complex system of actions, objects, and behaviors that is used to form messages that

announce who we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be considered akin to. It is therefore also a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others. And as such, style is a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society” (xi). While Brummett is discussing style at a broader, macro level, encompassing all aspects of our lives, from home furnishings to automobiles to clothing, it could be extended down to an analysis of clothing alone. His definition of style coincides nicely with how I am defining personal style. Personal style is the way we use personal adornments (clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, etc.) to form messages about who we are, who we dream we could be, and what our personal values are. It is a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others that, in return, offers a way to embrace, challenge, or subvert societal expectations and cultural norms. As other scholars have noted, personal style doesn't not construct our identities on its own (Davis; González and Bovone; Kaiser; Keenan); however, our dress is often the first indicator of our identity and personality. Even as our personal style evolves over time, there is still a common thread linking our style choices. Dress, therefore, becomes one way to express our identity, even in situations where we are otherwise silenced.

This is especially true of stateswomen, whose roles often expect them to be seen and not heard, or where even in the cases of giving a public address it is usually through the form of a prewritten speech by another party. Though politicians have their speeches written for them as well, they often have more say in making changes or in the general tone or message of the speech, this is not always a courtesy given to stateswomen. For stateswomen, dress and personal style functions as an expression of self that may or may not align with official roles and identities. It allows them to challenge the conventions of

expected style within the constraints they face. Dress becomes one of the few material practices women can use to challenge traditional roles. Throughout this analysis I look at the ways their dress reflects particular values and/or challenges traditional definitions of appropriate roles.

This project is guided by three research questions. First, how did/do these women navigate and shape their identities through the fashion choices they make as stateswomen? Second, how have they used clothing to create a public identity while working within the constraints of their stateswomen roles? Third, what, if any, influence do past stately and past royal icons have on current icons-in-the-making?

While each of these women operate within the fashion system, that is not what this project is exploring. Rather, I am concerned with how these women use dress to shape their public identity. Barnard discusses the continuous debate over the importance of dress in society and the conflict between the desire by some to finally move “beyond” the process of “endless deferral” and differentiation where the meaning of terms is a relation to other “different and absent terms” and the realisation that there will never be such a beyond (190-91). Ultimately, he states:

Those who see fashion and clothing as trivial and deceptive, and who bemoan their shallow and exploitative natures, are those who desire such a beyond. They are those who desire and end or an outside to the play of differences because they think that this would lead to stable and fixed meanings. Those who value fashion and clothing positively, who see fashion and clothing as evidence of creativity and cultural production, are those who realize that there is no such beyond and who are happy to enjoy the play of cultural differences as it is found in fashion and clothing. They are those who are happy with the idea that difference produces meanings, and who have no wish to see difference curtailed or escaped. (191)

This approach to dress is precisely what I am focusing on in this study. I see clothing and fashionably dress as a positive aspect of creativity and cultural production. And

throughout the following chapters I explore the ways that the stateswomen selected produce meaning through their clothing. Barnard also states that this difference in attitudes towards fashion is “the nature of fashion and clothing and that this is the nature of meaning and communication. The structural ambivalence of western capitalist societies towards fashion and clothing may be explained by these conflicting desires, by these two interpretations of interpretation and meaning” (Barnard 191). However, as a feminist, I also follow the example of Kaiser, who explains “Studying fashion is a *both/and*, rather than an *either/or*, activity. Fashion thrives on contradictions (conflicting truth claims) and ambivalence (conflicting emotions): *both/and* ways of knowing and feeling. Combining fashion and (feminist) cultural studies perspectives encourages thinking that disrupts, blurs, and transcends binary (*either/or*) oppositions” (emphasis in original 2). By taking an interdisciplinary and feminist approach to my selected stateswomen, I am open to the feminist critiques against the fashion system while still being open to the ways that dress operates in our everyday lives and how dress as a material object helps to construct our identity. Goggin, in examining a handkerchief embroidered with English suffrage signatures, explains identity is an ongoing process, “Never complete, identity is always in *media res*...a dynamic series of ongoing multiple meaning-making processes that are co-constructed by the knowing subject and the knowing observer” (“Fabricating 19). Goggin further explains that, “Material objects offer one available means for both performing identity and for recouping traces of identity performance” (“Fabricating” 19). I see dress as one of the material objects stateswomen have as an available means for performing their identity in their roles as

stateswomen. The way stateswomen dress leads us to how we define ideas of modesty, duty, femininity, and female empowerment.

While fashionable dress might seem easy to dismiss as something not significant to study, when we look at dress as a material object and as a way of constructing our identity, we see the active role that dress plays in negotiating the constraints of the roles each of us play in our daily lives. This research is important because dress functions as a unique identity indicator. Studying the ways fashion and dress interact in our daily lives is also important because fashion is an economic driver, as each of the selected women demonstrate. It is also a representation of the individual and an art form that the wearer can take with them wherever they go. Approaches to fashion have changed over the last several decades, but the importance that dress plays in our daily lives remains just as important now as ever, thus creating a deeper need to study the various ways dress functions in our lives.

Conclusion

This dissertation is broken up into seven chapters. The following chapter, Chapter 2, reviews the existing literature on the concepts of “dress as object,” “dress and social identity,” and “agency in dress” in order to set up a framework from which to base the garment analyses in the following chapters. I take a multidisciplinary approach and bring together scholarship from material culture studies, fashion theory, and visual rhetoric to show how clothing functions as a unique expression of personal identity and stateswoman style for the women selected for this analysis.

In Chapter 3, I explore the style of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and how she established a new baseline for modern stateswoman style. Jacqueline faced a variety of

rules and expectations as First Lady, some of which didn't always fit her personal style. Her clothing choices during the White House years were very different from the choices she made after she left the White House and transitioned to life as a private citizen. But her choices during the White House years set a precedent that many stateswomen, both in the US and abroad, have referenced and emulated in the years since. This chapter features case studies of the inauguration suit designed by Oleg Cassini and the inaugural ball gown designed by Ethel Frankau, and illustrates the proactive approach Jacqueline took in designing her clothing and her public image.

Chapter 4, illustrates the fashion and personal evolution of Diana, Princess of Wales, from a shy 19-year-old engaged to a seemingly charming prince, through the dazzling royal wedding, the early years of her marriage when she dutifully followed the rules and dressed as an exemplary stateswoman before realizing that following the rules wasn't getting her the happiness she craved and she began carving her own path. This included dressing how she wanted and not just mutely following the rules and etiquette of royal dressing. Diana begins by following the model of Jacqueline, playing by the rules and subtly negotiating the expectations to fit her personal style, but as her marriage crumbled Diana began subverting the rules more frequently before finally transgressing them completely and forging her own path and making her own rules. To demonstrate the beginning and end of this evolution I explore the case studies of her wedding gown designed by the Emanuels and the black cocktail dress designed by Christina Stambolian that Diana wore the night before Prince Charles' interview admitting to his infidelity was to be printed in the papers, thus stealing the headlines from him the next day.

In Chapter 5, I examine Michelle Obama and show how the baseline Jacqueline set in the 1960s gets taken up by a new generation of style in the White House. Using a similar case study of inauguration suit and inaugural ball gown, I argue that Michelle incorporates some of the stateswoman style that Jacqueline developed but does so in a way that updates the style and brings it into the 21st century. Michelle's choice of the Isabelle Toledo suit and the Jason Wu ball gown incorporates symbolism and optimism in a similar way that Jacqueline's inauguration ensembles did but does so to an even greater degree given the designers chosen and the stories that the designers bring to their work and the coverage of the ensembles in the days following the inauguration events. Michelle combines the glamour and appropriateness of Jacqueline's era while also making it more approachable and attainable in a modern era of financial constraint and social changes related to race, class, and gender.

Chapter 6, features the final stateswoman icon chosen for this study, Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge. Catherine possess a unique combination of each of the three women examined in the previous chapters, while also forging her own style identity. She uses the classic stateswoman style established by Jacqueline as a baseline, but demonstrates a similar strength and maturity seen during Diana's later years and often emulates Diana's working wardrobe of classic suits and dresses for public appearances. Like her one time American counterpart, Michelle, Catherine also embraces a range of designers and brands in the UK, supporting the best of British fashion as well as a mix of high end and more affordable options, making her style attainable to consumers worldwide seeking to emulate her modern but classic style. I argue that Catherine's appeal lies in her perceived normality and her avoidance of being a slave to trends. I also

argue that while the press likes to compare Catherine to Diana, her style more closely emulates that of Queen Elizabeth II.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude this study by mapping the similarities and overlaps of these women. Although they represent different time periods, ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as different official roles and duties, there are many ways that each of the later women reference Jacqueline's style and the precedent she set. There are also ways that Michelle and Catherine reference Diana, and ways that Michelle and Catherine make similar sartorial choices. I also briefly discuss the ways these women's style is preserved online and the digital afterlife of each, as well as the ways their clothing stories are told in museum exhibitions. I finish with a discussion of the meaning these women hold today, how their style continues to have influence, and make suggestions for future research directions.

Through my analysis of these four women, I show how style functions as a personal expression of their identity, their public and individual styles, and the ways style can be used to embrace expectations and values placed upon us, as well as to challenge and subvert those expectations. Style is a nonverbal rhetoric that can be used to either embrace the status quo or resist it and gives voice to women who might not otherwise have a voice or a platform to express their values and beliefs. I argue that these women aren't just fashion icons, women whose clothing is passively consumed, they are significant fashion *influencers*, whose style is replicated, either directly through the purchase of the exact same item, or indirectly through the purchase of similar or inspired pieces. By understanding the way these women influence the clothing behavior and

wardrobe choices of the average consumer, we can better understand the deeper ways clothing impacts our daily lives.

This chapter has served to lay out the foundation of my argument, establish definitions of key terms, and introduce the four women selected for this analysis. Chapter 2 will establish the scholarly foundation from which I am building my argument and introduce the key scholars and research consulted for this study.

CHAPTER 2

STITCHING IT ALL TOGETHER: DRESS AS OBJECT, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND AGENCY

As clothing is complex and multi-dimensional, fulfilling a wide range of tasks even in one outfit, it is necessary that the scholarship I rely on be multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary. As such I have brought together scholars from fashion theory, costume studies, material culture studies, and rhetorical theory to help me address my research questions. I look specifically at scholars who confront the differences between “dress” and “fashion,” the ways dress influences social identity, as well as the ways dress functions as an object worthy of scholarly examination. In this chapter I begin with a review of these scholars’ works that have influenced my research as well as present a more detailed analysis of the three works/scholars that I am using to create the framework for my larger analysis of the selected fashion icons.

Rather than divide this review into categories based on discipline I feel it is necessary to divide it by theme. Many of the sources consulted for this project were interdisciplinary themselves, which makes assigning them to a specific discipline a challenge. Likewise, many of these sources address more than one area of this project. Among all the sources that were examined, I identified themes of identity, communicative aspects of dress, cultural values of dress, as well as the cultural values of fashion (and the distinct differences between the two), and the rhetorical and persuasive qualities of dress and fashion. Therefore, the three categories I explore in detail in this review are Dress as Object, Dress and Social Identity, and Agency in Dress. These three themes are the most important in my analysis of the selected fashion icons and their

clothing. But before I get to that, it is necessary to elaborate for a moment on the framework I use to guide me throughout this project.

Theoretical Framework

To help me create a theoretical framework for my analysis I use the work of three scholars: Barry Brummett, Elizabeth Wilson, and Colleen Denney. I am drawn to the work of style scholar Barry Brummett, particularly his book *A Rhetoric of Style*. Brummett explains, “I want to think of style as socially held sign systems composed of a wide range of signs beyond only language, systems that are used to accomplish rhetorical purposes across the cultural spectrum” (3). By seeing style as a form of language, we can better explore the various ways that style functions in daily life. Through the choice of print, color, cut, and embellishment, as well as the combination of accessories, what we wear has vast possibilities to make numerous statements about our identity, our personalities, and how much we do—or don’t—conform to social expectations. Brummett also distinguishes between style and fashion, stating, “it would be useful to think of style as a language and fashion as the particular utterance of that language in the moment” (4). I argue for the ways that my selected fashion icons use clothing to construct their public identities and make visual statements in specific moments.

For Brummett there are five structural components to a rhetoric of style—primacy of the text, imaginary communities, market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies (117). In an analysis of the way clothing affects the cultural representation of fashion icons and constructs their social identity, clothing becomes the text in this rhetoric of style. As Brummett explains, “Style is crafted and strategic even if it is crafted out of awareness—it is not accidental or happenstance...Likewise, people are aware of

the styles of others, reading off those styles socially useful information about class, sexuality, and so forth” (119). Of the five components, Brummett also states that, “Although texts have *primacy* in a rhetoric of style, it may be said that homology has *centrality* in unifying a style as a coherent discourse” (131, emphasis in original). Homologies, or formal patterns/structures shared by members of a set (36), play a central role in a rhetoric of style in that “To explore the stylistic homologies of a rhetoric of style is in a sense to explore the repertoire of signification for a given enactment of that rhetoric. A given style is a repertoire of signs as well as the homological glue that binds them together as a style” (132). Brummett concludes, “Rhetorics of style are then read in the same way, the reader relying on triangulating the plausible meanings generated by the signs and the homological cohesion or incongruity of the style(s) displayed” (132). By using Brummett’s explanation of a rhetoric of style as a springboard, I can analyze the patterns between the women I am analyzing—or in Brummett’s words, the stylistic homologies of stateswoman style—and create a rhetoric of stateswoman style that could not only be applied to the four women in this study, but to future studies of other stateswomen.

I also lean on Elizabeth Wilson’s scholarship, and especially her book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. While Brummett explores the way that style can be used for persuasive effect, Wilson identifies the ways that dress has the power to create identity or subvert it. I cannot deny that I am approaching this project from the perspective of a feminist scholar, I also cannot deny the many and varied critiques of

fashion and the fashion industry by feminist scholars⁴. However, Wilson makes strong arguments for why fashion, both the study of it and the wearing of it, is of important cultural value. She argues that fashion is a form of visual art and, “like any other aesthetic enterprise fashion may then be understood as ideological, its function to resolve formally, at the imaginary level, social contradictions that cannot be resolved” (9). Wilson discusses the way that fashion parodies itself and mocks “moral pretensions of the dominant culture” which tends to criticize fashion for its perceived superficiality (10). She also comments on the difficulties faced in writing about fashion in any way other than purely descriptive. According to Wilson, fashion scholarship tends to focus on fashion from the perspective of social history, psychology, or the economy. However, when we focus on only one of these perspectives, the results lead to simplistic explanations that only address one part of what fashion is. She suggests, “we need a variety of ‘takes’ on fashion if the reductive and normative moralism of the single sociological explanation is to be avoided while we yet seek to go beyond the pure description of the art historian” (11). I envision this project as presenting one such new “take” on fashion studies and material culture⁵.

⁴ I define feminism as the push for social, political, and economic equality between the sexes and view this push from an intersectional perspective that takes into account equality across age, race, socioeconomic background, and religion. Though the women in this analysis are similar in many ways, there are some differences between them in terms of age and race, and socioeconomic background—though all of them came from fairly privileged backgrounds. But while the women in this study are similar, the women they represent, and who they influence with their style, are incredibly diverse. Though my research subjects may not openly discuss issues of intersectional feminism, their clothing is able to make subtle statements about these subjects in terms of which designers or brands they choose to wear.

⁵ For the purpose of this study, I am using Arthur Asa Berger’s definition of material culture as a guide. He defines material culture as, “the world of things that people make and things that we purchase or possess, so it is part of our consumer culture” (16). This connection to consumer culture is important when considering fashion and dress as part of material culture. The dress of public figures, like the women I am examining, begins as an object to be purchased and consumed, worn either just once (as in the cases of wedding gowns or inauguration outfits) or a number of times. The garment then transitions into a material artifact, a visual record of the past.

Wilson also addresses the restrictive nature that fashionable dressing has been accused of having, that “confined them to the status of the ornamental or the sexual chattel” (13); however, she continues by explaining that fashionable dress has also been one way that women, “have been able to achieve self-expression, and feminism has been as simplistic—and as moralistic—as other theories in its denigration of fashion” (13). For women in the public eye, such as the icons selected for this study, fashionable dress has been one of the few rhetorical outlets for women in official positions (First Ladies or royal princesses) whose official duties tend to require them to “be seen and not heard.” As I show in the case studies, the wardrobes of the women I examine have become a way for them to express their identities and personalities, as well as, if desired, either demonstrate that they are embracing or rejecting the roles placed upon them.

Speaking specifically about feminist theory and fashion, Wilson explains, “Within feminism fashionable dress and the beautification of the self are conventionally perceived as expressions of subordination; fashion and cosmetics fixing women visibly in their oppression” (13). Fashion and cosmetics are often constructed as the visible signs of women’s oppression. However, Wilson points out, “we must also recognize that to discuss fashion simply as a feminist moral problem is to miss the richness of its cultural and political meanings. The political subordination of women is an inappropriate point of departure if, as I believe, the important thing about fashion is *not* that it oppresses women” (13). She argues that fashion can be used in liberating ways, but that fashion remains ambiguous because it is many different things and can be interpreted in many different ways. Wilson frequently relates fashion to capitalism and states, “fashion, the child of capitalism, has, like capitalism, a double face” (13). I do not wish to take up too

much time arguing against the idea of fashion as a form of oppression here, but I do wish to begin laying the groundwork for a more detailed argument for the complex relationship between dress and fashion, and women's bodies and agency that the rest of this project will explore and analyze over the next few chapters. I want to be careful to respect feminist criticism of fashion and the fashion system, while still leaving room to explore the powerful ways that fashionable dress can be used by women through a rhetoric of style and personal expression. I want to avoid having the posture Wilson describes when she states, "To despise fashion as frivolous is therefore the most frivolous posture of all" (277).

Finally, the third work that I rely on is Colleen Denney's book *Representing Diana, Princess of Wales: Cultural Memory and Fairy Tales Revisited*. In her book Denney "concentrates on analyzing Diana's portraits in relation to those of her predecessors, especially Alexandra, Princess of Wales, and Queen Victoria, to assert the ways that we see both continuity and change in the presentation of the construction and performance of the princess of public and state duty" (13). Taking the position of third wave feminism, Denney explores the ways that "all representation is tied to competing discourses that are central not only to feminist analyses, but also to ways societies construct cultural memories" (13). What is of particular interest to me are the ways that Denney argues that the cultural visual memory of previous royal women impacts Diana's representation (19), I argue the same could be said for the way the memory of Diana impacts Catherine's representation. Similar to royal princesses, First Ladies follow strict rules of protocol and follow examples from the long line of First Ladies that have come before them. I argue that Jacqueline established a new baseline for style an

appropriateness for First Ladies, against which the First Ladies who follow her have been implicitly and explicitly judged, up through Michelle's tenure, and continuing into Melania Trump's tenure.

Speaking of Diana, Denney explains that within the context of the visual memories of previous royal women, Diana had to, "emit codes of royal authority *and* display exemplary feminine behavior. At the same time, she had to show herself as an ideal mother and wife *and* demonstrate a commitment to duty" (19, emphasis in original). Denney continues that Diana, "represented a privileged class that symbolized authority and power, yet was also a living model of femininity: attractive but not sexually threatening, a pleasure to behold but not a scene-stealer, docile, compliant, and deferential" (19). The same could be said for all four women selected for this project, and while Denney is exploring the cultural representations of royal women in their official portraiture, I think attention must be paid to the ways women are dressed in their visual representations and how their style of dress impacts those representations. As scholars who I discuss below have shown, dress is a key part of identity construction. The way these women dress makes statements about their official public identities, and these identities cannot be easily separated from their individual styles.

To help me explore the dress of Diana and Catherine, and Jackie and Michelle, it is necessary to first discuss the three key themes—Dress as Object, Dress and Social Identity, and Agency in Dress--guiding this research. These three themes help to shape a way to analyze the way the clothing worn by these women act as a rhetorical tool and a way of constructing identity of these women, which in turn, helps us to better understand

the ways clothing can be used as a form of personal expression and rhetorical tool for the average woman.

Dress as Object

There is a growing amount of scholarly interest and scholarship in theorizing dress as an object, rather than simply as part of the larger fashion system, and therefore not worthy of scholarly attention. Clothing by its very nature is material. Scholarship on material culture and how objects create meaning and function in our daily lives helps to set up a foundation for an argument for dress as objects and clothing as a material practice (Appadurai; Berger; Glassie; Goggin 2009a, 2009b; Graves-Brown; Kwint et. al.; Woodward). Additionally, there is a growing amount of scholarship that analyzes clothing and dress as a specific part of material culture helps to bridge the gap between fashion studies and material culture studies (Arthur; Guy et. al.; Guy & Banim; Haye & Wilson; Kuchler & Miller; Tseïlon). While some fashion theorists take an object approach to fashion, most of them do so from the perspective of dress as a commodity (Anspach; Craik; Entwistle; Thompson & Haytko; Miller, McIntyre, & Mantrala). Scholars in fashion theory are making substantial arguments on clothing having cultural value (Barnard; Crane; Craik; Entwistle; Davis; Kaiser; Keenan), but for specific arguments and analyses of dress as object I must turn to the field of material culture and costume/dress history. Though fashion theory has been a growing field for the past few decades, it tends to be split into two categories, either straight fashion history or theoretical concepts of fashion in relation to identity and culture. This leaves out the everyday ways we interact with dress and clothing in our lives. Fashion theory takes a

broader macro approach to ideas of dress and the fashion system, material culture allows me to have a micro approach to dress in our everyday lives.

To start, I must acknowledge the work of British clothing historian and costume designer, Janet Arnold, who published a series of books examining the cut and construction of historical clothing ranging from the 16th century through the 20th century (Arnold 1972; 1977; 1985; 2008). Taking an object approach to clothing in the *Patterns of Fashion* series, Arnold examines and dissects historical garments, breaking them down and replicating their individual pattern pieces and construction methods. She uses clothing contemporary to the time she is studying from surviving examples found in museums. Though originally intended for students of fashion and costume design, her work over the years has had lasting influence on fashion historians and museum curators. For scholars of material culture and dress her work is invaluable for the way she examines, in minute detail, every aspect of the garment under examination. She includes surviving data and information about common fabrics and construction techniques of the time, popular periodicals and information for how people would have had their garments made, or made the garment themselves, and other important details relevant to clothing of the time period being examined. In addition, Arnold created line-by-line pattern replicas of garments with instructions for how they could be recreated. Arnold's precise and scientific approach to historical clothing is very different from the typical books on fashion history that merely reprint pictures, prints, or portraits that showed what people wore during different time periods with little attention to material, construction, and so on. Arnold was one of the first to take such an object approach to clothing and show the

ways that an individual garment is the sum total of a number of much smaller and more intricate parts.

By focusing on methods of construction and the ways that patterns and styles traveled and spread through society before the existent of the fashion system as we know it today, the focus of Arnold's work is on the material nature of the garment, and not on the larger fashion system we see today. This opens up space for other scholars to continue exploring dress as an object and not only as one minor component of the larger fashion system. Elizabeth Wilson in *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* explains, "The 'garment as object' approach, starting from close examination of textiles, cut, provenance and so on, may to some appear limited by its descriptive protocols, but its attention to detail provides the possibility of drawing important conclusions concerning the reasons, for example, for the changes in fashion" (271). Work like Arnold's, and other material culture scholars focusing on dress, exemplifies Wilson's point. When we better understand the small details that make up a total garment, we are able to more fully comprehend the ways that dress functions in society, particularly in identity building practices. Each of these details acts as an additional part of the overall expression of the total outfit or ensemble. The cut, textiles, and decorative details of each garment all work together to convey a message about the wearer. A dress is never *just* a dress, it is the sum of all of its various parts and details, as I show in the following case study chapters.

Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson, in the introduction to the edited collection *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity* explain one of the issues with the dress as object approach is clothing's ubiquitousness. They state, "Ultimately, the fact that we all wear clothes ensures the widespread appeal of the subject and makes everyone

confident to express an opinion. However, this intimate and shared experience may perhaps also have contributed to the sometimes marginalized position that dress is given within academia and museology” (2). Because clothing is such an inherent part of our everyday lives, the way it functions in our everyday lives and helps to create our social identity is so crucial.

Haye and Wilson explain, “The scholarly work of the past two decades has brought about what almost amounts to a revolution in the way we conceptualize dress, and if, on the one hand, some may see this as being due to the dubious hedonism of a fully consumerised society, it is more fruitful to understand it as a recognition of the importance of daily life and also of ‘history from below’” (7). The essays in the collection cover a variety of subjects that explore the many and varied ways that clothing functions as objects in everyday life. One essay examines the use of woolen cloth, a fabric typically employed in menswear, in women’s clothing in Britain during the latter part of the 19th century, and the cultural and social implications the fabric had in women’s dress during this time. Another essay looks at the connection between clothing accessories and race in the form of the headtie and the way it forms a cultural and social narrative for young Black British women of Jamaican descent in the 1970s. One of the final essays takes an intriguing look at depictions of clothing without a body wearing it and the aesthetics of absence. Throughout the collection each essay makes a case for the material and object nature of clothing and cloth, as well as the depiction of clothing in art and shopping habits throughout the last two centuries.

Similarly, Daniel Miller, in the introduction to *Clothing as Material Culture* (co-edited by Suzanne Küchler) addresses the split in the field of material culture studies,

between researchers who approach dress and textiles from a specialist perspective of working in textiles and conservation in design and museum collections versus researchers in the area of cultural studies who explore the ‘social life’ of clothes. Miller’s collection seeks to move beyond that “simplistic dualism” (1). Like Miller, I argue for a study of dress that moves beyond a simplistic dualism that takes an either/or approach—either studying the physical properties of dress or the way dress interacts with us culturally.

I show in the case studies the ways that the physical properties of the garments worn *combined with* the cultural implications that the garment represents to create the rhetorical statement of the garment. Miller explains that the edited collection’s “dissection of clothing into pattern, fibre, fabric, form and production is not opposed to, but part of, its consideration as an aspect of human and cosmological engagement” (1). Like the collection by Haye and Wilson, Miller and K uchler’s collection examines a range of topics from new fibers to a discussion of the Turkish headscarf to Maori cloaks in New Zealand. Published a few years after Haye and Wilson’s collection, this collection by Miller is similar to Haye and Wilson in that the essays are analyzing specific aspects and elements of clothing and textiles, but is different in that while Haye And Wilson’s collection has a more historical perspective, Millers’ collection takes on more of an international and multi-cultural perspective.

The work in these collections is vital to the continued study of dress as a material object and the way dress operates materially in our lives, but more work needs to be done. Fashion theory tends to focus on the social and cultural influences of dress, exploring larger, more macro themes and subjects. By taking a material culture, or dress as object approach, to dress studies and exploring the micro themes and subjects we can

create a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the ways dress truly functions in our everyday lives. And more specifically the ways dress connects to social identity and the agency it can give its wearers, both of which will be discussed in the following sections.

Dress and Social Identity

Scholars in both fashion theory and material culture explore the connections among dress and identity. Each scholar takes a slightly different approach, but all seem to arrive at similar conclusions. Dress communicates social identity (Davis) and the meaning is produced both internally and externally (Barnard). Fashion scholars tend to look at the bigger picture of how dress, particularly fashionable or unfashionable dress, constructs identity (Barnard; Craik; Crane; Entwistle; Davis; Keenan; Solomon; Wilson) while material culture scholars tend to hone in on more specific demographics such as the everyday woman (Green, Guy & Banim) or sorority girls (Arthur), or exploring the social/beauty paradoxes faced by women (Tsëelon). Whether taking the macro or micro approach, these scholars are all getting to the same end result. Dress does, to a certain extent, make the woman.

In fashion theory, a growing body of scholarship has been produced examining the psychology of fashion and how fashion functions in society, demonstrating fashion's influence on gender, identity, class, culture, the body, and more (Anspach; Entwistle; Craik; Crane; Davis; Keenan; Solomon; Warwick & Cavallaro). Dress is one of the main tools we have to assist in creating and demonstrating our identity to society and many fashion scholars address issues related to identity in their research (Craik; Crane; Davis; Barthes; Entwistle; González and Bovone; Kaiser). Crane explains, in *Fashion and its Social Agenda*, "Clothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a

major role in the social construction of identity” (1). Crane, when comparing modes of fashion of the 19th century to now, explains that clothing was useful in, “breaking away from social constraints and of appearing to have more social or economic resources than was actually the case. The seductiveness of fashion, then as now, lay in the fact that it seemed to offer a person the possibility of becoming in some way different, more attractive, or more powerful” (67). Clothing and fashion practices that started in the 19th century as a way to elevate one’s social status, have now taken on a whole new level of identity construction.

With the prevalence of mass production and fast fashion, and after the establishment of “power dressing” in the 1980s and the emergence of fashion advice like “dress for the job you want, not the job you have,” clothing choices, perhaps now more than ever, allows people to truly express the person they are, or the person they want to be. Boundaries of class can be blurred if one makes certain clothing choices. The importance of this is demonstrated by various charities and community groups that collect clothing, accessories, and cosmetics for young girls going to prom or women who are trying to gain confidence on job searches following homelessness or leaving a domestic abuse situation, or dealing with the effects of chemotherapy or mastectomies. Dress is powerful, it can build us up or hold us back. For those at a socioeconomic or health disadvantage, having the right clothing and accessories can make a huge difference in mood and motivation.

In *Identities Through Fashion* edited by Ana Marta González and Laura Bovone, the authors explain that identity is not constructed through fashion alone, but rather contributes to the formation of identity. Identity cannot be broken down to the purely

visual but we live in a visual world so clothing is often the first indicators of our identity and personality, as well as at times an indicator of our mood or emotional state on any given day. Bovone (in *Identities*) identifies two different types of identity: personal and social. Personal identity is related to those things that make an individual unique, while social identity is concerned with the things that make an individual similar to others in their social group (71). In examining fashion icons, it is useful to explore them through these two identities. There is the personal identity that is rarely seen, and usually only in tabloid photos, and there is the social identity displayed through the clothing choices made for official events.

Kaiser, in *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, explains the need for approaching fashion and identities in fashion from a “both/and” perspective, stating, “fashion is not a thing or an essence. Rather it is a social process of negotiation and navigation through murky and yet-hopeful waters of what is to come. Fashion involves *becoming* collectively with others” (emphasis in original 1). Fashion is not simply a dress or a handbag, it is not just one collection of creations that is paraded down a runway during any of the various fashion weeks that happen around the world. Fashion is a process that involves a number of agents from designers and magazine editors to marketing and sales people to the individual consumer and the social groups they are influenced by, whether that influence is to dress similarly or in rejection of that influence. The consumer—or anti-consumer who crafts their clothing identity from second hand or re/upcycled finds—is in a constant negotiation and navigation process balancing between their personal and social identities. Kaiser, like González and Bovone, is arguing for an approach to fashion that sees fashion as one aspect (of many) of identity construction. Kaiser goes on to state that to, “be a

subject of the world is also to be an agent of creativity, control, or change, but it also means experiencing regulation” (30). This type of approach is especially important in an analysis of fashion icons and public figures. Indeed, women like the stateswomen I analyze in the following chapters are attempting to use clothing as a creative expression of their personalities, as a way of maintaining some amount of control over the public image, and to potentially affect change within some aspect of the countries they represent (or to symbolize change that they hope for), but they do this all while being regulated by the expectations and values of the roles they perform.

Guy and Banim, in “Personal Collections: Women’s Clothing Use and Identity,” explore the clothing choices women make and how those choices influence a women’s identity. Through the interviews they conduct with 15 women of various backgrounds, ages, and professions⁶, Guy and Banim identify three “views of self” that women have as they dress each day: “The woman I want to be,” “The woman I fear I could be,” “The woman I am most of the time” (316). Their analysis helps to understand the daily dressing process from a psychological perspective. They argue that the perceptions the women had about their relationship with clothing, demonstrates that, “they are very aware of ambivalence and that this is the key to understanding their agency as they resolve tensions and make decisions about their clothes. The themes of fluid images, skilled work and power and control are indicative of women’s struggles to construct personally acceptable images through their clothes” (325). The daily dressing process is a

⁶ They interviewed 15 women who all claimed an interest in clothes. 13 were full time employed, two were full time students. Seven lived alone, eight lived with a partner or spouse. Six were parents with a mix of dependent and non-dependent children. The majority were white and heterosexual but two were Asian and two were lesbians. They were all between 21 and 54 years old and there was a relatively even distribution between the ages. For more, see Guy and Banim 315.

deeply emotional, psychological, and imaginative process, that then becomes embodied by the wearer. Guy and Banim conclude, “Whilst women may imagine owning clothes the key is that they imagine themselves wearing them and the ways they would look in the clothes. Understanding both fashion and clothing cannot be separated from the ways in which they are embodied by the wearers” (326). The three views of self that Guy and Banim discover in their study reveals just how imaginative and emotional the process of dressing can be as women negotiate between these selves as they decide what to wear and which self that choice might reveal.

Guy and Banim collaborate with Eileen Green in the edited collection *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes*. The essays in the book expand on the work started by Guy and Banim in “Personal Collections” and explores what they call the “wardrobe moment,” where women stand in front of their wardrobe to figure out what they will wear, and to a certain extent, who they will be on any given day. As they explain, “There seem to be tensions around assembling an outfit which on the one hand allow us to exercise creativity and self-expression and on the other raise anxiety and dissatisfaction. If we think about the questions we ask ourselves, it is clear that those tensions come from a variety of sources” (2). The main focus of the book is on everyday women, not celebrities, but the arguments put forward in this book could be extended to public figures whose anxiety over an outfit going “wrong” are magnified by the knowledge that any perceived misstep will be captured on film and circulated around the world in a matter of seconds.

In *The Masque of Femininity*, through an interdisciplinary approach that combines social theory, psychology, cultural history, literature, semiotics, religion, feminist theory,

and psychoanalysis, Tseëlon, explores fashion and dress through an analysis of what she identifies as the five paradoxes of femininity: modesty, visibility, duplicity, beauty, and death. Each of these paradoxes are evident in an analysis of the public reception of the selected icons for this analysis. Discussing the ways that the study of clothing is approached by cultural studies and psychology, Tseëlon explains that the “departure point” for her work is, “the notion that a culture designation is instrumental in shaping a personal one. There is a dialectical dialogue between cultural categories and the people who embody them; the act of representation modifies the nature of the represented object” (3). Her analysis of the five paradoxes that she explores are useful to an analysis of the women I examine. Where Guy and Banim discover in their research three selves that women negotiate between during their daily dressing process, Tseëlon is analyzing five social identities that are placed on women by the larger social public. In a patriarchal society, women are viewed through one or more of these five paradoxes. She is modest, or seductive, but if she is seductive she is punished. She is constructed as an artifice, the sum of her aesthetic parts, but then criticized for lacking depth or authenticity. She is either invisible or visible but condemned for being a spectacle. She struggles against the beauty myth, which expects much of women and gives very little in return, until finally she is faced with her own mortality. Each chapter of her book focuses on a different paradox and shows how women are fighting against competing representations of femininity, these paradoxes will help to explore how cultural ideas of modesty, visibility, duplicity, beauty, and aging (death) affect the representation of public women and the construction of their social identities.

Dress has the ability to construct our social identities, clothing also has the ability to give us power and persuasive abilities in dealing with how we are perceived by others. This is an especially useful tool for those in public positions. With social identity, agency in dress provides further insight into the importance of fashion and style choices.

Agency in Dress

As Davis (and other fashion theorists) explains, society is constantly engaged in the interpretation and expression of our social identities, actively creating them rather than passively accepting an identity that is ascribed to us; however, at the same time there are “collective currents” that affect “our sense of self at different times during our lives and at different historical moments” (17). Each of the women that are examined in this project actively create their identities. I go into this in greater detail in each case study, but as surviving correspondence and interviews with designers and fashion insiders who have worked with each of the women in this analysis indicates, each of these women have taken a very proactive approach to their working wardrobes and have been strategic in their choices of what they wear for various events and public appearances. While they may not have much choice in how they are presented, they do have agency in what they will be wearing in that presentation (be it a public appearance or an official portrait). While there are certain rules and expectations that must be adhered to in official dressing, for the most part, all of my research has shown that these women maintain final say in what they will wear.

Perhaps this is the one advantage to the common misconception that clothing isn't that important. Or perhaps it's a concession to the woman in exchange for the amount of control over her life she gives up in taking on her official role. In extreme cases of

subverting the expectations, Diana's Stambolian "Revenge Dress" for example, there might be backlash by the official establishment, but as in the case of Diana, these transgressions usually come as a sartorial representation of the breakdown between the individual and the establishment. Jacqueline's subversion of her First Lady identity wasn't reflected in her wardrobe until after she left the White House and retreated into private life. Michelle and Catherine are still performing their roles—albeit as a former First Lady for Michelle—so their clothing choices continue to uphold the expectations and obligations of the roles they perform.

What we wear sends messages and signals out to the people around us. And different social groups understand the messages being sent by what we wear, even if it is representative of an entirely different social group due to market contexts related to capitalism. Brummett explains that the market is, "a mechanism for spreading sign systems and their meanings internationally. For that reason, a rhetorical system that makes use of the market is relatively international and stands a good chance of being understood more widely than do other rhetorical styles. Such a system is the rhetoric of style." (126). Unlike verbal languages, which can only be understood by those who speak that particular language, visual languages—like signs and symbols—can be understood without knowing the verbal translation of what those symbols represent. Anyone who's travelled through an international airport has seen that even if they don't speak the language of the country they are in, they can find the restrooms, shopping areas, restaurants, customs check, baggage claim, or where to get a taxi, because of the universally accepted and understood symbols that indicate each of these facilities. Style, and more specifically dress, is such a visual language. Western style, and western

fashion, is a rhetorical system with an international reach and no clear language barrier⁷. Brummett provides examples of American hipsters in restyled Mao jackets and Moscow teens wearing sports jerseys from overseas, and explains that, “all these people are speaking the language of a rhetoric of style that the market makes certain that people around the world understand. To be sure, local cultural differences bend these meanings but not so much that a core of shared meanings does not remain” (126). While some styles may be more easily understood internationally than others, overall, within the broad context of the fashion system and fashion consumer culture, the styles of different groups and sub-groups are understandable and do cross international borders and language barriers. In the context of public figures like First Ladies and royalty, their choice of fashionable dress or casual/relaxed clothing in off duty moments, all share cultural messages that cross borders and boundaries.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, many scholars have addressed the way that fashion and clothing can communicate and convey messages about the wearer to the public that sees the garment (Barnard; Barthes; Davis; Craik; Crane; Entwistle; Solomon; Warwick and Cavallaro). Barthes takes a direct approach, examining specific discourse practices of fashion magazines and the way they write about clothing. Others, like Barnard and Davis approach communication from a more abstract perspective. Davis explains clothing does communicate but not in the same way as writing or speech, it

⁷ I am specifying western style, over style in general, because some regional or religious garments in the middle and far east do not have the same international understanding. This is beginning to change, slowly, as some of the barriers are being crossed. For example, the number of hijab women on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube who are breaking down the barriers of ignorance and sharing what the hijab means to them religiously and culturally. But we are still some ways off from there being a generally accepted knowledge of the actual meaning and significance of the hijab outside of these online communities.

communicates our social identity as it, “is framed by cultural values bearing on gender, sexuality, social status, age, etc.” (191). Barnard explains that fashion is part of a complex system that has the ability to communicate messages and that has an impact on culture, society, and identity. He also argues that the meaning of clothing is both internally and externally produced, there is no single source of meaning in fashion. This relates to Evans and Thornton who, in their article, “Fashion, Representation, Femininity,” argue, “fashion has always existed as a challenge to meaning where meaning is understood to involve notions of coherence, a demonstrable consistence” (48). Michael Solomon, in the introduction to his edited collection, *The Psychology of Fashion*, also brings up the subject of communication and meaning, though he puts it in terms of encryption and transmission, stating, “Fashion is nothing more and nothing less than the systematic encryption, transmission, and interpretation of social meaning. A fashion item itself is only a vehicle that transports cultural information to its destinations—the consumer” (xi). Though each scholar approaches the subject slightly differently, the general consensus is that fashion does communicate messages about the wearer and about society.

Scholarship on affect also helps to understand the ways that dress gives the wearer agency. Gregg and Siegsworth provide a useful definition of affect, they state:

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.” (emphasis in original 1)

Put more simply, I define affect as subconscious forces which influence or impact conscious knowing or previously established ideas. Affect and affective qualities have

been discussed in relation to material culture in general (Berger; Kwint et. al.; Woodward) as well as the specific affective qualities of glamour as it relates to clothing and glamorous people (Gregg & Seigsworth; Postrel). Postrel in particular, in her book *The Power of Glamour; Longing and the Art of Visual Persuasion*, adds a lot to an analysis of fashion icons and their clothing and how they are received by the public. Throughout her book she argues that glamour is “powerfully persuasive” (7) and gives us pleasure. She states, “Although people often equate them, glamour is not the same as beauty, stylishness, luxury, celebrity, or sex appeal. It is not limited to fashion, nor is it intrinsically feminine...Glamour is, rather, a form of nonverbal rhetoric, which moves and persuades not through words but through images, concepts, and totems” (6). Postrel further explains that glamour is also subjective and has many qualities that can mean different things to different people. She states, “A ‘glamorous’ person, setting, or style will not produce glamour unless that object resonates with the audience’s aspirations, and unless the audience is willing to entertain the illusion. Conversely, one audience may find glamorous something another audience deems ordinary or even repulsive” (13). This discord helps to show how each of the selected women is perceived differently and is seen to be glamorous in different ways than the other.

Democrats during the Kennedy campaign, found Jacqueline to be glamorous and representative of a youth and freshness they longed for in the White House, Republicans viewed her clothing as superficial and a frivolous expense. Fast forward to the Obama campaign, many in the public and the fashion world felt Michelle brought a style and glamour back to the White House that had been missing since the Kennedy years. While others, reflecting implicit or explicit racist views felt that Michelle lacked even an ounce

of glamour or class and was a degradation to the memory of Jacqueline. Diana was universally seen as glamorous, particularly nearer the end of her marriage and following her divorce when she began making more independent choices that diverged from the expectations of her role as Princess of Wales, but while many in the public praise Catherine's style as elegant and glamorous, some fashion critics and designers claim her style is boring and too safe. Postrel's work illustrates how these women can be viewed—and their style interpreted—differently by different audiences.

In *Clothing as Material Culture*, Daniel Miller discusses the difficulties of approaching clothing from a semiotic perspective as it distances clothing from its material nature and reduces clothing to being “handmaidens to the study of society, or culture or identity” (2). Instead, he claims that through a material culture approach to clothing, “we are prepared now to see clothes themselves as having agency, as part of what constitutes and forms lives, cosmologies, reasons, causes and effects” (2). The rest of the essays in this collection continue to break away from traditional approaches to clothing and dress that are seen among fashion theory scholars and help me to analyze and discuss the ways that clothing actually functions in the lives of the women I analyze and the relationship that exists between a woman, her clothing, and the way that the public receives her outfits for any given situation or event. However, the works consulted in the field of material culture typically shy away from fully discussing celebrity culture or fashion icons.

Summary

All combined, these three themes bring together a range of scholarship that demonstrates the complex and nuanced ways that fashion interacts with, and impacts, our

lives. It is important to have an understanding about the ways that dress functions as an object, rather than as a purely ideological construct, in order to understand the ways that dress helps construct identity and gives agency to the wearer. Over the next four chapters I explore four case studies of Jacqueline, Diana, Michelle, and Catherine, and the way their clothing constructs their social identity and gives them agency.

CHAPTER 3

JACQUELINE LEE BOUVIER KENNEDY ONASSIS

Introduction

Jacqueline Lee Bouvier was born on July 28th, 1929, in Southampton New York, into wealth and privilege. The eldest of two, she had a younger sister Caroline Lee Bouvier. While having a mostly happy childhood, her parent's divorce in 1940 had a lasting impact, always a quiet child, she became even more so. Divorce was not common in the 1940s, compared to today, so she had no peers from divorced families. Additionally, Jacqueline was raised Catholic, so the divorce would have been even more painful and confusing. She was educated at a finishing school, Miss Porter's School, in Connecticut as was the custom for upper class American families of the time. She made her society debut in 1947, wearing a traditional white silk gown with tulle skirt, a \$59 purchase from a New York department store (Craughwell-Varda 16). In the fall of the same year she became a student at Vassar where she studied literature.

Her junior year was spent in Paris at the Sorbonne and her senior year at George Washington University. During her senior year she also won *Vogue* magazine's Prix de Paris writing contest, where the grand prize was a one year position as a staff writer in New York and Paris, unfortunately her parents influenced her to turn down the position (Craughwell-Varda 19). It was not much later that she took a job as an "inquiring photographer" for the *Washington Times-Herald*, where she eventually met then Senator Kennedy ("Jacqueline"). The couple married in 1953 and if her debutante ball gown had established her as "Debutante of the Year" of the 1947-1948 season ("Jacqueline"), her

wedding gown by African American society dressmaker Ann Lowe, marked the beginning of the creation of her fashion icon status.

The elaborate bridal gown with its portrait neckline and off-the-shoulder cap sleeves, featured dozens of ruffles and tucks on the full skirt. With her marriage into the wealthy Kennedy family, Jacqueline began to focus on her wardrobe, often spending extreme amounts of money on her clothing, in an effort to dress the part of a serious politician's wife (Craughwell-Varda 21). The couple soon had two children, Caroline in 1957 and John Jr. in 1960 and were on their way to the White House. The campaign and election became a bit of a sartorial challenge for Jacqueline. People loved her glamorous look, but Jacqueline had to take care not to allow her clothing to become a polarizing topic. It was around this time that Jacqueline employed a strategic tactic of having high end and couture pieces from European houses, replicated and made by American dressmakers⁸. Her red campaign coat was a copy of a Givenchy design and purchased at Ohrbach's department store (Craughwell-Varda 22). The infamous pink suit worn the day of Kennedy's assassination was a copy of a Chanel suit made by New York City boutique Chez Ninon. This practice allowed Jacqueline to build a wardrobe with an international appeal that was largely American made, and is an early 20th century example of fashion diplomacy.

However, there would be a designer that Jacqueline would become close to and rely on greatly throughout her White House years. Oleg Cassini, a descendent of Russian aristocracy, hugely popular with Hollywood celebrities and a friend of the Kennedy

⁸ This was a fairly common practice for many women at the time. Line by line copies of designs by Dior, Chanel, Givenchy, and many others, were purchased by dress shops and department stores and recreated by dressmakers in the US, usually at a lower cost.

family, was chosen by Jacqueline to be her personal designer. Together they crafted a fresh look for Jacqueline that would set the tone of her time as an American First Lady.

Establishing a New Stateswoman Style

Throughout the campaign and her tenure as First Lady of the United States, Jacqueline redefined and established the modern stateswoman style. There were certain values and expectations that she was expected to follow as well as formal codes of dress to which she found she must adhere. Speaking of the Paris couture houses, with their history of working with European royalty, Anspach explains, “The houses know precisely which textures, lines, and colors in dress are appropriate for every hour of the day, every season of the year, and each type of occasion” (Anspach 328). These are rules that stateswomen learn and adapt to the codes and needs of their specific roles. For women in stateswomen roles, with the many and varied duties they must perform, there are three different ways that clothing can be used for fashion: to express personality, to define status, and to play a role (Anspach 25). Jacqueline throughout the campaign and during her years as First Lady, used fashion in all of these ways and in the process set a new tone for stateswoman style. Anspach states, “Clothing, being peripheral and easily seen, permits fast assessment of a situation and the element of fashion in clothes adds a status dimension of its own” (Anspach 28). Judging by the correspondence between Jacqueline and her designer Oleg Cassini and Vogue editor Diana Vreeland, as well as with her sister Lee, Jacqueline was well aware of the way fashion could be used to signal her status as the wife of a presidential candidate, and then as a First Lady, and had to carefully choose her designs to represent that status. This required the careful blend of casual staples for her off duty moments and impeccably designed fashionable pieces,

ideally designed and made in America, for official state business. “Dress and fashion are significant symbols used to identify roles as well as status” (Anspach 29) and Jacqueline, with her love of history and symbolism jumped at every opportunity to bring these elements into her wardrobe.

Respect for history and tradition would become one of the stylistic homologies that Jacqueline would lean on in her establishing the modern stateswoman style. As I show in the analysis that follows, there are several other homologies that form the complete style. Brummett explains that, “To explore the stylistic homologies of a rhetoric of style is in a sense to explore the repertoire of signification for a given enactment of that rhetoric. A given style is a repertoire of signs as well as the homological glue that binds them together as a style” (132). It is through reading and triangulating the probable meanings created through the “homological cohesion or incongruity of the style(s) displayed” (Brummett 132) that the complete picture of Jacqueline’s stateswoman style is revealed.

Although Jacqueline was already known for her style, going back to her days as a debutant, the Cassini suit and Halston hat worn to the Inauguration ceremony and the Frankau gown worn to the Inaugural Balls marked the beginning of Jacqueline’s official stateswomen style and her role as an American fashion icon. As First Lady of the United States, she became a representative of the country and her clothing choices were scrutinized around the world. The international press featured her regularly, and when the Kennedy’s visited Paris, the press and French public went wild for Jacqueline and her clothing (see Craughwell-Varda and Bowles). As correspondence between Jacqueline and Cassini shows (see Bowles) there had been much discussion between the two, as well as

between Jacqueline and Diana Vreeland, leading up to the Inauguration about what she would wear. The garment had to be suitable to the role while still matching the personal style that Jacqueline was known for. Brummett explains that style is not only a system of signs, but also, “a kind of performance” (3). For Jacqueline, style was her main tool for performing the role of First Lady while still maintaining a certain amount of independence and agency over her portrayal and cultural representation. The outfit chosen for the inauguration ceremony would be the first of many “performances” as First Lady. The balance between personal identity and official, public identity would be struck through the selection of the right outfit. This balancing act had been witnessed throughout the campaign as Jacqueline navigated the tricky terrain of sartorial politics.

The crafting of her stateswoman style was not as simple as just wearing whatever she wanted. Jacqueline needed to create a style, a new stateswoman style that would be similar to, but different from, her predecessors. She needed a style that would strike the balance between tradition, showing respect to the values and expectations of her role as First Lady, while also incorporating her personal preference for fresh, youthful designs and her international tastes. This ticklish balance was a challenge Jacqueline was well aware of. In a letter to *Vogue* editor Diana Vreeland during the campaign seeking advice, Jacqueline made it very clear that she was very aware of the need to begin buying more American clothes, complaining, “There have been several newspaper stores and lots of letters—about me wearing Paris clothes and Mrs. Nixon running up hers on the sewing machine. . . . Just remember I like terribly simple, covered up clothes” and was quite definitive in stating, “I hate prints” (qtd. in Bowles 28). In a letter to Cassini she states, “I will never become stuffy. . . . but there is a dignity to the office that suddenly hits me” (qtd.

in Bowles 18). Jacqueline also instructed Cassini on the creation of her spring wardrobe for her first year as First Lady, “Even though these are for official life, please don’t make them dressy, as I’m sure I can continue to dress the way I like—simple and young clothes, as long as they are covered up for the occasion” (qtd. in Bowles 30). Jacqueline wore clothing like armor going into battle, particularly for public appearances where there would be press and the public vying for pictures. She wanted clothes that were youthful, but not like many of the skin-exposing styles of the time. Though she would occasionally wear sleeveless dresses, this was usually only for evening looks where it would be more appropriate for bare arms, or in very warm climates, and she almost always had a jacket, cardigan, or shawl to accessories. In these letters, and others, it is evident that Jacqueline, well aware of the expectations in dress she must meet as First Lady, but was also adamant to maintain as much of her personal style as possible. Rather than merely follow the examples of the First Ladies who came before her, Jacqueline would redefine for the modern era what stateswoman style would look like.

While she would eventually become known for her eponymous “Jackie” style, that style could be broken down in different components that made up the total look. Brummett discusses the connection between style and systems. He explains, “When we think about style as a system, it is also important to think about how style works as a system to bind together its component elements” (Brummett 35). What ultimately made Jacqueline’s style so well-known and so instantly recognizable that even today her image is compared to stateswomen of the 21st century, is her reliance on stylistic homologies (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). In his discussion of homologies, Brummett explains, “Because people respond powerfully to form and pattern, the coherence suggested by a

style's components can be powerfully motivating" (36). This led Jackie's style to be powerfully motivating and able to transcend the boundaries of borders and time. In order to fully understand the impact of Jacqueline's wardrobe and understand the way she redefined stateswoman style, it is necessary to examine in detail two of her most iconic outfits, her suit worn to the Inauguration ceremony and the gown worn that evening to the Inaugural Balls. These two outfits solidified, in less than 24 hours, what her stateswoman style during her tenure as First Lady of the United States would look like.

A New Era Begins: The Inauguration Suit

I breakdown Jacqueline's ensemble for the inauguration ceremony into the hat, coat, dress, fur muff, and shoes. Each of these items join together to create the ensemble that was "read" by the public, nationally and internationally, who viewed the pictures from that day. Starting with the hat, it's an item that appears simple on the surface, but was ultimately a calculated choice by Jacqueline. She notoriously disliked hats, but had been forced to adopt them during the campaign. Bowles explains, "At the time there were situations in which a bare head might have been construed as disrespectful, and the powerful milliners' union, under the leadership of Alex Rose...lobbied to persuade her to support the industry" (179). Though she was taking a proactive approach in the creation of her style, certain elements were chosen for her purely from the demands of the role she was hoping to occupy. Brummett discusses this duality of style, stating, "Style is not so much something that one does as it is the grounds in terms of which something is done; or to put it bluntly, style performs us as much as we perform any given style. We may choose styles or styles may choose us" (Brummett 3). As correspondence from the time indicates, Jacqueline was well aware of the power her clothing could give her over the

construction of her public identity, but she would have to create that while also accepting the values and expectations placed upon her by the role she would fulfill. This acceptance would require her to make compromises between the cultural values and expectations and her personal sense of style. Some of her choices would be driven by personal motivations but other choices would be made by the demands of her position. Butler argues that style is, “a complicated terrain, and not one that we unilaterally choose or control with the purposes we consciously intend... Certainly one can practice styles, but the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice. Moreover, neither grammar nor style are politically neutral” (xix). Pillbox hats are now closely associated with cultural memories of Jacqueline, but at the time they were not a widely popular hat style among the general American public. By choosing a pillbox style to go over her famous bouffant hairstyle, Jacqueline was choosing a style that would be unique to her and not blend in with every other hat worn that day.

Her preference for bouffant hairstyles also led to her preference for pillbox hats. Comparatively small next to other popular styles of the day and also typically free from embellishments, they can blend in easily with the outfit. They can also fit over a large hairstyle. Though not hugely popular in America, that year French designers such as Givenchy and Balenciaga had featured similar hats but were shown worn straight and at the top of the head; however, Jacqueline’s hair dresser Kenneth Battelle noted that she, “wanted her face to show but she also didn’t want her hair to get flattened out,” (qtd. in Bowles 63). As a result, she decided to wear her hats (on every occasion, not just Inauguration Day) tipped to the back of her head. Combining a growing European hat trend, and her love of European fashion in general, with her own personal preference for

hat wear, had an immediate effect. “Ironically, this attempt to downplay the hat’s scale and significance made instant fashion history and created an iconic element of style” (Bowles 63). Jacqueline, throughout her White House years, wore her hats off her face because covering the face created mystery and she knew her role demanded visibility⁹. In the hat, dress, and coat combination, Jacqueline and Cassini crafted an ensemble that was instantly fresh and modern, and was in keeping with the tone the new Kennedy administration was working towards and setting a new standard for how the First Lady would dress.

As mentioned above, Cassini designed both a dress and coat (see Figure 1), however, in the official pictures from the ceremony, only the coat is ever seen, the dress is never visible except for very occasionally when Jacqueline is walking and the coat kicks out a bit to reveal the lower hem of the dress underneath in a matching fabric. Pictures from the luncheon following the ceremony show the bodice of the dress, revealing a simple rounded high neck with the sable collar that had been visible on the coat, and half-length sleeves, coming just to the top of Jacqueline’s elbows. She also wore a brooch on her left shoulder in the shape of a berry sprig made from diamonds and rubies. The brooch was designed by Jean Schlumberger, master jeweler for Tiffany’s and was a gift from President Kennedy to celebrate the birth of their son, John F. Kennedy Jr. (Bowles 62). However, the majority of pictures that circulated that day are of the coat, not of the dress, so in this case, the coat—as it was seen during the ceremony—became the most important item.

⁹ Her eponymous “Jackie O” style sunglasses, large and dominating the face, became a staple in her wardrobe after her tenure as First Lady and when she was in a phase of her life where she wanted to be less visible after she no longer played a role that demanded visibility.



Figure 1 - Jacqueline in her Cassini suit with coat and muff

Wearing carefully and beautifully designed coats is not an unusual thing for stateswomen. Since stateswomen often participate in outdoor events and appearances, coats must be well designed and aesthetically pleasing rather than purely functional. Designing the coat in a light color was a strategic choice by Jacqueline and Cassini. As Bowles explains, “The surprising and atypical choice of a neutral greige [grey beige] color was a brilliant one, for in this pale, unemphatic, and unostentatious hue, Mrs.

Kennedy stood out from all the other women swathed in deep, jewel-colored coats and dark furs, such as those worn by Mamie Eisenhower, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and Lady Bird Johnson” (60). Indeed, the pictures from the ceremony show Jacqueline stands out among the women in their dark coats and furs and the men in their dark overcoats. The coat is simple, but far from boring still makes a statement. The sable collar and muff, add luxury to the outfit and keeps it from looking plain, as do the two large buttons and two large side pockets on the coat. The overall effect is very youthful and refreshing and reflected the style and taste Jacqueline had become known for, without being overly ostentatious or extravagant—something the press had frequently accused her of during the campaign.

While the coat and dress have a youthful and effortless look to them, there is still a hint of structure and a lot of coverage of the body. Throughout most of the day, the only skin visible are Jacqueline’s legs. The high neck of the coat, and the modest neckline of the dress, cover most, if not all, of her upper body, as do the three-quarter length sleeves. This is a choice made by Jacqueline on most of her clothing throughout the White House years, especially in her suits and day wear. Postrel explains that Jacqueline, “wore suits as armor, designed to hide her body” (34). Bowles states that Jacqueline used her state clothing “as a shield and style as an effective weapon” (18). Part of the desire to be covered was likely connected to a desire to appear modest and appropriately attired for the role she was serving in, but part of it was also related to the need to feel protected as Jacqueline suffered with the sudden loss of anonymity and the vast exposure she had on the international stage.

As for the shoes, Jacqueline is photographed wearing two different pairs that day. In some photos of her and President Kennedy walking down a sidewalk Jacqueline is seen wearing fur lined snow boots, but in other photos of the day, she is wearing dark colored pumps. Having two pairs, for indoors and outdoors, was a wise choice given the bitterly cold temperatures and the snow on the ground. Her unadorned pumps were a staple in her wardrobe; she described them as “elegant and timeless,” (qtd. in Bowles 60) and were a nice compliment to the lighter colors of the coat and gloves while also balancing the darker color of the sable collar and muff. Bowles explains that the muff, “provided a discreet reference to the fur coats that many of the prominent women guests chose to wear on this glacial day” and states that it had been the inspiration of Diana Vreeland (60). Vreeland claims, “It was only for practical reasons—I thought she was going to freeze to death...But I think muffs are so romantic because they have to do with *history*” (emphasis in original, qtd. in Bowles 60). Being an admirer of both style and history, Jacqueline would have no doubt been in agreement with Vreeland. The long gloves also provided warmth, as well as elegance, and came up high enough to go under the three-quarter length sleeves of the coat, but being ivory, kept with the lighter color of the main body of the coat and helped to further balance between the light and dark colors in the ensemble.

Overall, this ensemble provides an excellent example of the stylistic homologies of stateswomen. Jacqueline’s ensemble for the inauguration ceremony featured a design in a solid color in clean, classic lines. Though it is recognizable as belonging to the 1960s it wouldn’t have been that out of place fifty years prior (perhaps just cut a bit longer) nor would it be criticized were it to be featured on the runways today (and in fact, similar

styles are currently being shown). The hemline of the dress and coat, as well as the neckline of the over blouse of the dress are cut to appropriate lengths, the hems are not too short as to cause a scandal in the press nor is the neckline too deep for a daytime affair. There are minimal extraneous details to the ensemble, the coat only has two large buttons, enough to make a statement but not so much to look odd, and the only visible accessories are the long white gloves and the Tiffany brooch—which is only visible when the coat is removed—if she is wearing earrings, they are hidden behind her hair. It fits the rules and protocol of the position she then occupied: it was traditional, stylish but unfussy, and not led by trends that would be out by the next season, hinted at luxury while also appearing financially modest, and most importantly it was American designed and made. As the fuss in the press and from the opposition in the campaign had shown, though the public loved Jacqueline's style, they also expected her to represent American values and businesses, as well as to represent the people she would be serving. Most of Jacqueline's ensembles during her White House years feature the same characteristics (there are only a few exceptions). But if the inauguration suit established the baseline, her gown for the Inaugural Ball solidified it.

Belle of the Ball: The Inaugural Ball Gown

There were galas on two evenings. The Inaugural Gala, held on the 19th of January 1961, and the Inaugural Balls, the following evening. For the 1961 Inaugural Balls on the 20th, Jacqueline deviated temporarily from wearing Cassini. She wore a white satin Cassini gown to the inauguration eve gala, but had already—prior to her appointment of Cassini as her personal designer—chosen to design a gown with Diana Vreeland, fashion editor at *Vogue* magazine, and Ethel Frankau, the head designer of the

fashion salon at Bergdorf Goodman to wear to the balls on the night of the inauguration itself. The Frankau gown (see Figure 2) was designed based on suggestions by Jacqueline (Graddy & Pastan 39) and consisted of an off-white sleeveless chiffon top that bloused over a strapless bodice, encrusted in beads and silver embroidery in a floral design, visible through the chiffon overlay. The lower portion of the dress was an off-white satin narrow skirt that fell to floor length. Along with the gown, Jacqueline wore a matching cape, long white gloves, drop earrings, and carried a small clutch bag out of a similar off-white chiffon fabric. Where the Cassini suit from earlier in the day had demonstrated Jacqueline's fresh beauty and youth, the Frankau gown showcased her ability to pull off glamour that could rival any Hollywood celebrity or European royal. Wilson states, "Fashion acts as a vehicle for fantasy" (246) and Jacqueline's ball gown clearly demonstrates that sentiment. With this dress, as much as with the inauguration suit, Jacqueline's effortless look belied the calculated control she exerted over the creation of her look for the balls.

As with her work with Cassini, Jacqueline took a very proactive role in the designing of the gown and cape. She collected pictures of designer gowns with elements she liked to craft an idea that was a composite of those designs. Sending the pictures to Vreeland, Jacqueline wrote, "Here is a picture [of a dress by Victor Steibel] I tore out of some English magazine of what I think I would like the Inaugural Ball dress to be... I imagine it is silver and white with a faille skirt. I also imagine the lines are the same as the enclosed Dior picture with the dark beaded top. I would like to modify the long bodice—so it doesn't look like a Dior of this season—something more timeless" (qtd. in

Bowles 66). Jacqueline knew what she wanted, and had the language to back up her choices and decisions.



Figure 2 - Jacqueline's Frankau gown

In her correspondence with Cassini and Vreeland it is clear that she is discussing these decisions with them as an equal and not simply deferring to their dictations. She had a clear understanding of how to take current styles and modify them to meet her tastes and needs and create something that was reminiscent of the great European couturiers yet still uniquely her own. Jacqueline had long favored classic and timeless designs, and with the look she was crafting for her role as First Lady, timeless yet

traditional would be a theme she would carry throughout her White House years. Brummett argues that, “identity is socially and symbolically constructed—that it is thus unstable and complex—and that identity is thus grounded in style” (83). Jacqueline was carefully constructing her identity as First Lady, by balancing references to the past with her personal preferences in the present. There are elements of the gown that are reminiscent of previous First Lady gowns spanning the past several decades. The elaborate beading on the bodice, fits with the formality of the event and in some ways, references formal evening wear of the late 19th and early 20th century, similar to previous inauguration gowns, but Jacqueline downplays it slightly with the chiffon overlay, which has a diffusive effect under the lighting at the venue for the Inaugural Ball. This gives it a more modern and youthful appearance. Brummett states, “Identity would seem to relate to the individual; it is the sum (and perhaps a shifting and unstable sum) of who we are, with whom we affiliate, and against whom we align” (83). Youth and freshness would be central themes not only to Jacqueline’s modern stateswoman style (mimicked by the stateswomen that follow her), but are also subtle themes that ran through the Kennedy campaign and election. They were a youthful couple, still at the beginning of their marriage and family. The couple were bringing a sense of youth and vitality into the White House and part of Jacqueline’s strategy with her designers was to carry those themes into her wardrobe.

The cape (see Figure 3), interestingly, was a last-minute addition as Jacqueline had originally thought of wearing a short fur coat (Bowles 66), the decision to go for the cape was a regal and visually stunning one. Bowles explains, “As Bergdorfs did not have enough of the dress fabric to make the cape, nor anything that would be an exact match,

the matte faille was hailed in chiffon georgette. The result diffused the solidity of the cape's form and create a shimmeringly ethereal effect" (66). Although the comparisons between the Kennedy's and Camelot would come after Kennedy's assassination, the image of Jacqueline in the ivory ball gown with the structured cape laid the groundwork for the construction of the Kennedy's as American royalty.



Figure 3 - Jacqueline in her cape.

Though I'm only discussing the suit and the gown worn to the Inaugural Balls, all of the outfits worn to the inaugural celebrations were in various shades of ivory/beige. This was intentional on Jacqueline's part. This color was a careful and symbolic choice. Jacqueline considered white to be a "ceremonial color" and chose shades of it for both her inaugural gown and the gala the night before (Bowles 59). Bowles says of the Cassini

gown worn to the gala on the eve of the inauguration, “the majestic dress, so suggestive of a bride or a debutante, was a masterstroke of image making, establishing Jacqueline Kennedy in the national consciousness as a woman of commanding personal style, with an unerring sense of history and her place in it” (59). This statement could be applied to all three inauguration outfits (two of which have been discussed in this analysis) and the attention to detail Jacqueline paid to each of them.

By the end of the inauguration celebrations, Jacqueline was well on her way in the construction of her identity as First Lady, this construction having been aided by her clothing choices. Brummett explains, “identity is not created in isolation but emerges from the social, material, and symbolic contexts in which we live and from which we spring” (83-84). Through the combination of the clothing and accessories Jacqueline chose to wear, from the start of the campaign through her tenure as First Lady, her image as American fashion icon and her construction of the modern stateswoman style was created and would have a lasting influence on the stateswomen that would follow along the path she laid out.

Conclusion

Returning to Anspach’s concept of national style, Jacqueline carefully developed a national stateswoman style that transcended time and borders. Anspach states, “where a national style is well developed and has some desired symbolic reference in other countries, it may be adopted as international fashion” (244). Anspach is referring specific items and styles of garments that become representations of the nations, but I argue that national style can be applied to stateswomen and the styles they embrace as representatives of their countries. Jacqueline became known for her fresh, youthful style

that was at once traditional and contemporary, ultimately making it timeless. In addition to relying on timeless, classic styles, Jacqueline also utilized solid colors with minimal and strategic use of prints. Additionally, she turned to designs that were more covered up in the day and appropriately revealing for evening wear, usually playing with fabric to make a design look more revealing than it was. She utilized American designers but maintained an internationally influenced style and took advantage of foreign travel for state visits to wear foreign designers and thus clothing became a diplomatic tool. Her clothing was feminine and non-threatening in her position as wife and First Lady, but was never overly “girly” or childish. By creating a revised set of stylistic homologies for stateswomen Jacqueline redefined and established the modern stateswoman style. As will be discussed in the following chapters, this style has been replicated in part or in whole by the stateswomen that have followed Jacqueline.

Jacqueline’s time in the White House was cut short, when President Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963. For the next twenty-two months Jacqueline was in mourning, away from the press and public. During this time, the myth and idyllic representations of Camelot began to take form in the press and the public mind. In April 1964, *Women’s Wear Daily*, said, “There is no doubt that Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy probably did more to uplift taste levels in the United States than any women in the history of our country. And there is no doubt that the entire fashion industry received a major shot in the arm as a result of the constant stream of reports on what Mrs. Kennedy was wearing and wear she wore it” (qtd. in Craughwell-Varda 32). Though there have been numerous American women over the centuries whose style and taste was well-regarded by the public, none have had quite the lasting legacy or enduring appeal of Jacqueline,

even more than fifty years after her tenure as First Lady, she is still influencing American and international style, particularly for current stateswomen such as Michelle or Catherine as I discuss later.

When Jacqueline came out of mourning, there was a noticeable shift in her style. Now a private citizen, and no longer bound by the rules and protocol of the White House, Jacqueline was free to experiment with her style and wear what she wanted. Still only in her mid-30s, Jacqueline continued to embrace a youthful look. But she no longer limited herself primarily to American designers. She began to more frequently wear couture by Valentino and Yves Saint Laurent, and just as during her White House years, she was still a massive style influence on the public. 1966 saw her embracing the miniskirt—to which the *New York Times* proclaimed, “The future of the miniskirt is assured” (qtd. in Craughwell-Varda 32)—as well as be inducted into the International Best-Dressed List Hall of Fame “to honor the profound worldwide impact of her three years in the White House (Craughwell-Varda 32). But by the late 1960s Jacqueline was tiring of the pressure of the Kennedy legacy and looking to move on. She stunned the world with her marriage to Aristotle Onassis. She told a friend, “Nobody could understand why I married Ari. But I just couldn’t live anymore as the Kennedy widow. It was a release, freedom from the oppressive obsession the world has with me” (qtd. in Craughwell-Varda 32). In addition to living more privately and reinventing her image, Jacqueline now had an even larger amount of money at her disposal. She spent extravagantly, purchasing from all the great French couturiers. She also was much less concerned about getting multiple uses out of her clothing and being more financially restrained, as she had done during her White House years. Craughwell-Varda explains, “For years Jackie had been selling her clothes

at Encore, a consignment shop in Manhattan, in an effort to add to her monthly clothing allowance. She continued to do this after marrying Onassis, consigning coat, suits, gowns, handbags, blouses, and slacks, often wearing or using them only once” (32). No longer needing to appear financially conservative, Jacqueline was free to spend and go through clothing as much or as quickly as she wanted. Her style in these later years transitioned from her stateswoman style to more of a celebrity/jet set style.

Her style would change yet again after the death of Onassis. During these later years Jacqueline went to work as an editor, first at Viking Press and then at Doubleday. Her style during this time was more casual but with an elegant and businesslike twist. Jacqueline remained one of the most photographed public woman, even in her later years in life, and she was mourned heavily in the media and by the public after her death in 1994. Her legacy had long been established. She had redefined style in the White House, opening a space for each First Lady who followed to craft her own public image. Both in and out of the White House, Jacqueline was the living embodiment of true style. As Craughwell-Varda explains, “For Jackie, style was more than clothes; it was a way of living, a way of imbuing one’s life with taste and beauty. Her clothes never overwhelmed her; they were chosen to set off her best features, while remaining comfortable and stylish” (35). Jacqueline had an innate sense of style that transcended fashionable dress of the era and passing trends. As much as many have tried, no one can ever completely replicate Jacqueline’s style. The wise stateswoman will look to Jacqueline as an influence and inspiration, but will never attempt to copy or imitate outright. Any attempt to do so would fall flat instantly, because a huge part of what made Jaqueline’s style so successful and so enormously popular was that it seemed to come from some part of her inner being.

Her style was so perfectly connected to her personality and her individuality. I argue this sense of uniqueness and individuality is what was most appealing, the clothing was just an outward representation of it. The public was drawn to her style because that was the outward representation of what they were really attracted to and wanting to emulate: her confidence, her elegance, her ability to be completely and totally herself. Rather than try to be like previous First Ladies, Jacqueline took the role and shaped it to fit herself. And that is her true enduring legacy.

In the following chapter I turn to an analysis of Diana, Princess of Wales and show how she starts similar to Jacqueline, embracing the values and expectations of the public role she performed, before eventually subverting those expectations completely.

CHAPTER 4

DIANA FRANCES SPENCER, THE PRINCESS OF WALES

Introduction

On July 1st, 1961 at Park House on the Queen's Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, England, the Honorable Diana Frances Spencer, was born into a life of titles and privilege. Though not royal, her family descends from Henry VII and are part of the British aristocracy. Diana had two older sisters, and a younger brother, the family had also suffered the loss of a son in 1960, who only lived ten hours past his birth (Hoey 2). Diana's parents divorced when she was six and the children remained with their father. When Diana was fourteen, in 1975, her life changed dramatically. Her father, Viscount Althorp succeeded his father, becoming the 8th Earl Spencer, and Diana becoming Lady Diana. The family moved from Park House in Norfolk to their stately home Althorp in Northamptonshire.

The Earl remarried the following year and Diana would eventually go to finishing school in Switzerland where she studied domestic science along with typing and correspondence (Hoey 2). After completing finishing school, Diana returned from Switzerland and settled in London, sharing an apartment with some friends and working as a nanny and then as a helper at a kindergarten. She soon became known as part of a group of young people of the upper class referred to as "Sloane Rangers,"¹⁰ known for their fashionable lifestyles. Despite her connection to this fashionable group, and becoming one of the most famous Sloane Rangers, during this time Diana only owned a

¹⁰ The term Sloane Ranger is named partly for the London area, Sloane Square in Chelsea, known for the wealth of the residents and frequent visitors.

few items of clothing, mixing and sharing items with her flat mates and didn't spend much time or attention on clothing.

On February 24th, 1981, the palace announced the engagement of Lady Diana Spencer to HRH Charles, The Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne. At the official engagement photo call and press conference, Diana wore a blue suit—to match her sapphire engagement ring—that was bought off the rack at Harrods (Wackerl 109). In July of 1981¹¹ the wedding of Diana and Charles took place at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, televised to an audience of millions and the streets of London lined with people hoping to catch a glimpse of the couple on their way to the cathedral. The couple honeymooned in Gibraltar and then at the Royal Family's Scottish estate Balmoral. In the years following the wedding, Diana and Charles had two sons, Prince William on June 21st, 1982—a respectable eleven months after the wedding—and Prince Henry (known better as Prince Harry) two years later on September 15th, 1984. However, the marriage was plagued from the beginning with a number of struggles. Prince Charles still had a connection to his ex-girlfriend, Camilla Parker Bowles, and Diana's dreams of a fairytale romance were quickly dashed. She also struggled to cope with the mounting pressures of being a senior member of the Royal Family and suffered from depression and bulimia during the early years of her marriage.

As she recovered from her eating disorder, she threw herself into motherhood and the charities that she was patron of, but by the 1990s the couple had reached a breaking point with their separation becoming a major scandal in the tabloids. The couple

¹¹ Once royal engagements are announced it is not uncommon for the wedding to follow only 5-6 months later.

eventually divorced and it was finalized on August 28th, 1996. During the final year of her life, Diana briefly pursued a relationship with heart surgeon, Hasnat Khan, and then with Dodi Fayed, son of friend and businessman, and former Harrods owner, Mohammed Al-Fayed. Diana engaged in a whirlwind romance in the summer of 1997 with Dodi, vacationing on Mohammed Al-Fayed's yacht in the Mediterranean and attracting a great deal of tabloid attention. The relationship came to an abrupt and tragic end when the car Diana, Dodi, their driver (Henri Paul) and bodyguard (Trevor Rees-Jones) rode in crashed in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris after being pursued by paparazzi. Only Rees-Jones survived the crash.

Diana's funeral was held on September 6th, 1997 at Westminster Abbey and she was eventually returned to the family estate Althorp and buried on an island in a small lake within the grounds of Althorp Park. Diana has been remembered for many things, but her sense of style is one of her lasting legacies among the public. The way Diana used clothing as a tool of personal expression in the beginning of her marriage and then later, as a form of nonverbal resistance and rebellion against the royal family during the breakdown of her marriage, demonstrate the many and varied ways that Diana used clothing to embrace, challenge, and at times, subvert the official expectations and values placed upon her due to her position as the Princess of Wales and future Queen of England.

Evolution of a Princess

Diana's personal style would undergo a massive evolution throughout her short 17 years in the public eye. From her engagement to Prince Charles at age 19 until her untimely death at age 36, Diana's personal style evolved from that of a teenage in love

with romantic details like frills and bows to that of a mature woman who knew not only what looked best on her but also—and in some ways more importantly—what photographed well, outfits with simple and sophisticated silhouettes, solid colors, and flattering but not overly revealing. Diana’s clothing choices throughout her public life are of great interest as they show very clearly the transition that many women make in the evolution of their personal style, but it is Diana’s clothing during her years as part of the British royal family that is of interest in this chapter.

Being part of the Royal Family, meant being part of a social group with strict codes of conduct that extends to the way members dress. Barnard explains, “Fashion and clothing are therefore not only ways in which social groups are constituted as social groups and by means of which they communicate their identity. It is another aspect of ideology that in ensures the functioning of a system of dominant and subservient positions within a social order” (42). As a result, clothing takes on an ideological function that helps keep members of the social group in line. Barnard continues, “Fashion and clothing are ideological, then, in that they are also part of the process in which social groups establish, sustain, and reproduce positions of power, relations of dominance and subservience” (42). Dress was one more way that the palace tried to exert power and control over members of the Royal Family and maintain a consistent public image among all over its extended members.

There aren’t publicly shared rules about royal dress code and dress etiquette. Most articles on the topic are in popular magazines and consult self-proclaimed royal experts and insiders. So, some of the rules in these articles might be accurate but others there are examples of times when those rules have been broken by many members of the royal

family. However, it can be reasonably assumed that royal protocol when it comes to dress is set by the Queen's example, and the Queen would be guided by etiquette of dress from both the time period she was raised in, the mid-20th century, as well as the time periods that preceded her, that her family and role models were raised in, namely the Edwardian and Victorian eras. Most of this information would have been privately taught and passed down, with the majority of the royal court, and royal family, following the Queen's example—and the example set by previous monarchs.

Analysis of Diana's clothing choices during the period of time between her engagement in February 1981 through her divorce in August 1996 makes very clear that Diana was aware of the power her clothing had on her public perception and construction of her public identity,¹² Diana was conscious of the fact that clothing could communicate meaning, and she used this to her advantage whenever she could. Lynn, speaking of the designers and photographer who worked with Diana, says, "Everyone who worked with her recalls that she knew what she liked and was very active in her own image-making" (qtd. in Cartner-Moreley). Those who worked with her over the years reveal that Diana possessed a keen awareness of the power of her clothing and what it communicated. Designer Jasper Conran remembers, "When the princess discussed her wardrobe with me, it was always also about the question: What am I communicating if I wear this? It became a real language of fashion" (qtd. in Wackerl 106). Similar to Jacqueline, Diana worked closely with a handful of designers and took a proactive approach in crafting a public

¹² This awareness is illustrated in the clothing selected for the exhibition mounted by Kensington Palace in February 2017 featuring clothing worn by Diana throughout her public life. The exhibition features 25 dresses worn by Diana and tracks her evolution as a princess, trendsetter, and humanitarian. Curator Eleri Lynn explains, "Diana understood the language of clothes, and though she never liked to be known as a clothes horse, she knew how to use fashion to help her do the job at hand. She crafted her image carefully, and learned how to use it to engage and inspire people all over the world" (Lynn 1).

style that fit her identity. In her discussions with designers she was continually aware that each outfit would communicate something about her to the public and she was very careful about making the right choice for the right event.

Though she was in the public eye for less than twenty years, Diana had a global impact and was well known and beloved internationally. Lynn, discussing Diana's ability to communicate with clothing, observes "It is very surprising how little footage there exists of the Princess actually speaking. We all have a sense of what we think she was like, and yet so much of it comes from still photographs, and a large part of that [idea] is communicated through the different clothes that she wore" (qtd. in Tashjian). Chancey, who has examined Diana's photographic image, and how it has been altered after her death, explains, "It is photographs...that have allowed the public to feel as if they [we] know her intimately, and that same body of photographs that contributed to the enormous outpouring of grief across the globe upon her death" (163). But as Lynn points out, it is not just the photos alone, as Chancey claims, that led to this feeling of intimate connection to a woman most of the world had never met in person. It was the clothing seen in the photographs, the clothing that crafted an image of a woman people felt they could relate to.

Guy and Banim's "Personal Collections: Woman's Clothing Use and Identity" explored how women relate to, connect to, and use their personal wardrobes in the construction of their personal identity. While the study focused on ordinary women, not celebrities, their findings and arguments can still be applied to stateswomen. Clothing use and clothing behaviors are a universally shared experience. The expense paid towards one's wardrobe can differ widely but the emotional connection is a common experience.

Guy and Banim explain that, “the women found they could use their clothing to initiate or reflect changes in their self-perception or their bodies. They could recognise when they had (literally or psychologically) grown out of certain clothes which no longer sustain particular images” (323). Diana uses clothing in this way throughout her public life, changing her clothing as her self-perception changed based on how her image was being portrayed in the media.

Diana evolved from shy, hesitant teenager to a more confident, mature woman, something many of us experience—but Diana did this on the international stage, with every move, every success or misstep, scrutinized the next day in the press. While Diana is largely remembered for her fashion successes, there were the occasional mistakes. The black, ruffled strapless gown with a sweetheart neckline, designed by the Emmanuel’s and worn to her first official formal event after the engagement announcement drew negative attention from the palace due to its black color—at the time, royals did not typically wear black because of its connection to mourning¹³—and its inappropriately low-cut neckline. The color could have been forgiven, it was an evening event and times had changed enough to allow for a black gown, but the daring neckline was a drastic departure from the shy, innocent kindergarten teacher image that had been going around the press. Known in the press as “Shy Di,” the dress suddenly switched the headlines to “Sexy Di,” a change not appreciated by the palace, or some in the public. Denney explains, “Lady Diana did not repeat the experience of the décolletage black dress. This action indicates her own willingness to conform to what her audience—and the Queen—

¹³ This rule has since been relaxed as Catherine has worn black gowns on a few occasions since joining the royal family. But during Diana’s time, black would have been saved for events of mourning and remembrance, such as state funerals or Remembrance Day services.

wanted: a more demure, innocent representation. Nonetheless these observers [the press] hint at the uncomfortable dichotomy of having a young, sexually inexperienced woman appearing simultaneously as a sexualized being” (47). Young Diana understood that her primary objective as Princess of Wales was to be visible but not to call too much attention to herself. This is something she would struggle with as she matured, and as she realized the social power she held and what could be accomplished with it.

Shortly after her marriage the frills and ruffles she had favored as a teenager gave way to more sleek and refined silhouettes, primarily because she quickly realized they photographed better. Lynn states, “You really see the frills and ruffles of her early romantic style disappearing quite quickly, as she realized that didn’t work very well for press photographs. It made her look cluttered. So around the 80s you see the silhouette sleek down, and all the decoration becomes surface embellishment” (qtd. in Tashjian). There would also be massive shifts in her style as her marriage started to break down and again following the divorce. By the late 1980s, Diana began to make changes in her life. She recovered from her eating disorder and took a different approach to fashion as a way of controlling her image with the press. Wackerl describes one public appearance at a pop concert where Diana, “wore tight black leather trousers by Jasper Conran—a superb photo op for the paparazzi but far too risqué for a future queen. The more she distanced herself from the royal family and its fashion, the closer she became to the common people: her clothes made her the ‘princess within reach’” (114). Guy and Banim further found in their study that women’s, “engagement with clothes and image creation/continuity was understood by the women as an enduring personal characteristic. What is evident here is a reciprocal exchange between the women and their clothes, and

in this process, a range of potential images may be considered as clothes are selected” (323). As someone in the public eye, Diana was even more aware of range of potential images she had to consider as she decided what to wear each day. A single day could include a number of meetings, personal appearances, and official functions, often with little or no time in between to change, so a single outfit had to be able to cover a wide range of functions. If regular women, as Guy and Banim found, spend time each day asking themselves “who will I be today?” as they got dressed, then stateswomen, with even more eyes on them judging their choices, must spend even more time and attention considering these questions. Ultimately, Guy and Banim state, “It is not just clothes that travel through the wardrobe over time but a woman’s identity travels with her as she continues to refine her clothes set” (Guy and Banim 323). This is why, when collections of clothing of women like Diana are gathered together for public display, whether it be for an auction or museum exhibition,¹⁴ the resulting collection of clothing gives great insight into the identity and personality of Diana.

Diana quickly mastered the rules of public stateswoman style, and just as quickly learned how to bend those rules. Wackerl states, “The princess loved to transform herself, like a chameleon: at her wedding, she lived the Cinderella dream dressed as a giant meringue, and years later, rebelled against the cold in Buckingham Place with Dallas

¹⁴ At the time of this writing there have been a number of such collections. Beginning with the Christies auction in 1997, only weeks before her death, when Diana decided to sell 79 of her gowns from the years of her marriage, including some of her most iconic and memorable pieces, and continuing with exhibitions at Kensington Palace. First the inclusion of a several of Diana’s garments in “Fashion Rules,” in 2013, an exhibition that featured a number of garments worn by Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret, and Princess Diana. This was re-done in 2016 with “Fashion Rules: Restyled,” which included more garments from each of the women. And most recently, in 2017, in “Diana: Her Fashion Story,” at Kensington, which traces Diana’s fashion evolution. There is also a permanent exhibition celebrating Diana’s life, featuring her wedding gown and a number of other garments worn by Diana at her family home, Althorp, that is open to visitors during the estates open days each year.

dresses of gold lamé” (106). She was well aware of how her clothing would impact her physical presence, even something as simple as fabric created an opportunity to convey empathy. Lynn explains, “If she was visiting hospitals for the blind, she would often wear velvet so that she would feel sort of warm and tactile” (qtd. in Tashjian). Additionally, Diana understood how her use of clothing and accessories could shape her public image. Lynn describes, “One of her most famous gestures, which was to remove her gloves very conspicuously to hold hands with patients—you know she’s using clothing and fashion in order to really hammer home that message” (qtd. in Tashjian). This would be in stark contrast to photos of the Queen visiting patients, who always kept a polite distance, and always kept her white gloves on.

She also would wear bright colors and prints, frequently wearing a floral Belville Sassoon dress to hospital visits, a dress Diana dubbed her “caring dress,” to hospital visits, often accessorizing with chunky jewelry that children to touch and play with (Elwick-Bates). The original sketch for the dress included a hat, but Diana rejected the hat, saying, “You can’t cuddle a child in a hat” (Elwick-Bates). These types of subtle subversion of the rules dictated by her position were the same things that caused the world to fall in love with her and lead to her becoming known as the “People’s Princess.” In the beginning, these minor episodes of rule bending were largely overlooked by the palace because they kept Diana, and the royal family, in a positive light.

As a public figure, Diana’s clothing had a performative quality. Tseëlon argues that, “women are always on a stage, always observed, always visible: they lack a back region [back stage] both literally and symbolically” (74). It was important for Diana’s clothing to perform on two levels: to demonstrate her personality and to meet the

expectations and needs of the event she was attending. Denney explains the affect that clothing and dress codes have on identity, stating, “Dress codes and conformity to them have the ability to transform one’s identity and to send different messages on varying occasions. Dress and its symbolism can also change the course of one’s life and hence become a cynosure in one’s autobiography” (139). As evident in the various exhibitions of Diana’s clothing have shown, dress becomes a critical, and central, example of Diana’s autobiography and enduring legacy. While images of Diana can be reselected after her death, and rearranged to tell a more sanitized version of her life, the garments themselves still tell the original story.¹⁵

The rest of this chapter explores and analyzes Diana’s wedding gown worn in 1991 and her black cocktail dress designed by Christina Stambolian worn in 1994, and the ways these two gowns demonstrate Diana’s initial acceptance and embracing of the identity of royal princess and dutiful wife and then her ultimate subversion of this identity and act of separation from her husband, and the Royal Family in general, and establishing her own identity outside of her original role. These two outfits stand in stark contrast to one another and demonstrate the change that Diana went through in her style evolution. The tensions within her marriage and within the royal family, would lead Diana to not only break the royal fashion rules, but burn the rulebook to ashes, and go from a virginal bride in her white Emanuel gown in 1981, to a scorned wife seizing back her power in the daring black Stambolian cocktail dress in 1994.

The Making of a Fairytale: The Emmanuel Wedding Gown

¹⁵ Jill R. Chancey argues that in the months after Diana’s death, photo books and commemorative magazines began to rewrite Diana’s narrative, removing the more scandalous and unpleasant stories the tabloids had been spreading, only days before her death, and replacing them with an idealized portrayal of Diana as a mother and humanitarian.

On July 29th, 1981 Lady Diana Spencer arrived at St. Paul's Cathedral in central London in a golden, glass encased horse drawn carriage, with her diamond tiara sparkling through the windows of the carriage. Her face was framed by white taffeta and tulle and Diana looked every bit a fairytale princess from a storybook. As she stepped down from the carriage, assisted by her father Earl Spencer and her bridesmaids—and after months of stalking by the press outside the studio of designers David and Elizabeth Emanuel to find any information possible about the dress—the world finally saw the dress in all its glory (see Figure 4). Made from ivory taffeta, the bodice of the dress featured a modest neckline fanned with ruffles of taffeta, by this point ruffles had become a staple in her wardrobe, and lace that came down in a shallow V with a small bow at the center. The lower part of the bodice had a lace panel, hand embroidered with thousands of tiny sequins and pearls.

The gown also featured a voluminous, full skirt made from yards of taffeta, including a 25-foot train edged with lace. The Emanuel's had ordered two forty-one meter (approximately 134 feet) lengths of the silk taffeta from Stephen Walters & Sons Limited, a small company in Sudbury, Suffolk that was founded in the eighteenth century and is one of the oldest silk weavers in Britain. David Walters, the chairman of the company said, "As the eighth generation of my family to run the business, it is a source of immense pride to have personally been part of such a historic event, just as it had been to previous generations of the family who had woven silk for the coronation gown of Queen Elizabeth II and the wedding dress of Princess Anne" (qtd. in Emanuel and

Emanuel 85). Only one of the forty-one meter lengths were used¹⁶ for the dress and the train, with the majority of that delicate fabric going into the dress and the bodice.



Figure 4 - Diana arrives at St. Paul's Cathedral

While Diana had input on the dress with designers David and Elizabeth Emanuel, at only 19 years old, she was still very young with an idealized vision of marriage, exaggerated by her love of romance novels. She particularly loved the novels by prolific British author, Barbara Cartland, who happened to be Diana's step-grandmother. When Diana first met with the Emanuel's to begin discussing the design of the gown, she tried on a number of samples to get a feel for different silhouettes, ultimately choosing a style that had frills at the shoulder, a tiny waist, and a voluminous skirt. From there the Emanuel's drew up over fifty different designs based on that silhouette. They also

¹⁶ The silk was woven at the rate of one meter per hour and each bolt of forty-one meters took almost a full working week to complete. The second bolt was woven in case of accidents and was eventually used to create a replica of the dress for Madame Trussards.

researched previous royal brides to find inspiration for the design details of Diana's gown. They explain, "One thing that immediately struck us was the use of antique lace in Queen Victoria's wedding dress, something that was already part of the Emanuel signature. We wanted to include as much lace as we could on the dress, and yet ensure a style that would suit a contemporary young royal bride" (54). The volume of the skirt was another aspect that received specific attention by the two young designers. They explain that they wanted to create a very full skirt, "to give a scale to the dress that would reflect the fact that the wedding was to be at St. Paul's, one of the largest cathedrals in the world... We discovered the longest train in history had been twenty-three feet. So we were very excited to think that we might create an even longer one, and the vision of what Diana would look like in that dress, climbing those steps. Even from the earliest stages of the design, the Emanuel's and Diana were thinking about what the dress would look like on the public stage" (54). The dress needed to be grounded in a sense of history and tradition yet reflect the youth and vitality of the bride, while also have the romantic details the designers were known for that had led Diana to choose them to design the gown.

While the skirt and train of the dress received a great deal of attention, particular for the way the taffeta had crumpled significantly during the carriage ride to the cathedral, another memorable feature of the gown are the giant puffed sleeves. Puffed at the shoulders and cinched in at the elbow before flaring out over the forearm in layers of taffeta and lace, the sleeves alone represent the ultimate in 80s extravagances. Diana also wore a long tulle veil, topped with the Spencer family tiara. As for jewelry, she wore only diamond drop earrings and her sapphire engagement ring. The overall effect is a

combination of storybook romance, 80s decadences, and dutiful, virgin bride marrying into one of the most famous royal families in the world. Love it or hate it, the cultural significance of the dress is difficult to deny.

Denney explains, “Diana had to emit codes of royal authority *and* display exemplary feminine behavior. At the same time, she had to show herself as an ideal mother and wife *and* demonstrate a commitment to duty. In other words, she represented a privileged class that symbolized authority and power, yet was also a living model of femininity: attractive but not sexually treating, a pleasure to behold but not a scene-stealer, docile, compliant, and deferential” (19, emphasis in original). Behind the scenes there was protocol and rules, and a tradition of royal brides that had to be followed. Diana had to be demure and modest, yet also a visual representation of the success of the British monarchy. She had to be healthy and full of life, the kind of woman who would eventually give birth to two potential heirs. Her clothing had to exemplify all of this.

Diana was stepping into a role, where individuality and independence were not accepted; conformity and subservience were the norm. Royal fashion expert, Colin McDowell explains, “The Princess cannot wear very young iconoclastic clothes; neither can she be too much a ‘fashion freak’ without running the risk of alienating her public. She is circumscribed by orthodox views of how the future Queen Consort should be dressed. It is not possible for her to be a fashion leader, nor indeed a fashionable figure in the way that a girl of her age... would perhaps wish to be... The Princess must never look anything but demure; she must never look threatening; above all, she must always look like a lady: Modern fashions for the young is about none of these things” (qtd. in Denney 114). Viewed in this context, we can see the gown accomplishes all these things. The

gown portrays Diana's modesty and chastity, well as her duty and loyalty to her new family.

The gown is extravagant and royal, but with the frills and ruffles, it is also feminine—perhaps excessively so. It is entirely non-threatening and subservient, the dutiful daughter and soon to be wife, being led towards her future as wife of the future king and eventual mother of the next future monarch. The dress does not assert an individual identity or sex appeal, because essentially, Diana's role, was simply to marry, have children, and ensure the continuation of the British monarchy. Ultimately, the design of the dress would necessarily need to defer to the expectations and cultural values of the monarchy and the authority it represented.

Modesty and chastity would become two of the most important themes visually represented by the gown. The gown shows some skin, namely around the neck and the lower part of her arms, but there is so much fabric and ruffles around the neckline and sleeves that it is reminiscent of royal brides going back through the centuries, covered with fabric and face obscured by a veil. The effect is that of a package wrapped up in the finest paper and bows with sparkling jewels. The dress is not pure white, but rather a very soft ivory. However, in the low lighting and candlelight of the Cathedral would have still looked like traditional bridal white. In the field of costume design, pure white is typically avoided on stage (unless needed for specific effect) because pure white doesn't read correctly to the audience under theatrical lighting¹⁷. The choice of ivory by the Emanuel's

¹⁷ It leads to the appearance of over exposure and reflects too much of the light, which can be distracting to the audience.

was a wise choice for the theatricality of the royal wedding. It still reads as “chaste” but also fits in perfectly to the surroundings of the venue.

Historically, the mystery of women is connected to unconscious fears over the sexual power she might possess. Tsëelon explains, “To counter those fears, and to offer the woman a path to salvation, female sexuality had to be controlled. Thus, a discourse of modesty and chastity in dress came to encode female sexuality. As a symbol of seduction and sin, the woman was redeemed in chastity and pardoned in modesty. She came to be a site of cultural messages and displaced fantasies” (12). Diana’s gown, with all its frills, lace, beading, and those puffed sleeves, referenced British history, British craftsmanship, and ancient values of modesty and chastity that were expected of every royal bride. As the third daughter of an English Earl, the main expectation for Diana’s life from her family would have been for her to marry well. Her gown is the symbol of Diana’s personal worth to her new husband.

Women throughout history have had to contend with these expectations, but in the middle and upper-class circles, where success meant marrying well, modesty and chastity were two of the most important currencies young women possessed. And it wasn’t just about a state of being modest or chaste, it was also largely about appearances. As Tsëelon states, “But in Christian theology virginity is not merely abstinence of sexual behavior. It is chastity of body and mind in every form: desire, thought, speech, and look. And it extends beyond the subject’s own mind. In the requirement *to appear pure* as well as *to be pure*, modesty is located not only in the woman, but also in the way she is perceived by others” (12). Thus, virginity has to be performed. A wedding is one of the places where this performance can take place. The way women dress becomes a large part of the

way she negotiates those perceptions and manages her appearance. Diana's gown is a key aspect of that performance. In the gown's color, silhouette, volume of fabric and decorative detail, Diana is, in a sense, a gift, wrapped in the most beautiful package, for her new husband.

Wilson, speaking of 19th century virgins on the marriage market, makes points ultimately significant for Diana when he discusses the many qualities of their clothing. For these young women, their dress had to, "subtly convey family status as well as personal desirability: seductiveness, albeit virginal' along with apparent submissiveness and a willingness to obey, the ability to run a household should be suggested; the ethereal qualities of the Angel in the House must somehow be combined with the suggestion of sufficient health and strength to bear a large family" (Wilson 123). Though Wilson is speaking of 19th century women, her analysis still fits for 20th century aristocratic women, who were largely still expected to marry within, or above, their social class. Wilson continues, "And in a society, or at least in a class, in which women outnumbered men, the importance for a woman of distinguishing herself from her rivals could not be overestimated" (123). Diana's adoption of Sloane Ranger style, and socializing within the set of people who that style had been named for, in her early days put her in a relatively small social circle, her family heritage and connection to the Royal Family also set her closer to the family she would eventually marry into. Her youthful, fresh look (not entirely dissimilar to Jacqueline Kennedy at the same age) and her carefree attitude made her a very attractive prospect.

She had the appearance of everything the Royal Family could have wanted in a bride for the heir to the throne: youth, vitality, modesty, chastity, submissiveness, and a

natural and unthreatening beauty. Lovely to look at and easy to keep in line. The dress would need to reflect that. The full skirt, takes up space: it is wide and makes it difficult to get close to Diana, this physical barrier and distance represents her modesty and chastity and the idea of being “untouched.” This is accentuated by the long train, which also hints at the concept of submissiveness and being unthreatening. Diana cannot walk down the aisle without a group of young girls holding her train, she is controlled in the movements she is able to make. The puffed sleeves and all the decorative details are beautiful but also overly decorative and hyper feminine. This adds to the sense of youth and vitality, as well as beauty, every bit an example of a young bride who will surely provide heirs to secure the line of succession. The gown was the very image of a storybook, fairytale princess.

The train was held up by several young bridesmaids as Diana was led down the aisle by her father, on her way to her new life. Her identity was about to be transferred from Lady Spencer, daughter of the Earl of Spencer to Diana, Princess of Wales, wife of the Prince of Wales and future Queen Consort. Lost in this, and lost in the gown, was a sense of who Diana truly was as an individual, very little about the gown gives any hint or indication of the woman the public would get to know over the next several years. At most, the gown represents the woman Diana was up to the moment of her wedding, but not the woman she would become after. Denney explains, “The fairy tale depends on the creation of a feminine form of behavior that all young women within a patriarchal structure must learn: passivity, docility, and submissiveness” (32), and Diana, especially in that gown on that day, resembled all of these qualities. The gown was so big, so over the top, so highly decorated, and so filled with British heritage and craftsmanship, the

resulting look was the very image of passivity and docility. It was about something so much bigger and so much more than just the young woman wearing it. But fast forward several years, through two children and an increasingly rocky marriage, and Diana would step out in front of the cameras once more, but this time in a dress that is in every way the antithesis of her now iconic wedding gown. Age, experience, and growing independence had allowed Diana to develop a more individualized personal style that was no longer dependent on meeting the expectations of the royal family or her role within it.

Getting “Revenge”: The Stambolian Cocktail Dress

The “War of the Wales” had been going on for years by June of 1994. Details of the continuous breakdown of their marriage and details of Charles’ affair with Parker Bowles were daily features of not only the British and international tabloids but of the mainstream press as well. On the evening of June 29th, 1994, Charles was scheduled to give a televised interview with Jonathan Dimbleby, in which he admitted to having an affair with Parker Bowles during his marriage to Diana. The interview was designed as an effort to regain some public understanding and sympathy, as in Charles’ own words, had only restarted the relationship with Parker Bowles after his marriage to Diana had “irretrievably broken down.” Diana however, was not going to take this admission lying down and so she arrived at the Serpentine Gallery’s summer party, hosted by *Vanity Fair*, that same night wearing a daring, and incredibly out of character, cocktail dress designed by Christina Stambolian (see Figure 5). The following day, rather than featuring Charles and his candid admission, the front pages of every newspaper and tabloid featured full page images of Diana in the short black dress, with the headlines declaring her “revenge.” The Stambolian dress was quickly nicknamed the “Revenge Dress” by the press and

fashion commentators and demonstrated just how far outside the bounds of expectations and royal dress codes Diana had stepped.



Figure 5 - Diana arrives at the Serpentine Gallery

Diane Crane argues that women's clothing behavior can be used as a form of nonverbal resistance. Discussing 19th century middle- and upper-class women, Crane explains, "Lacking other forms of power, they used nonverbal symbols as a means of self-expression. Fashionable clothing exemplified the doctrine of separate spheres that was supported by other social institutions. It suited the subordinate and passive social

roles women were expected to perform” (100). As I have argued in the previous chapters as well as in this one, part of the reason clothing is able to be used as such a powerful rhetorical tool is because of its perceived passiveness and frivolity by the general public. Clothing performs identity in a subtle way but has a powerful impact, as in the case of both the wedding gown and this cocktail dress. Similar to Wilson’s discussion of 19th century brides, Crane’s arguments about the lack of power applies to female members of the Royal Family in the 20th century. Diana, as well as female members of the Royal Family past and present, was expected to be seen and not heard. Fashion becomes a nonverbal way of making a statement. Crane continues, “Effectively denied anything but very limited participation in the public sphere, women were frequently identified according to their clothing” (Crane 100). Crane states, “Nonverbal culture is more susceptible to different interpretations than verbal culture. Those who do not wish to receive a message can refuse to perceive it” (126). The attractive prints, soft textures, and chunky costume jewelry that invited children to play with it that Diana frequently wore to hospital visits, were not perceived as being subversive, though they definitely were stepping away from standard clothing procedure for the Royal Family at the time. Ultimately Crane argues that, “marginal discourse about gender are not maintained entirely through verbal communication; nonverbal communication involving symbolic inversion [through clothing behavior] performs an important role, affecting people both conscious and unconsciously” (128). The black cocktail dress would, almost immediately, become such a symbolic inversion.

The story of the origin of the revenge dress is that Diana was shopping with her brother, the Earl of Spencer and they visited Christina Stambolian’s boutique in London.

Stambolian produced a few sketches, the black dress among them and Diana immediately took a liking to it, though she wasn't sure where she would wear such a daring dress. Even at the final fitting a few weeks later, Diana was still apprehensive about the dress and after making the final purchase it hung in her wardrobe for three years before Diana finally chose to wear it to the Serpentine Gallery that night (Rubenstein 130). The dress featured a tight, body conscious silhouette made from dozens of tiny tucks and folds of the fabric that started in a sweetheart neckline that fell into short, ruched sleeves that draped off the shoulders. The chiffon fabric draped and ruched over the hips, with the hem draping asymmetrically from a point mid-thigh down to just above the knee. From the hip of the shorter side of the dress a long cut of chiffon fabric floated out behind Diana adding to the drama of the dress. She accessorized the dress with sheer black stockings, simple black high heels, and a small black clutch bag. She also wore a bracelet, large pearl drop earrings, her famous multi-strand pearl choker with the large diamond and sapphire clasp, as well as her instantly recognizable sapphire engagement ring. She also wore bright red nail polish, something that was strictly not done when following royal dress code. Traditionally, members of the royal family, particularly the high-ranking members like the Queen and her direct heirs, dress conservatively and traditionally. For women, this means modest clothing in clean lines and classic styles, sheer hosiery (not colored hosiery or bare legs), simple hair styles, natural makeup, and natural nail color. By choosing a dress and a look like this, Diana was sending a clear signal to the Palace that she was done playing by their rules and was going to do what she wanted. Each of these things—the dress, the black stockings, the red nail polish—in

isolation would have been forgivable, but the combination of the whole look, and the timing of when it was worn, made a clear sartorial statement.

As Stambolian remembers, Diana, “chose not to play the scene like Odette [from Swan Lake], innocent in white. She was clearly angry. She played it like Odile, in black. She wore bright red nail enamel, which we had never seen her do before. She was saying, ‘Let’s be wicked tonight!’” (qtd. in Wackerl 106). By this point, Diana had a clear understanding of how the press worked and she knew what her estranged husband would be saying in the interview, and she knew how the press would spin his interview. The “scene” Stambolian is referencing are the pictures that would be in the press the following day. Diana would have known that pictures from the gala at the Serpentine would run alongside coverage of Charles’ interview, so the challenge would have been, how to dress for those pictures and what statement would that outfit make? The dress was the antithesis of Diana’s wedding gown and signified just how much Diana had broken from the Royal Family.

Comparing the two dresses reveals the two Diana’s at play in the press. The young Diana in ivory, almost buried under all that material with all the ruffles and crystals. The mature Diana, in black, her face and body the focus and on display. Where the wedding dress showed Diana’s youthfulness and naiveté, as well as a conformity and devotion to duty and family, the Stambolian dress displays her maturity and independence, a woman with her own mind and her own life. She was asserting her independence and agency from a family and institution she had felt betrayed by, and indicated a determination to write her own narrative. Barnard states, “Fashion and clothing, then, may be understood as weapons and defenses by different groups that go to

makeup up a social order, a social hierarchy, in achieving, challenging, or sustaining positions of dominance and supremacy” (41). And at the Serpentine Gallery that night, Diana used the Stambolian dress as a weapon, against Charles and the Royal Family, to take back power and independence in her public identity.

Tseëlon discusses the concept of consciousness in regard to women’s clothing choices, she explains that this refers to, “a particular kind of awareness: of being an object of the gaze of the Other” (55). The concept of the gaze, the act of seeing and being seen, is an important part of the study of dress. Tseëlon states, “The other need not be physically present. It can be evoked in preparation for an encounter, or it can be used metaphorically, as an imaginary Other... Women care about their appearance when there are important things at stake, when being judged, or when feeling unsure and anxious” (55). For Diana that night, the Other would have been both the press taking her picture, as well as Charles and Buckingham Palace. She was dressing in a way that sent a clear signal that she was now doing things her way and was no longer going to be bound by royal protocol. While it is impossible to know exactly what Diana was thinking that night as she chose her outfit, all the details added up to equal a clear consciousness and awareness of what each of the elements would symbolize and how they would potentially be perceived. The cut and silhouette of the dress, very daring and not quite meeting royal protocol, and the red nails especially, definitely against palace rules, signal a careful and calculated plan for how she would appear that night. Her clothing choices were a deliberate attempt to upstage Charles in the press the following morning.

While this study is looking at four stateswomen icons, it is important to remember that my arguments also apply to ordinary women and the importance of dress in their

daily lives. For Diana, this performance was happening on the international stage, but her choices are representative of choices made by ordinary women on a regular basis.

Tseëlon's research found a precarious connection between dress and the concept of self-worth among women, claiming, "The precariousness of the image explains why the relationship between dressing and confidence is of crucial importance. Tseëlon states, "In fact the effect is quite dramatic as it appears that regardless of age, experience and marital status—almost across the board (but more so for the younger women) dress has a profound effect on the woman's sense of self-worth and well-being. Clothes both confer a sense of self-worth and help creating it" (61). The Stambolian dress visually symbolizes Diana's desire to take back full control over her image. While she couldn't control the presence of photographers, she could control what she would wear and could attempt to lead others (the press, the Palace, the public) to *read* the outfit, and the statements implied by the outfit, in the way she wanted. She could also try to create a visual image in her outfit that could potentially be a more powerful statement than Charles' interview. While previous outfits had included subtle subversive signals, the Stambolian dress boldly and clearly marks a new era of Diana's style.

While she would never wear a dress quite like the Stambolian dress again, her new style post-divorce was significantly different from her style during her marriage. Freed from the confines of her official role within the royal family, Diana was now able to embrace her individual style and personal identity instead of continuing in her palace-dictated identity. Much like Jacqueline after her mourning period and during her marriage to Onassis, Diana was now able to make her own rules for her style. Though dubbed the "Revenge Dress" by the press, the dress signifies a shift in Diana's style, from

stateswoman following the rules and expectations, to individual public figure dressing for herself and making her own rules.

Conclusion

Diana ultimately became known for choosing clothing that suited her, and not what was simply the style of the moment or a fleeting trend. Lynn explains, “That’s what sort of takes somebody above daily fashion...and helps make them a fashion icon: they have that elegance that is *theirs* and doesn’t move with the changes of fashion” (qtd. in Tashjian, emphasis in original). Her style post-divorce included a range of designers, many based outside of Britain, like Versace, while still relying on tried and true British classics, like Catherine Walker. Catherine Walker was a longtime favorite designer of Diana’s, she wore Walker designs a number of times during her public life, both during and after her marriage, and she would ultimately be buried in an unknown design by the Walker label.

Similar to Jacqueline, Diana knew when to follow the rules as well as when and how to bend them to her preferences from time to time, though each did that in different ways. Jacqueline preferred to stay separate and private as much as possible from the public she served. Diana, however, seemed to want to do anything she could to appeal to the public and earn their approval. Clothing was a major element Diana would use in accomplishing this goal, whether it was wearing jewelry children could play with during visits to children’s hospitals or removing gloves to hold hands with an AIDS patient, during a time when such an act was taboo and terrifying to many, or simply making playful and interesting choices that would provide commentary and pretty pictures in the press the day after an event. Lynn states, “She did clearly have fun with fashion...and

experimented with her style. She was the first member of the royal family to be photographed wearing trousers to evening events. But she often teamed that with tuxedo jackets and bowties—that’s quite the bold, fun look that you don’t necessarily expect of a princess” (qtd. in Tashjian). Diana was significantly younger than Jacqueline when Diana married Charles and entered public life, and that youth is seen in some of her choices and experiments. By the time Jacqueline married then Senator Kennedy, she was ready to make her own choices—no longer wanting to deal with the interference from her family—and knew exactly what she wanted. Diana, however, was still a teenager, full of romantic sensibilities, and no clear sense of her personal style. She knew what she liked, but lacked the language to express what she wanted. Former Beauty Editor of *Vogue*, Felicity Clarke, says, “Diana always knew what she liked. I think she found it terribly exciting. Initially it wasn’t a world she was well acquainted with. Like any young girl, she was more of a t-shirt-and-jeans girl up to that point. I believe she was thrilled by the whole experience of designer fashions” (qtd. in Emanuel and Emanuel 64). The Emanuel’s themselves agree with Clarke saying, “Diana was very young at that time and she had no real idea about fashion. When we first met her, she was wearing a little cardigan and a pie-crust-frilled blouse—very Sloan Ranger, very Knightsbridge—and had a short hairstyle...Like most nineteen-year-olds, she had never experienced a couture environment, so it this was a totally new experience for her” (70). Though Diana didn’t have the language to articulate what she wanted, or take quite as proactive an approach to her style in the early years, as Jacqueline had, Diana did eventually learn her way in fashion and slowly began to make it work for her.

Jacqueline had been slightly more prepared for what it would mean to marry into a powerful family and what would be expected of her, being older and having several years of marriage experience prior to entering the White House worked in Jacqueline's favor. Diana, in contrast, went from teenage nanny/kindergarten teacher to high profile Princess of Wales in a matter of months, and was thrust into the spotlight overnight after the announcement of the engagement. Diana's journey from the wedding gown to the "Revenge Dress" demonstrates the struggle she faced in meeting similar expectations. Both women show a desire to impress the public, meet the expectations of the institutions they represented, and establish their own identities.

Jacqueline's life as an official public figure and stateswoman lasted only a few years before she was able to retreat into a more private life, but Diana lived as a public figure from age 19, at the start of her romance with Prince Charles, until her death at age 36. We were only just beginning to get a picture of what her individual public style, separate from her stateswoman style during her marriage, would be. Denney claims, "Royal women are known and 'read' by the symbols of their rules. For Diana, the rules were beginning to change, yet she never escaped... 'a reflected construction.' Diana tried to maintain some agency over such reflections, but in doing so she was still tied to a tradition of imaging the princess in terms of public duty, state protocol, class privilege, and, simultaneously, objectification and agency" (138). Diana was still tied to the traditional images of princesses, but in the short time after the intention to divorce was announced, Diana was beginning to make changes. We were beginning to see what the next phase of Diana's style would be. After her divorce, she had started wearing more international designers, Italian designer Gianni Versace was a frequent choice.

We will never know what Diana's style would evolve to had she lived a longer life, just as we'll never know what Jacqueline's stateswoman style would have been like had President Kennedy not been killed and if they'd stayed on for a second term and then into life as "former President and Mrs. Kennedy." Death would ultimately play an important role for each woman. But, the examples that both of these women set are evident in their predecessors filling their same roles today, as will be discussed in the next two chapters. Though Diana only lived and served publicly for a relatively short time, her influence is still felt today and her memory, though it's been adapted slightly since death, is still just as strong as it was immediately following her death.

Diana's style evolution, similar to Jacqueline's, provides examples of how she embraced, challenged, and ultimately subverted the expectations and rules in her role as Princess of Wales and member of the British royal family. In the following chapter, we will move back across the pond to the United States to see how Michelle follows the examples set by Jacqueline and Diana in her wardrobe choices as First Lady of the United States over the course of eight years in the White House.

CHAPTER 5

MICHELLE LaVAUGHN ROBINSON OBAMA

Introduction

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born on January 17th, 1964 in Chicago, Illinois. Her father was a pump worker at the City of Chicago Waterworks and her mother worked in the home raising Michelle and her siblings, and later worked as a secretary in the offices of Spiegel Catalogue until the 2008 presidential election (“First Lady Biography: Michelle Obama”). Her older brother, Craig Robinson was born two years prior to Michelle. Michelle was a gifted student throughout her primary and secondary education, and eventually earned a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Princeton University in 1985 and then a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1988 (“First Lady Biography: Michelle Obama”). After law school Michelle worked as an attorney at a Chicago based law firm and then as the assistant to the Mayor of Chicago.

Michelle first met Barack Obama when he came to work as a summer associate at the law firm she was working at. They continued to correspond and date long distance while he finished at Harvard Law (where he graduated in 1990) and they were engaged in 1991 (“First Lady Biography: Michelle Obama”). Unlike Jacqueline, Michelle’s wedding was a quiet family affair that reflected the multicultural backgrounds of the couple. Michelle wore a long-sleeved off-the-shoulder gown with an A-line skirt that featured lace appliqués. Though the designer/origin of the dress is unknown, the gown reflects many of the trends of 90s brides and was in keeping with the styles of a modern but traditional wedding gown. After her marriage, she continued to work for the city of

Chicago, in various positions, and gave birth to two daughters (Malia in 1998 and Sasha in 2001).

Michelle continued to work full time while she and Barack raised their two daughters, and as Barack began running for public office. Michelle also took on a much more public, and vocal, role in her husband's campaigning (certainly more than would have been socially appropriate for Jackie in the early 1960s). Though not immediately as much of a style setter as Jackie was, the media began increasingly to cover Michelle's fashion choices during the 2008 presidential race. Being from a more financially modest background and marriage than Jackie, Michelle had to achieve many of the same visual goals and sartorial statements as a candidate's wife, while still reflecting the trends and fiscal conservatism that would have been appropriate at the time (the US was still in the middle of a financial crisis). Throughout the campaign and the election, Michelle consistently made smart choices that demonstrated this balance and also called upon the social memory of Jackie as a political fashion icon.

Michelle's Professional Style

As a lawyer, Michelle was already accustomed to dressing professionally and maintaining a certain image in public. And Michelle's wardrobe during the campaign reflected her established professional style, unlike Jacqueline who had been a staple in the society pages since well before her marriage to John F. Kennedy. Jacqueline's wedding gown was photographed and featured in the press; by contrast, Michelle's dress is by an unknown designer/brand, most likely purchased at a local bridal boutique rather than custom designed like Jacqueline's or Diana's. The dress had a sweetheart neckline with a wide collar that fell off the shoulders and long sleeves. It had a lace skirt but the

skirt wasn't very full. She wore a full veil with her hair up along with diamond and pearl drop earrings.

As for her professional style, she frequently wore designs by Chicago-based designer Maria Pinto, as well as many of the same labels she wore throughout her time in the White House, such as J. Crew and Liz Claiborne. But prior to her husband's rise in politics, the press took little notice of the couple. It would be during the campaign that the spotlight would shine more brightly on her sartorial choices. Blending high-end labels with more affordable pieces, similar to many professional women in the US, Michelle's campaign wardrobe set a tone for what would become her First Lady stateswoman style.

Being a First Lady brings a number of challenges when it comes to dressing. As Jacqueline learned, garments and designers become political when worn by the First Lady. There are rules about what is and is not appropriate to wear to different occasions. While those rules had loosened up slightly since Jacqueline's time, there were still many rules that Michelle had to follow, which limited the amount of agency she had in her wardrobe choices. Kaiser states, "To be a subject in the world is also to be an agent of creativity, control, or changes, but it also means experiencing regulation...The degree of agency that individuals have depends upon the cultural (and political, religious, class) context and various social circumstances" (30). As Van Meter explains, "She has a job with no salary, a platform with no power, and East Wing filled with staff but no budget. And it is, as Mrs. Obama will point out...a role that is surprisingly malleable, shaped by the personality, style, and interest (or lack thereof) of the person occupying it" (222). Michelle explains, "Everything we do is by choice...I could have spent eight years doing *anything*, and at some level it would have been fine. I could have focused on flowers. I

could have focused on decor. I could have focused on entertainment. Because any First Lady, rightfully, gets to define her role. There's no legislative authority; you're not elected. And that's a wonderful gift of freedom" (qtd. in Van Meter 223). But that freedom also comes with difficulties, such as the media's tendency to focus on style over substance.

Early in the campaign, there was less of a focus on the issues Michelle was passionate about such as her career as a successful lawyer and more of a focus on her role as a wife and mother and the latest outfit she was wearing. Church Gibson explains, Michelle's "desire to help disenfranchised minorities has repeatedly generated photo opportunities in which more emphasis has been placed on her outfits than her work or what she has to say...She seems trapped and, by a weird irony—in her role as a new kind of celebrity fashion icon, the athletic, accomplished woman of colour—strangely disenfranchised *herself*, alienated in her image as though she were another" (40). Operating in the age of social media, Michelle would have a much larger platform than Jacqueline. Michelle also came into the White House in an era where many more women were juggling careers with marriage. While this would seem to simplify things for Michelle, it oddly made things more complicated. The role of First Lady still holds very traditional and old-fashioned values. While the role initially was meant to be just the official hostess of the White House—and wasn't always the wife of the President, but occasionally another female family member—The First Lady is typically seen as the ultimate wife and mother. This was one area where Jacqueline excelled, and her style complemented her roles as wife and mother. For Michelle, adding in the professional identity created a complex balance between the professional and the personal. For First

Ladies, the public sphere and the private sphere intersect and add increased scrutiny on the women.

Thanks to the increased attention in the current media age, Michelle was interviewed numerous times during her years in the White House by popular fashion and lifestyle magazines. This focus could sometimes work against her as Church Gibson points out, in the April 2010 *Good Housekeeping* issue she “happily answered the question, ‘How has your Harvard education prepared you for parenting?’ There was no mention of her own career nor of the new initiatives she had earlier discussed [in the interview]” (41). But, for the purposes of my research, some of these interviews are hugely beneficial for understanding Michelle’s philosophy regarding her wardrobe. Jacqueline did not give many interviews during her tenure, nor especially after her years as First Lady. And because of royal protocol, Diana and Catherine did not/have not done interviews with popular magazines (though Catherine has had an official cover shoot, which will be discussed in the next chapter) so there are very few first-hand thoughts on how clothing functions for stateswomen. But it is clearly something about which these women think quite carefully and strategically. When asked what role fashion plays for her, Michelle explains:

It goes hand in hand for anyone who’s in the public sphere. Your first interaction with people is what they see. So you can’t take it for granted. When you’re traveling in the country, the colors you wear, the cut of a dress, the hem length, whether your shoulders are showing—those are all important statements of respect and appreciation and understanding of a culture. But it’s also just as important for the wearer to be comfortable, and that has always been what drives my choices—do I feel good in this? I don’t really care what the trend is. (qtd. in Foxman 289)

Michelle’s wardrobe over the course of the campaign and her years in the White House, reveal this personal style philosophy reflected in her choices. Similar to Jacqueline,

Michelle paid careful attention to cut, silhouette, color, and design details. Clothing has a particular function and purpose for each event and public appearance. Clothing also has the ability to operate politically through the choice of designer for a particular event.

While Jacqueline established a trend of sartorial diplomacy, Michelle turned it into an art form. Throughout her time in the White House, Michelle carefully and strategically chose a mix of US and international designers for state dinners and official visits. For example, American designers with connections to another country to show the diversity of the American public, such as her choice of a suit by Cuban-American designer Isabel Toledo for the first Inauguration ceremony or a gown by Indian-American designer Naeem Khan for a state dinner with the Prime Minister of India, or foreign designers to pay tribute to visiting dignitaries such as wearing British label Marchesa for a state visit by British Prime Minister David Cameron or a Versace gown for a state dinner with Italian Prime Minister, Michelle mastered sartorial diplomacy.

Michelle also frequently chose young designers at the start of their careers, giving them a boost within the industry and increasing their name recognition among the public. Before the inauguration, Jason Wu was still a relatively unknown designer. After choosing his gown for the inaugural ball, Wu became a design celebrity almost overnight and his career went into an upward trajectory that continues to this day. She wore a cobalt blue dress by rising designer Christian Siriano to the 2016 Democratic National Convention. Describing the dress, Siriano explains:

It was about striking the balance with that dress...the top made it feel powerful and the bottom made it feel soft and kind of romantic...[the dress] represents her personality, from what I see [having never met her]. She's such a powerful woman and she is so strong, but she's also one of the kindest people there is. That's the balance of that dress: a simple silhouette that is still elegant and

romantic and covered [up] in a different way. It was also different from what every other woman wore, which was also an interesting choice. (qtd. in Yotka)

Both designers show a desire to navigate and negotiate Michelle's image as First Lady and to play with the expectations of her role. In both cases, the dresses were sent to Michelle, uncertain if she would wear them. Michelle maintains ultimate choice in whether she will take the designer's interpretation of her role and wear it on the public stage, but when she makes that choice, she gives the designer an opportunity to help mold the image of what an American First Lady can look like.

Discussing her off duty style, Michelle states, "Very casual. No makeup, a T-shirt, and a pair of ripped jean shorts or workout pants because I'm always on the verge of going to or coming from [working out]. So it isn't formal. I love color and pieces that make me feel good, but it's much more informal." (qtd. in Foxman 289). This desire to be comfortable and able to move freely also connects to her official wardrobe. Michelle herself explains her overall style philosophy saying:

It all boils down to comfort level; if I'm going to make *you* comfortable, then I have to be comfortable first. So my first reaction isn't 'Who made this?' But 'Let's try it on. What does it look like? Oooh, that's cute. Oh, wow. I never thought of wearing something like this. Let's put a belt on it. I feel *gooooood* in this.' There are definitely designers that I love, people I love to work with. And who they are as people matters. Are they good people? Do they treat their staff well? Do they treat *my* staff well? Are they young? Can I give them a boost? But! When all of that is equal...*is it cute?!?*" (emphasis in original, qtd. in Van Meter 291)

There are a few things worth noting in this statement. First, Michelle explicitly states that comfort is central to her style; this doesn't have to mean casual. Whether wearing loungewear or evening wear, there's a desire to be comfortable; but it's not just comfort for comfort's sake, it's so that Michelle can feel comfortable and confident in order to help those around her feel the same. Second, is her intentional focus on the designer. It's

not just about how well they design something, but who they are as people. In this statement we see her focusing both on what kind of person the designer is and do they treat those around them well, by wearing their outfit is she promoting someone who is kind and has a positive reputation? She must also consider if the designer could potentially be involved in negative attention from the media. She also pays attention to where they are at in their career and if her wearing their design would give them a boost. She's actively considering a variety of factors when choosing a garment to wear. This shows that her choices go well beyond being "just a dress" or a choice of little consequence. Brummett states, "Today, people pay attention to the styles they project in their person, at home, and in public. Style is crafted and strategic even if it is crafted out of awareness—it is not accidental or happenstance" (119). The above statement by Michelle demonstrates that she is aware how she was actively and strategically crafting her personal style as First Lady.

In the next section, I examine two of her most famous outfits in greater detail to show the ways that these garments function in the creation of her image as First Lady of the United States. Both are from President Obama's first inauguration: the suit she wore to the Inauguration Ceremony and the ball gown worn to the Inaugural Balls.

Hope and Optimism: The Isabel Toledo Suit

The Inauguration, as I discussed with Jacqueline, is similar to the first day at a new job. Most people can relate to the pressure felt at the prospect of choosing just the right outfit to make the right impression on the first day. Clothing, when seen as a rhetorical statement, can either give power to the wearer or take it away. Wearing the "wrong" outfit can give a less than favorable impression, whereas making the "right"

choice can create a positive impression. This process is magnified when enacted on a national and international stage at an event such as a US Presidential Inauguration. The suit worn by the First Lady to the inauguration sets a tone for her style and public identity throughout her tenure in the White House. While her campaign style lays the groundwork for this identity construction, the inauguration suit solidifies that identity construction.

Like Jacqueline who had come before her (and to whom she is frequently compared to) Michelle faced an increasing amount of interest in her clothing throughout the campaign. When Inauguration Day arrived, Michelle did not disappoint her fans and critics, showing up in a bright yellow-green dress and matching overcoat made by Cuban born and Manhattan based designer Isabel Toledo (see Figure 6). The inauguration wasn't the first time that Michelle had worn a Toledo design. She had previously worn the designer and had purchased a few pieces through a boutique in Chicago. The designer, Isabel Toledo, upon hearing that Michelle had worn one of Toledo's designs previously to a campaign event explained to the *New York Daily Mail*, "I was so honored to hear that she's a fan . . . She chose to wear a dress made by a Latina and made in the U.S. . . . She chose to support the industry here" (qtd. in Betts), further emphasizing how Michelle both personally and publicly was establishing a personal style that was diverse and inclusive of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Like Jacqueline, Michelle wore a piece that was made in the US by a US designer. It was also in a bright color that stood out from the dark overcoats of the men and public around Michelle and the accessories complimented the look appropriately. However, unlike Jacqueline's Cassini suit, Michelle's Toledo suit is a brighter color that does more than just make Michelle stand out in the crowd. It's a happy, optimistic color,

and optimism was just what the US needed at the time. There was a hint of sparkle in the fabric of the suit, and a jeweled collar necklace. In the January cold, the Toledo suit seems to represent the coming end of winter and arrival of spring and all the renewal of life that spring entails.



Figure 6 - Michelle and President Obama on Inauguration Day.

The dress and coat were made out of Swiss lace and satin-backed wool guipure that had an additional lining to protect against the frigid temperatures. Toledo referred to the color of the suit as an “optimistic” spring color (qtd. in Triggs 80). The Toledo suit is more detailed than the Cassini suit for Jacqueline had been. For Michelle, the yellow-green color is brighter than the ivory/greige color of the Jacqueline’s Cassini suit, but suits her complexion well and doesn’t appear too bright. Toledo also says of the color, “The color of this dress was a very gentle, subtle tone of sage, but I called it 'lemongrass' to express an emotion more than a color. I hoped this tone would evoke the idea of rebirth and renewal. This color expressed a warmth and a pacific, calming emotion and symbolized a new day” (338). The color of the suit is definitely worth noting. The lemongrass of the Toledo suit, is bright, bold, and eye-catching. It stands out in contrast to the black overcoat and suit that President Obama wore, and the dark coats worn by the others in attendance, just as Jacqueline’s suit stood out against the dark wools and furs worn at the Kennedy inauguration. I argue that it is more than just coincidence that the suits of the two women are so similar. Jacqueline’s ensemble at the Kennedy inauguration was meant to indicate the youthfulness and optimism of the incoming administration. The Obama campaign ran on many of the same themes that the Kennedy campaign succeeded with. And comparisons between the Kennedy’s and the Obama’s were already circulating at the time of the inauguration.

The lace and wool fabric, provides warmth as well as visual texture. The lace has a delicate floral pattern with a lighter color satin peeking through. The satin under the lace catches the light and adds a bit of depth and light without appearing too sparkly. It makes the suit appropriately formal for the occasion without going too far over the line

into evening wear. Toledo elaborates on the choice of the fabric saying, “This was a felted wool lace and reminded me of floating islands connected by one strong and sturdy thread. The empty spaces gave me the ability to play with the illusion of light escaping from beneath” (337). The imagery of the islands connected by a strong, sturdy thread, fits with the idea of diversity and unity that was so important to the Obama administration. Hearing Toledo talk about her decision process for choosing the fabric demonstrates how much thought goes into designing what Toledo knew would become a historic suit if Michelle chose to wear it. Toledo further explains, “When I saw this cloth, I felt instantly that this was the one. I knew it could help make Michelle luminous. The light was going to emit from within. This historic moment had to have more than one dimension, and I knew I could create depth with this lace” (340). The issue of creating depth is an important one to consider. Toledo had to take into consideration that if this suit was the one chosen it would be photographed multiple times, from different distances and angles. When looking at images from the day, the texture of the fabric appears slightly different depending on the distance from the camera. Shots taken from further away make it look textured but the pattern is not visible. Shots that are zoomed in or from a closer distance show the delicate floral pattern and that the fabric is partially lace. Either way, there is a sense of the depth and dimension that Toledo was aiming for. But lace, is a difficult fabric to work with for winter garments. Toledo describes the appeal of lace in general and the wool lace in particular that was chosen for the suit:

I love lace in any form because for me, it is one of the most modern as well as ancient textiles. This wool lace was an exceptional weave, fragile to the eye, but strong and sturdy. This quality is rare to find and is perfect for molding and tailoring. Warmth was a specific concern for me and my staff. We did not want Michelle to freeze. I wanted this coat to protect the First Lady, to comfort and hug

her like a friend, while still allowing her relaxed body language to shine through and speak. (338)

It is evident that Toledo was not only thinking of the aesthetic qualities of the fabric but also the practical, functional aspects of it. Temperatures in Washington, D.C. in January during the inauguration are always frigid. And while the men can always get away with long overcoats and being more bundled up, for the women, particularly the new First Lady, the sartorial decisions are always trickier; how to be warm and covered, without losing all shape and ability to move.

In photos where Michelle is walking you can see the inner lining of the coat, as well as an extra bit of fabric that appears to be a built-in scarf around the neck and chest of the suit coat. Unlike Jacqueline's coat, which was buttoned and only kicked open slightly down at the hem as she walked, the coat on the Toledo suit is partially open all the way from hem to neck, so the matching dress is visible throughout the day and the coat is fastened partially across the bust by a tie closure, making the underlying scarf partially visible. Toledo further addresses the issue of warmth and how she and her team accomplished adding more layers that would help give added warmth to the suit without adding bulk. She explains, "I backed the lace in thin layers of cream silk radzimir and cloudlike silk netting. Sandwiching the interlinings were thin weblike stitches of pashmina for extra warmth" (338). Additionally, using the silk underneath the lace gave an interesting design effect, Toledo explains, "The cream silk lining showing through the eyelet of the lace created the illusion of sunlight hitting water. This glittering light effect had many experienced fashion folk declare the dress was made of sequins. Some journalists and taste experts quickly debated whether a beaded dress was appropriate for day wear" (338). Ultimately, whether viewed up close or from farther away, the fabric

created a very visually dynamic look for the suit. And it worked in Michelle's favor, despite a few criticisms. Toledo explains, "The response was instant and phenomenal. The entire world watched this gracious, humble, and modernly elegant woman step into the future and take us along with her" (344).

But it wasn't just the suit that was noticed that day, there was also an interesting mix of accessories. The ensemble was accessorized with a sparkling crystal collar necklace and diamond stud earrings. Michelle also wore green leather gloves by premium brand J. Crew that retailed for \$98 and dark green pumps by Jimmy Choo that retailed for \$585. The pumps were simple and not flashy stilettos, and despite being from a high-end brand, it would be easy to find a similar pair if one wanted to recreate the look. And the choice of gloves from a brand that many professional women in the US wear shows that Michelle is like any other professional woman, looking for quality pieces that can be worn multiple times in different ways. She also chose different shades of green, and not a shade that was exactly the same as the suit. It is also worth noting that in her choice of color, she went with a color that is not traditionally patriotic.

Often First Ladies will choose from ivory (as Jacqueline did) or shades of red or blue. The lemongrass and green color palette is a unique and bold choice. Style expert Stacy London, speaking on the choice of the shades of green between the suit, gloves, and shoes, "These are not traditionally patriotic colors...She's saying, 'I'm going to be a different kind of First Lady'" (qtd. in Triggs 80). I argue that in addition to the suit declaring that Michelle will be a different kind of First Lady, she's also redefining what it means to dress powerfully and making a strong first impression with your professional wardrobe. Traditionally, the female "power suit" and the concept of power dressing takes

on a very masculine appearance, implying that to be powerful one has to be male, or at the very least, dress male. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a shift towards maintaining some femininity while dressing professionally. Michelle strikes this balance skillfully. The suit is appropriate to her age, and is a suit dress—as opposed to a pant suit—and it has slightly more feminine details in the texture of the fabric and the accessories. However, it is not form fitting or overtly sexualized; she is not the “trophy wife” of the new President. The silhouette creates an impression of strength and dignity, while the color is youthful, feminine, and fresh...an also stylish. She could have chosen a neutral color, but bright colors would become a signature style staple in Michelle’s working wardrobe that would help redefine what power dressing could look like for the modern woman. Thus, the color palette was just one more way Michelle asserted some agency over her personal style and representation. This would also be a color that she would continue to wear, in part or in whole in an outfit, over the next several years of her tenure as First Lady.

As the above quotes from Toledo show, there was more to this suit than just fabric and buttons, color or texture. It wasn’t just about the design and function of the dress. There was a deliberate intention to say something with the suit. Those intentions may have been created by Toledo and implied in the design, though not explicitly stated or explained as such to Michelle. Nevertheless, Michelle must have picked up on what Toledo was trying to convey. This was not just any suit, this was hope stitched together with a needle and thread, stitched by the hands of skilled artists inspired by the messages Michelle and her husband had been promoting throughout the campaign. As Toledo says, “When I saw her in my dress, it was like a gift from the universe. I was totally floating.

Taken together, the lace and all of its secret layers created a wonderful effect. It was almost like little bits of sunshine were emanating from the dress and coat. I felt like my lemongrass dress and coat ensemble was happiness made visible—for Michelle and me, for our new president, and for a nation” (344). It is especially important to note that Toledo’s own history, as well as the background of her team, makes this choice especially poignant. Toledo explains:

To put this into perspective, you must remember that Ruben and I are political refugees, and my staff consists of people from the U.S., China, Korea, Poland, Mexico, and Japan. We have interns from Austria, Qatar, England, and Canada. Ruben's 85-year-old dad, who had been our cutter, had come from Cuba during the Revolution. So you can just imagine how proud and honored we all were, this small United Nations of Fashion. Watching this historic moment meant so much to us for all its deep significance. This was a moment bigger than fashion. This was history, and now we were woven into this very moment in history forever. (345)

While this information may or may not have been known to Michelle at the time—though as a fan and previous wearer of the label, she likely knew of Toledo’s background—it would have been certain that information about the designer and the label would be researched and used by the press. As Michelle’s statement in a quote above indicates, she’s aware of who she wears and what kind of people they are and who she’s helping to shine a spotlight on. Her choice of Toledo on this day would not have been a coincidence, it would have been a deliberate statement.

Additionally, while Michelle didn’t design the suit herself—as Jacqueline had done in collaboration with Cassini—Michelle made the choice to wear the Toledo suit. This put her in a very relatable situation for the average woman watching Michelle on that day. Michelle had been given at least a few options to wear that day, and she would have reviewed each option carefully to decide which would be most appropriate for the

situation and which would give the best first impression. Thus, Michelle would have been in what Guy, Green, and Banim refer to as the “wardrobe moment” of standing before your wardrobe and all of its offerings and deciding which outfit best suits the demands of the day. Guy, Green, and Banim explore this concept through the perspective of average women, not celebrities or public figures, but Michelle demonstrates how some public figures, particularly stateswomen, face this process as well, with much higher stakes, and can serve as an example to average women how they can make similar choices in their own wardrobes to give themselves additional power and agency through their clothing choices.

Taking together the colors, textures, design, and accessories, the overall ensemble works together to enhance Michelle’s agency in her representation at the Inauguration. Crane states, “Clothes as artifacts ‘create’ behavior through their capacity to impose social identities and empower people to assert latent social identities...Alternatively, clothing can be viewed as a vast reservoir of meanings that can be manipulated or reconstructed so as to enhance a person’s sense of agency” (2). We see the Toledo suit (and the Wu gown which will be discussed in the next section) functioning in this way. The Toledo suit indeed carries with it a vast reservoir of meanings and symbolism that work in tandem with Michelle’s personal and public identity.

Dazzling in Jason Wu: Past and Present Combine

Later that evening Mrs. Obama would make another bold statement by choosing a Jason Wu ball gown for the various Inaugural balls that evening. For decades, the public has waited anxiously to see what each new first lady will wear for her first inaugural ball. As Robin Givhan explains, “Every four years the country has a collective fashion

moment. Citizens wait, if not in breathless anticipation, then at least in a state of mildly embarrassed, vaguely fraught curiosity for the first glimpse of a single dress: the inaugural gown” (Givhan). The inaugural gown fills a national role in American culture and stands as a memorial to that event. It also teaches a lesson in dressing powerfully and with authority in evening wear. As with the Toledo suit, we don’t know what other options were available to Michelle in the days leading up to Inauguration Day. But her choice of the Wu gown still holds many features worth investigating further.

Designed by then relatively unknown Chinese American designer Jason Wu, Mrs. Obama’s white chiffon one-shouldered gown covered with embroidery and crystals, did not disappoint (see Figure 7). Along with the dress, Michelle wore jewelry designed by Loree Rodkin. Her earrings were triple rose-cut diamonds, with a dropped cluster of diamond briolettes, set in white gold with a total carat weight of 61.9 (Graddy and Pastan 19). She also wore the “Michelle” signet ring by Rodkin, made of white gold and black rhodium with rose-cut diamonds around a rose-cut center stone with a total carat weight of 13 (Graddy and Pastan 19). For shoes, she chose white satin shoes by Jimmy Choo. For a woman 5 feet 11 inches tall, who would have been over 6 feet tall in heels, the column of white, embellished fabric could have overwhelmed a weaker, less confident figure. But Michelle demonstrates the adage, “wear the dress, don’t let it wear you.” Michelle shows that you can wear what you want, even if it doesn’t follow certain “fashion rules.”



Figure 7 - Michelle and President Obama arriving at the Inaugural Ball.

As with her choices for the election night and the inauguration ceremony earlier in the day, Mrs. Obama made a choice of gown and designer that represented a young, independent, and forward-thinking woman, very different from previous First Ladies. Championing unknown designers, who also come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, is also representative of a woman aware of the diverse demographics and economic situation of the country she is now a cultural ambassador for. As Eric Wilson explains,

“the symbolism of Mrs. Obama’s choice of such a young American designer is invigorating for the fashion industry, especially at a moment when new companies are facing tight odds of survival (Wilson). Wu was one of several designers contacted to put forward a possible gown for the inaugural ball; he was given four weeks to design, produce, and ship the gown by late November (Rubenstein 158). Rubenstein explains, “Wu and the three women on his team set to work, spending more than three hundred hours making the gown, which included creating five hundred hand-wrapped organza flowers, which they hand-sewed along with more than a thousand Swarovski crystals onto the ivory silk chiffon” (158). The final dress was sent off to Michelle’s team and life moved on for the designer over the next few months between the end of November deadline and the inaugural balls in late January. Rubenstein continues, “Since he was never sent any indication of his chances or notified that a choice had been made, Wu insists he forgot about it and wasn’t even sure the gown was his when he first saw it. But within moments the congratulatory phone calls began—and lasted until dawn—coming that Jason Wu, twenty-eight, was the youngest designer to outfit a first lady for the inaugural ball” (158). For Wu, it was a life-changing moment; for Michelle, it was one of many sartorial statements she would make throughout her time as First Lady.

There are similarities between the Wu gown and Jacqueline’s Frankau gown. Both are white, floor length gowns and both reflect the hope and optimism of the incoming administrations. Designer Jason Wu explains, “I wanted the dress to reflect hope, fantasy, a dream [because] this is a pretty surreal moment we’re living in” (qtd. in McIntyre). As I discussed in Chapter 3, this parallels what Jacqueline had wanted to do with her inaugural gown in her symbolic choice of the color white. Wu also explained,

“White was the only color I ever considered for Mrs. Obama. I wanted you to be able to see her before you saw anyone in the room. I think I got it right” (qtd. in Rubenstein 158). As for the silhouette of the gown, Wu explains, “I wanted it to move beautifully—she had 10 parties to go to...I wanted her to have something that wasn’t going to wrinkle, and it had to be something that was going to photograph beautifully” (qtd. in McIntyre 79). While the Wu dress is clearly a modern gown, designed for 2009, just as the Frankau gown was designed with the styles of the early 1960s, both gowns manage to reference similar themes of hope and optimism, youth and vitality, for a new administration and a new family in the White House and become a sartorial representation of those themes and messages. In this gown, Michelle is representing visually what her husband is stating explicitly in his speeches on the day, and as such becomes part of the larger conversation.

Choosing which outfit to wear, especially to events as significant as the Inauguration and Inaugural Balls, can be a tricky prospect for a First Lady. Jacqueline designed her dress in collaboration with Frankau, but Michelle took the more contemporary, red carpet dressing approach, of having a number of dresses sent to her to choose from. We don’t know what the other dresses in the running looked like, or just how similar or unique each dress was. We also don’t know what exactly prompted her to choose the Wu gown. But it wouldn’t be much of a stretch to imagine that she chose it for the themes of hope and optimism Wu describes in his design approach to the dress. The Inauguration outfits are two of the most important outfits the First Lady will wear. They set the tone for her personal style as First Lady and how she will present herself in public. Each dress becomes a text that makes a statement about her values and intentions. As with the Toledo suit, the Wu gown exemplifies a more feminine form of power dressing

that shows women they can embrace femininity—if they choose to—and still dress powerfully, with authority and agency. The gown fits with the expectations of the role of First Lady but also expresses something of Michelle’s own personality and style with the silhouette and design details. The Obama era would bring many changes compared to the previous Bush era, and like the Kennedy’s, the Obamas were a younger couple, with young children and a fresh outlook on how to approach politics. While Michelle couldn’t make explicit statements to this effect, her clothing on Inauguration Day, could make statements for her. In choosing a gown that was fresh and fashion forward, designed by a young, emerging minority designer, Michelle was making it clear that change was indeed coming and that she would be supporting the youth of America, the innovators, and the creative spirits.

Brummett discusses texts as being primary in a rhetoric of style. He explains, “If texts are primary, then values, motivations, allegiances, identities, communities, and intentions can be read off a text” (118). The Wu gown is a good example of the textual aspect of dress. The color is light and fresh, the fabric is light and airy, and floated gracefully around Michelle as she moved, which again adds to the feeling of freshness and new beginnings. The gown has much more of red carpet, celebrity feel, unlike the inaugural gowns of many of the previous First Ladies since Jacqueline—the one exception being perhaps Nancy Reagan in her James Galanos designed gown, which perhaps not coincidentally was also a white, beaded gown in a straight silhouette, almost a cross between Jacqueline’s and Michelle’s gowns. Michelle’s gown seems to say, she is not just a First Lady and politician’s wife, but a strong character herself who can shine just as brightly as her husband. The cut and silhouette of Michelle’s gown, including the

one shouldered bodice and modest neckline that showed little, if any cleavage, indicates that she is aware of appropriateness and her role as wife and mother, and that even if she may or may not agree with traditional values of female modesty, she will play the game and not draw the wrong kind of attention. “[W]hen talking about individuality and identity and the role played by fashion and dress it is important to recognize that identities are socially meaningful. The individual may want to ‘stand out’ but she or he also wants to ‘fit in’ with a group” (Entwistle 139). Overall the gown allows Michelle to shine and stand out in a positive way, but without drawing any negative attention.

The gown was eventually donated to the First Ladies Collection at the Smithsonian Institute in March 2010, with both Michelle and Wu as part of the ceremony. It is worth noting that due to the tradition of the inaugural ball gown being donated to the Smithsonian, the choice of a young, Chinese-American designer seems even more poignant as his design now sits among some of America’s greatest works of art and national treasures.

Conclusion

The stories, meanings, and intentions of the designers are not immediately apparent when first looking at the Wu gown—or the Toledo suit—but in an era of social media and popular news, interviews with the designers were everywhere within 24 hours of the inauguration. Magazines such as *People Magazine* ran one-page articles and sidebars on both ensembles featuring quotes from the designers and style experts. TV entertainment and news shows commented on both the garments and who designed them. Before long the nationalities and ethnicities of the designers were public knowledge. Though Toledo was not a new designer—like Wu—she was not a household name

among the average American. Michelle's choice of Toledo and Wu was a clear statement that not only supported American fashion but supported a diverse American fashion. Supporting, to borrow a phrase from Toledo, a "United Nations of Fashion" that reflected a diverse and unified direction of the incoming administration that was inheriting years of war and a massive economic recession. Quotes from the designers (including ones that have been featured above) following the inauguration allowed them to speak of their intentions to convey feelings of hope and optimism, and a desire to see the United States move in a direction of acceptance and unity. Where Michelle was not able to make these statements directly herself, choosing to wear designs by Toledo and Wu specifically, with knowledge of their backgrounds, gives them a voice and a platform.

Taking into consideration the backstory of Toledo and her team, we cannot ignore the values and ideologies embedded in the suit, and the rhetorical nature of it. Brummett explains, "Style is value laden because it is rhetorical and rhetorical because it conveys values...Put rhetoric and values together, and you have *struggle*. Values of empowered interest and their opponents may be expressed in style, and this marking of conflict is also a kind of social organization" (50-51). Brummett further states, "Style can be a way of asserting value judgments out of the articulate or conscious awareness of others when to do so explicitly may be rhetorically or politically inappropriate" (51). The suit and gown allowed Michelle to make statements about herself and her values, and to foreshadow topics that would become part of her platform during her tenure as First Lady, without actually speaking a word. Typically, the First Lady is silent at the Inauguration, all of the focus is on the President being sworn in. And the Inaugural Balls don't include any interviews and if there are speeches, again, it is the President giving them. The First Lady

remains a silent figure. So, clothing becomes one way that the First Lady can make some kind of statement and retain some amount of agency over her representation in the media. Unlike the “body as advertisement” relationship to clothing with regular celebrities, stateswomen like Michelle demonstrate “body as agency” with their clothing choices. Michelle is a working professional with goals and objectives to complete. Her clothing needs to help her command a presence and authority, not make her fade into the background. Her ensembles on Inauguration Day show women how they can negotiate between personal and public style as well as how they can use clothing to create a public identity that is empowering. Through Michelle’s choice of the Toledo suit and the Wu gown, Michelle’s outfits that day spoke of hope and optimism, diversity and acceptance, youth and innovation as well as maturity and experience, all elements that would be important aspects of Michelle’s identity as First Lady.

Though Michelle is no longer in the White House, her post-White House style differs slightly from Jacqueline as Michelle is still serving as a public figure with her husband through their work for the Obama Foundation. Michelle has more freedom now than during her White House years, as she is not bound by quite the same rules and protocol as when she was an active First Lady, but there are still expectations placed on her as a continuing, active stateswoman and former First Lady. In looking at Michelle, we can see examples of how she uses clothing to illustrate her power and agency in various situations, and also how she uses clothing as part of an ongoing identity construction process. As I’ve shown with the previous two women in this study, identity is always in flux; it is never static or completed. Even after death clothing choices continue to be reviewed and analyzed with judgements made about the wearer. But where

Jacqueline retreated into private life and Diana's life was tragically cut short before the continued evolution of her style and the negotiation of a new role for her within the royal family, with Michelle we see the inevitable next step of a stateswoman after her official role has concluded but while still function in a public service role.

In the next chapter I show how this process works in Michelle's royal counterpart—and friend—Catherine, The Duchess of Cambridge. Like Michelle, Catherine has found a balance between public expectations, royal protocol, and her own personal identity and agency.

CHAPTER 6

CATHERINE EIZABETH MIDDLETON, THE DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE

Introduction

Catherine Elizabeth Middleton was born on January 9th, 1982 in Reading England at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Her father, Michael, was a British Airways manager and her mother, Carol, was a flight attendant then stay at home mother. Catherine's sister Pippa was born in 1983 and the family briefly lived in Amman, Jordan where Michael was posted with British Airways before the family eventually settled in Berkshire in 1986, with their son James being born in 1987 (Bullen 2012, 3). The Middleton family is known to be a close, tight knit group, enjoying family meals and activities. Carol was active with the children and in village life and in the early 1990s came up with a business idea to provide party bags and supplies for children's parties. Michael quit his airline work in 1995 to join the new enterprise, which has since become a booming business. Although the media would later play up Catherine's upper middle-class background with stories of her being a "commoner" from a "coal mining background¹⁸," the fact was her parents had built a very successful life for themselves. Catherine and her siblings grew up in a large family home near the village of Bucklebury and attended private schools. Catherine excelled at school in her studies and in sports, as well as in performing in school plays. Even at a young age, her path tentatively crossed with her future husband, as William was a student at a boy's school near Catherine's co-educational St. Andrews

¹⁸ Catherine's ancestors on her mother's side did work in the coal pits of Durham, England. But her great-grandfather learned to be a carpenter and was able to leave mining, with his family continuing to increase the standard of living for the family over the following generations. Her family on her father's side were more successful and prominent as lawyers and mill owners. For more of Catherine's ancestry, see Joseph.

School and would play matches at the St. Andrews fields (Bullen 2012, 8). At age 13 Catherine began attending the exclusive all girls boarding school Downe House, but struggled to fit in and after two terms transferred to the equally prominent Marlborough College.

Catherine came into her own at Marlborough, growing from a shy teenager into beautiful young woman who was known among her classmates for being polite, kind, discreet, dignified, and following her own moral code. Neither a ‘goody-goody’ or a partier (Bullen 2012,10), she was well respected by classmates and friends. From an early age, she demonstrated many of the qualities and characteristics that would serve her well as a future member of the royal family. Between school and university, Catherine—like many young British students—took a gap year. She began by traveling to Florence, Italy for three months, enrolling in an art and language course at the British Institute and later working in Chile with the Raleigh International Challenge, assisting on a marine survey and helping to build a fire station (Bullen 2012, 11). This was coincidentally the same program William had participated in just one month prior to Catherine’s arrival, a common experience they would later bond over. Catherine would eventually meet William at St. Andrews University, when they were freshman students together and assigned to the same residence hall, St. Salvator’s and were in the same Art History course. William soon took notice of the shy and quiet Catherine, who had been voted the prettiest girl by the end of freshers’ week (Bullen 2012, 12). But despite stories of an instant love affair, the two were actually friends for more than a year before the

relationship turned into anything more romantic,¹⁹ a very different experience than William's parents had had during their short courtship and engagement. In their second year William and Catherine moved into a flat with two other friends and settled into their studies. The pair socialized as part of a larger friend group and never gave any serious indication of their being in a serious relationship, though there was much speculation in the press.

They graduated in 2005 and William went off to his officer training for the military at Sandhurst. Meanwhile Catherine moved to a flat in London with a friend, briefly working as an accessories buyer for the high street retailer Jigsaw. While William was protected from the press while at Sandhurst, paparazzi stalked Catherine in London and she eventually quit her job and went to work for the family business. There was a brief breakup in 2007, but only a few months after the reports of the breakup appeared in the newspapers, the couple seemed to be reconciling and spending time together in public once more, with Catherine being introduced to the Queen in 2008 at a family wedding. Finally, on November 16th, 2010, the official announcement of their engagement came from Clarence House and the couple met for a photo call in front of dozens of cameras at St. James Palace. William had proposed with his mother's sapphire engagement ring, which he later explained in an interview that it was his way of keeping his mother involved in the celebration. The couple would marry in a lavish wedding at Westminster Abbey on April 29th, 2011 and the Queen granted three new titles on the couple in honor

¹⁹ The media loves to portray a different story, particularly rehashing the tale of the charity fashion show Catherine participated in during their second term at St. Andrews, where she walked down the runway wearing a short, sheer strapless dress with a black bandeau top and underwear visible beneath. A complete departure from anything she had worn previously or since, but was most likely nothing more than a fun thing to do at University. Many gossip commentators like to put this evening as the moment William became enamored with Catherine, though it is really only speculation.

of the marriage, their primary titles of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge as well as the Earl and Countess of Strathearn and the Baron and Baroness of Carrickfergus.

From College Style to Royal Style

Catherine's early style would not have given anyone the impression she would one day become an international fashion icon. As a teenager, she favored jeans and t-shirts or sweaters, casual clothing for a life in the country or at boarding school. She was active and involved in sports and her school pictures could be of almost any middle class young woman of that age. Her college years at University of St. Andrews were likewise casual and functional, leaning towards studious or "preppy," they were age and location appropriate. From time to time there was a bit of tweed and other standard middle/upper-class "British countryside" wardrobe essentials. Something she still reverts back to even now, when the environment and occasion allows.

During her years at St. Andrews and those following her graduation, Catherine began to develop her adult style, carefully selecting high street brands with the occasional luxury staple mixed in. Even from the beginning, it was evident that Catherine was more concerned with quality than with quantity. She wasn't afraid to take an older piece and have it altered to make it more current, such as her Katherine Hooker coat she had worn in 2006 to the Cheltenham Gold Cup and then had rehemmed to a shorter, more current length and wore in 2011 for her first official event with Prince William following their engagement. She also was known to share clothing with her sister and her mother, famously wearing a blue Reiss dress to her first solo speaking engagement that her mother had previously worn three years prior to Ascot. These are undoubtedly interesting choices for such public events and one that indicates a reliance on personal style and not

a need to follow trends or purchase a new coat for every event when updating an old one will do.

Once Catherine and Prince William's engagement was announced, the public and the press began paying even closer attention to what Catherine wore. It was no longer just the tabloid press talking about her, referring to her as "Waity Katie." Suddenly even people who'd managed to escape the tabloids were now hearing Catherine's name and seeing her picture in mainstream popular magazines and websites. She was quickly becoming the person that young women wanted to dress like, and that designers wanted to dress. Though some designers found her style boring and safe, others viewed her as a breath of fresh air. American designer Michael Kors has said, "When I look at Kate I see a changing of the guard in what is considered elegant. She likes to look easy but chic. I would liken her to Michelle Obama...in that way" (qtd. in Wackerl 157). She's a new stateswoman icon, for a new era. Though Catherine is younger than Michelle, their style and clothing philosophies appear to be very similar, both favor classic tailoring, pops of color, casual off duty style, a mix of high street and high-end pieces, and both employ strategic sartorial diplomacy for official events.

The engagement announcement could be seen as the pivotal moment when the average public sat up and took notice of the young woman who would soon marry the future King of England. For the occasion, she wore a blue silk-jersey dress by Daniella Issa Helayel that cost approximately £400 (Wackerl 148). The brand had been successful and was a popular choice among clients, who favored the brand's flattering cuts and materials, but was still a small label. Overnight Issa was thrust into the international spotlight. The dress sold out from British retailer Harvey Nichols in less than 24 hours

and other designs by the brand sold out worldwide in more than 43 countries (O'Malley). Helayel explained, "We didn't have a TV at the studio and this was pre-Instagram, but we soon knew Kate was wearing Issa because at four o'clock the phones began ringing and didn't stop." (qtd. in O'Malley). The dress, called the "Sapphire London," was a huge hit, and when the original sold out, cheap knockoffs were quickly produced. It set the tone for Catherine's royal style, classic, elegant, easy to wear, and not extremely expensive. Catherine would wear other Issa designs, the latest being in 2011 on the royal tour of Canada, but in mid-2011 the brand was bought by Camilla Al Fayed and Catherine hasn't been seen to wear the brand since²⁰. But the press had already got what it wanted and it was running wild with story after story on the soon to be Duchess of Cambridge.

In February 2013, British *Vogue* ran an article by Lisa Armstrong titled "Katepedia," which outlined Catherine's wardrobe and style down to specific numbers and statistics. These types of articles have become very popular in the years since the engagement was announced and Catherine became an official public figure. There are also books that have been published documenting her style and detailing how the reader can replicate Catherine's style, especially on a budget. The popularity of books and magazines that feature her style and offer advice and tips on how to emulate it point to the attraction Catherine's style has to the public. One of the primary appeals of her style

²⁰ Al Fayed is the daughter of ex-Harrods owner Mohammed Al Fayed and sister of the late Dodi Al Fayed, who had been linked with Princess Diana at the time of her death. Mohammed Al Fayed has been vocal against the royal family and supports conspiracy theories surrounding the death of his son and Princess Diana. It is likely that avoiding the label after the purchase stemmed from a desire to avoid a connection to potential scandal or unnecessary drama. Ultimately the label closed in 2015, four years after the purchase and two years after Helayel left as creative director.

is that she wears clothing and brands that are accessible to the average woman and has a normal working professional wardrobe.

Traditionally the royal family does not do public interviews about their personal lives, something Diana used to her advantage when she wanted to take control of the public narrative about her own personal life. But Catherine has followed with tradition and protocol, and has never done an interview with any of the popular magazines or media. However, a slight exception was made in early 2016 when Catherine agreed to be the cover story for the June 2016 British *Vogue*. A photoshoot was arranged and was accompanied in the magazine by a piece written by then editor Alexandra Shulman, titled “HRH.” This was a landmark cover and considered to be quite a catch for Shulman that had been carefully kept under wraps for months. This was the centennial issue and was in connection with the National Portrait Gallery, which Catherine serves as the royal patron. The idea was that the pictures would not only be featured in the magazine but would also be part of a special exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. With this more purposeful connection, Shulman was finally able to get Catherine to participate. Catherine’s reluctance to appear in an official capacity in a fashion magazine is understandable. Like Diana, she has been adamant about wanting to be known as a working member of the royal family, not as a clotheshorse or a slave to fashion. But agreeing to the photoshoot and to the series of portraits that would be included in the exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery brings the project more in line with her official duties as Patron and not just a regular photoshoot.

What is especially interesting—and telling of Catherine’s approach to fashion and style—is the way Catherine chose to be dressed for the photos. Shulman explains:

It was very clear from the outset that these pictures were to be of the woman herself rather than of a figurehead and that they would be as informal as possible. The Duchess liked the idea of being photographed in the countryside, and she wanted the pictures to reflect an element of her private existence. She didn't want to be dressed as a fashion plate and was not keen to be shot in gala gowns and tiaras. Instead, the clothes *Vogue's* fashion director Lucinda Chambers gathered for the day were based on what the Duchess likes to wear when she is off-duty—jeans, shirts, T-shirts. The same as the rest of us. (282)

The same as the rest of us. A large part of Catherine's appeal to the public is her perceived normality. She's not like celebrities within the entertainment industry with their designer collaborations and unlimited budgets and free designer gifts. Despite her royal status, she's a working mother of two who dresses herself each day based on her personal or professional demands. She's not being dressed by an army of stylists or costume designers. Catherine, certainly aware of the fascination over her clothing, consistently chooses to dress informally and/or inexpensively for key events and appearances. Designer pieces are typically saved for black tie and red carpet moments, or times when sartorial diplomacy would serve her well (such as wearing Chanel during an official visit to Paris, a brand she rarely wears otherwise). For the most part, Catherine doesn't *do* anything exceptionally different from the rest of us in the way she dresses. Her budget and clothing expenditures might exceed the average woman, but like the average woman Catherine seems to enjoy shopping in her (limited) leisure time, finding a bargain, and rewearing the outfits she enjoys the most. She understands the importance of dressing appropriately for public appearances but seems to prefer wearing casual clothing during her off-duty moments and while chasing after her two children. It's her seemingly average and normal approach to dressing that has led to her status as a stateswoman icon, and something she has in common with the other women analyzed in this study. As I argue throughout this study, stateswomen icons function differently than fashion icons

from the popular culture sphere. If anything, they are icons of the average woman, dressing with many of the same daily constraints of what is appropriate to the events of the day and not being outlandish or trend setting. The perceived normality of Catherine, and the other women in this study, is a central part of their public appeal.

While we tend to think of iconic style as being something that sets the icon apart from the rest of the public, I argue that iconic style is born out of at least some perception—however slight—of relatability. Iconic style comes, at least in part, out of an admiration for someone’s style and a desire to replicate it, even in some small way—as if to replicate their style, one might have a piece of their lifestyle as well. Barnard, speaking of individual style and mass fashion, states, “At the heart of individual identity, then, at the heart of something that is supposed to be specific to an individual, is the mass-produced, the garment that exists in the form of hundreds or thousands of copies. Moreover, that identity can only be constructed according to a network of differences which are already understood and common to a whole community” (190). Catherine frequently wears high street clothing that is affordable to a wider range of consumers, this is in direct contrast—and at times opposition—to the choices of Diana who, more often than not, wore high end and couture pieces that were not readily available or financially accessible to those wanting to mimic their style²¹. Catherine’s choices of lower cost items create an identity that is more easily understood by the wider community she is observed by. She’s a working professional with a functional, working wardrobe, not just a closet

²¹ Diana did wear high street and casual clothing on occasion, but this was typically saved for off-camera or private moments. She didn’t blend high-end with high street for public appearances in the same way that Catherine does.

full of lovely, expensive things. This also creates a personal style that is more easily adopted by those wanting to replicate her style.

There are numerous social media accounts focused on reporting what Catherine wears on a day to day basis. And while some women simply like making a few similar purchases here and there, others have made it a dedicated pastime to replicate as much of Catherine's wardrobe as possible. Known as "RepliKates" and sharing their replicated style online with the hashtag #replikate, this small—but not insignificant—online community shows the lengths some people will go to adopt their favorite fashion icon's style. As if having part of Catherine's wardrobe would give the wearer some of the glamour and prestige that the public perceives of Catherine's lifestyle.

The younger royals, Catherine and her husband Prince William as well as William's brother, Prince Harry, are all working to create an image of the royal family that is young, fresh, in touch with the concerns of the British people, with the three of them working together on the Heads Up charity that advocates for mental health issues, among many other charities they are patrons of. The princes, no doubt inspired by the work left unfinished by their mother, are working, along with Catherine, to create an image of the monarchy that is not as remote and rarified as it has been in previous generations. In Catherine's position, one of the tools she uses to help create a more relatable image is clothing. Barnard explains, "[A]nother way of looking at the relation between social role and fashion or clothing is to see the latter as making inequalities in the former appear to be natural or proper" (63). For example, uniforms of superiors versus their subordinates clarify differences in power and authority. "The difference in status, and the different expectations with regard to behavior, are made to appear natural

and proper when they are given concrete form in clothing and fashions” (Barnard 63). But Catherine, like Diana, uses her style to blur the lines between herself and the public she serves. Where Diana focused on texture and color to make her more approachable to children on hospital visits or cut and silhouette when she wanted her clothing to blend in and not make her stand out, Catherine uses high street, affordable brands to help her seem more relatable to the public. She also frequently re-wears the same garment multiple times. This is a tactic she uses on her entire wardrobe, both her high street and her designer pieces. Wackerl states, “Through her wedding, the ‘Queen of the High Street Labels’ has also discovered the glamour world of Jenny Peckham and Jimmy Choo. In order to distract attention from her love of luxury, she grasps every opportunity to pull old clothes from her closet. After all, Kate is not just the ‘Queen of the High Street,’ but is also considered a role model for recycling looks” (155). In Britain’s latest age of austerity, this recycling works to Catherine’s credit.

When she does wear a designer piece, odds are good she’ll wear the same dress at least a few more times over the following couple of years, rather than once and never again. And though her clothing may not always be recycled as frequently as the average woman’s wardrobe is, Catherine’s accessories certainly are. She regularly rotates through the same handful of shoes and handbags. Her L.K. Bennett “Sledge” pumps were worn so many times in the early years of the engagement and marriage that the cost per wear on the £195 heels is probably close to £1. Not a bad purchase there. And a choice that certainly spurred a number of admirers to purchase the same style and has kept the style a firm classic for the brand with new color options being released yearly. This is just one example, but it illustrates the way that Catherine makes solid investments in classic

pieces. It's also a brilliant advertising win for the brand. They could feature countless ads for the shoes in magazines or online, but the public seeing Catherine wear them time after time is the ultimate testimony for the shoe and proves it's a worthy investment to those wanting to purchase a piece of Catherine's working wardrobe.

Over the last several years since the wedding, Catherine has built a working wardrobe, something Diana had been focusing on more intentionally in the last years of her life as she transitioned from her role as a member of the royal family to a more professional role as a private philanthropist. Catherine does not spend excessively (for a woman in her position) on clothing and she wears outfits more than once to public events, sometimes years apart but other times only days apart such as the pink Emilia Wickstead suit dress worn first to a 2012 luncheon at Windsor Castle and then again only eleven days later to tea party at Buckingham Palace. She favors simple suits like the Emilia Wickstead one (which she also owns in another color), and variations by other British designers such as Alexander McQueen and Catherine Walker. Catherine Walker is a label that was favored by Diana, during her later years, and Catherine is likely drawn to it for similar reasons. Walker suits help form a working wardrobe, they are stylish but not led by trends. The silhouettes are simple, classic, elegant, and let the focus be on the wearer's words and actions. The perfect choice for a woman who wants to be known for her charity work and public service and not as a clothes horse or style icon. It is important to note that while "fashion icon" is a label attached to Catherine (by myself and by others) it is not a label that Catherine herself has adopted. But perhaps that's what makes her style so iconic, that she's not intentionally trying to do so.

While many people compare Catherine to Diana, I argue that the royal figure she more closely resembles in her wardrobe is actually Queen Elizabeth. The Queen's current wardrobe don't make the similarities as obvious—though both Catherine and the Queen favor simple silhouettes and color blocking—but in the Queen's younger style, there are many similarities. Both women are in favor of looking glamorous when the event calls for it but also prefer simple, country clothing that is comfortable and functional—much like the looks Catherine was styled in for the *Vogue* shoot. In the following sections I analyze two of Catherine's most memorable looks. First, the instantly iconic Sarah Burton for Alexander McQueen wedding gown. Second, the “Nannette” dress by high street retailer Reiss, worn first in the official engagement photos taken in Kensington Palace and later at one of the appearances on the Canadian royal tour.

Modern Yet Traditional: The McQueen Wedding Gown

The royal wedding of Catherine Middleton to Prince William took place at eleven o'clock in the morning on April 29th, 2011. There had been months of anticipation and speculation on who would design the dress and what would it look like. By this point there had been a number of high profile royal weddings, ranging from the Queen herself to Princess Margaret, and Princess Diana. Would she follow any of their examples? And who would the designer be? The names of many British designers were bandied about, Alice Temperly and Jenny Packham were both top contenders—and designers Catherine has worn a number of times. The secret slipped on Twitter the night before, when Sarah Burton of Alexander McQueen was spotted slipping into the Goring Hotel where Catherine was spending her last night before the wedding (Wackerl 148). But the public didn't know for sure until the Palace released a statement to the press as Catherine

stepped out of the Rolls-Royce in front of the Abbey that she was in fact wearing a gown designed by Sarah Burton of British design house Alexander McQueen (see Figure 8).

Throughout the drive to the Abbey the cameras could see that the dress had long, lace sleeves and a V-neckline, with her hair partially down and a simple tulle and lace veil and tiara. But when she stepped out of the car into full view, the complete beauty of the gown was revealed. And as all the details of the gown and its construction, as well as the accessories chosen to go with the dress were eventually shared with the press, the total significance of the ensemble for the day was eventually made clear.



Figure 8 - Catherine walking into Westminster Abbey.

Similar to Diana's gown, every detail had been carefully considered. But unlike Diana's gown, which definitely epitomized the glamour and decadence of the 1980s and

the girlish innocence of the 19-year-old virgin bride, Catherine's gown in contrast offered a classic silhouette and mature design befitting a young woman who had more life experience and knew her own mind. There are many interesting points to discuss in regard to this gown, the first being the designer and the label chosen to take on this project. Thomas, referencing the effect Diana's choice of the Emmanuel's for her wedding gown explains, "Middleton's gown, which would be seen by an estimated two billion people on television and via the Internet—twice as many as had watched Princess Diana walk down the aisle—was bound to have an even more powerful effect on whichever brand she chose. The commission would be the greatest publicity a company could wish for" (375). This would not be a decision Catherine would take lightly, and no doubt she sought advice within the family but also looked for guidance from one fashion insider in particular. According to Thomas, "Unbeknownst to the public and the press, Middleton went to see British *Vogue* editor Alexandra Shulman for advice. Shulman urged Middleton to hire McQueen. She did, and kept the decision to herself. Most of the employees at McQueen didn't know they were working on the royal wedding dress; they were told it was a movie costume" (375). Secrecy and confidentiality were of great importance during the design process, and just as in the case of Diana's dress, great lengths were taken with Catherine's dress to not let the press have any hint of who was designing it or what it would look like.

The British fashion house Alexander McQueen had been around since the 1990s and was founded by its namesake when McQueen was a young designer coming out of design school at London's Central Saint Martins. Even during his school years McQueen was known for pushing the boundaries and favored a darker and edgier side of fashion,

but was also a skilled tailor who soon established himself as a premiere designer for innovative cuts and silhouettes and perfect tailoring and skilled craftsmanship²². When it was finally revealed that Catherine had indeed chosen to go with the house of McQueen, “the fashion world gasped a sigh of relief: she had chosen not only the house of a tragic British talent but what many in fashion now believe was one of the greatest couturiers ever” (Thomas 375).

After McQueen’s death, his design assistant Sarah Burton took over the running of the house, carrying on the craftsmanship and design genius that McQueen had made his label famous for. Though some might be baffled at the choice of such a rebellious designer, known as much for his savagery in his designs as for his artistry, the choice of McQueen to design the wedding gown is one worth investigating further. First, it was important that the commission go to a British designer, that much was for certain. This wedding would be the start of a new image of the future of the monarchy. Young, fresh, in touch with the changing times, and hopeful for the future. The country, like most of the world, was still struggling with the recent economic recession. Royal weddings were always good for business, and this would be no exception. The dress, like every other detail of the wedding, would be sure to support British industries. And for a marriage to a future King of England, not just any designer or gown would do. The choice of McQueen indicates a desire to stay current and modern, while simultaneously acknowledging and referencing centuries of British tailoring and heritage brands. McQueen was the best of both worlds, design and legacy.

²² McQueen was both loved and hated, but there was no doubt he was a design genius. Sadly, he took his own life February 11, 2010. For more on McQueen’s life and career, see Thomas.

After the wedding, Shulman commented, “The dress had that softness that [Sarah Burton has] brought to the label and it had all the wonderful structure of an Alexander McQueen dress, as well as a femininity. It could have been a lot of people, there are many designers who would have done something very beautiful, but it was good she [The Duchess of Cambridge] chose a more modern fashion designer” (Shulman 2011).

Clarence House, in an official statement following the reveal of the designer, indicates that Catherine was thinking about the same factors Shulman mentions, claiming that Catherine chose the label for “the beauty of its craftsmanship...Miss Middleton wished for her dress to combine traditional and modernity with the artistic vision that characterizes Alexander McQueen’s work...Ms. Burton’s design draws on [the heritage of the Arts and Crafts tradition] giving the gown the intricate embellishment a distinctive contemporary and feminine character” (qtd. in WWD). Burton herself has been quiet about the dress and the experience of making it, but after the wedding she revealed in a statement:

It has been the experience of a lifetime to work with Catherine Middleton to create her wedding dress, and I have enjoyed every moment of it. It was such an incredible honor to be asked, and I am so proud of what we and the Alexander McQueen team have created. I am delighted that the dress represents the best of British craftsmanship. Alexander McQueen’s designs are all about bringing contrasts together to create startling and beautiful clothes and I hope that by marrying traditional fabrics and lacework, with a modern structure and design we have created a beautiful dress for Catherine on her wedding day. (qtd. in WWD)

Fashion critics and the public alike were immediately enamored with the dress and it was clear that Catherine had chosen successfully and collaborated brilliantly with Burton and the team from McQueen. But as significant as the designer of the dress was, that was only part of the picture.

While the press and commentators immediately went wild over the general look of the gown and the revelation of the designer, considering it quite a coup for Burton as well as a sign that McQueen's legacy would be solidified and remain intact for years to come²³. The significance of some of the subtler details wasn't revealed until a bit later as intense study of the gown followed in the days and weeks after the wedding and the various people involved in the construction of the gown were at last able to talk about the process. The soft ivory and white lace and satin gown looked, at first glance, beautifully simple in its design. A fitted lace bodice with long, lace sleeves over a corseted satin bodice, was both elegant and modest, showing a bit of skin but not too much and covering the upper body enough to be appropriate for a wedding at the Abbey. The back of the gown was done up in 58 tiny satin-covered buttons. The bodice flares out into a full, floor length skirt, that hung delicately but revealed yards and yards of satin folds as Catherine walked and flowed into an 8ft. train. The veil fell part way down the back but didn't reach the ground. This would be a stark contrast to Diana's 25ft train. For those with any amount of fashion history and/or celebrity knowledge, the gown almost immediately reminded of a previous royal wedding. But not Diana's. Instead, it was very reminiscent of Grace Kelly, on her marriage to Prince Rainier of Monaco. Though we don't know for sure if Catherine, or Burton, was inspired by Kelly, the lace, half sheer/half covered bodice and full satin skirt are remarkably similar to Kelly's not to have

²³ The wedding was only a little over a year since McQueen's passing, and having a design house change hands can lead to instability and uncertainty. The house to get this commission would ensure a certain amount of security for the brand. The house enjoys a continued relationship with Catherine as she has worn a number of suits and dresses by them since the wedding. Her patronage combined with the "Kate effect" on sales of any items by the brand, be it from their ready to wear lines or accessories (a more affordable entry point for those wanting a piece of the brand without the funds for a full garment) has helped to firmly establish the brand as a top British fashion house.

been considered at least a partial reference in the design. And Kelly would be an interesting icon to draw upon. Kelly was also a regular citizen of her country (the United States) from a privileged but not aristocratic family who gained fame as an actress and then married into royalty. Although her background is not a direct parallel to Catherine's, they have more in common than Catherine does with some previous English royal brides. The similarity to Kelly's dress indicates a desire to have a dress fit for a princess, but not to be a copy of the public's idea of the ultimate princess, Diana.

Though simple in design at first, on closer look, there are numerous details that show just how intricate the planning and design of the dress was, as well as the various messages Catherine and Burton were hoping to convey. Bullen states, "Sarah Burton's design paid tribute to the British Arts and Crafts movement with an emphasis on fine materials and superb craftsmanship used to make the simple beautiful, often with a Romantic decorative style" (2012, 21). Though the dress appears simple, an extensive team of needle workers and dressmakers worked together to bring Catherine and Burton's design to life. The design incorporated appliqués of English and Chantilly lace, which were hand-cut and then stitched onto the gown and train. The lace pieces were all done in the shape of a flower, the English rose, Welsh daffodil, Scottish thistle, and Irish shamrock, representing the four countries of Great Britain. The lace was crafted by the Royal School of Needlework based at Hampton Court Palace, in collaboration with Burton. They used a technique called Carrickmacross, which dates back to 1820, and "had to wash their hands every thirty minutes to avoid dirtying the delicate fabric" (Wackerl 148). The underskirt of the gown was made from silk tulle and was trimmed with English Cluny lace (Bullen 2012, 21) and the veil was also decorated with hand-

crafted lace. This attention to detail, tradition, and history demonstrates Catherine's desire to incorporate symbols of tradition and heritage of the British people.

Catherine wore minimal jewelry on the day, but the pieces worn were of great significance. First there was the sapphire engagement ring that had previously belonged to the late Princess Diana, who would have been Catherine's mother-in-law. Second was the tiara. The veil was held in place by the Cartier "Halo" tiara, on loan from the Queen for the wedding. The tiara was made in 1936 and was originally purchased by the Queen's father, then the Duke of York, for his wife (later Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother), the tiara was later given to then Princess Elizabeth as an 18th birthday present (Bullen 2012, 21). Finally, Catherine wore a pair of earrings, a wedding present from her parents. They commissioned a design based on the new family crest that had been established for the family after the engagement. The design featured tiny diamond oak leaves and acorns (see Figure 9). As with the gown, Catherine's attention to detail and history is illustrated in her choice of accessories.

Even the bouquet Catherine carried held symbolism in the choice of flowers it contained. Wackerl states, "in addition to lilies of the valley (returning happiness), white hyacinths (constancy), and ivy (love and friendship), it contained the traditional twig of myrtle from a bush that Queen Victoria had planted herself in her garden on the Isle of Wight in 1845. Kate also made a very personal declaration of love to her husband: the bouquet featured a plant called Sweet William" (153). Similar to the choice of a shorter train on the gown, the bouquet was another way that Catherine intentionally wasn't trying to compete with Diana's wedding. Catherine's bouquet was significantly smaller, a delicate accessory that didn't detract from the design details of the dress.



Figure 9 - Oak leaf and acorn earrings.

Ultimately, while the lace and satin combination is reminiscent of Grace Kelly's dress, the full skirt, long sleeves, and embroidered symbolism is reminiscent of a more famous royal, Queen Elizabeth. The Queen's wedding gown featured a similar full, silk skirt covered with embroidered details. The embroidery pops more noticeably off the silk skirt of the Queen's Norman Hartnell creation than it does off the satin skirt of the Burton gown, making the Burton design subtler to read. The softness of the embroidery on the lace and fabric of the Burton gown leads to a layered process of reading the gown. At first glance, you see the silhouette and the basic style of the gown. But upon closer inspection, all of the various details in the lace and embroidery become apparent and the layers of meaning stitched into the gown begin to reveal themselves. Hartnell took inspiration from Botticelli's painting of *Primavera*, "stitching in a spring theme,

symbolic in those post-war times, of flowers, leaves and wheat, detailed in thousands of seed pearls, silver thread, and tiny sparkling crystals” (Bullen 2012, 22). Though the similarity to Grace Kelly, in regard to the basic silhouette of the gown, is hard to miss, the subtle similarity to the symbolism embroidered into the Queen’s wedding gown is likely not entirely a coincidence. This seems to be just one more way that Catherine is taking style guidance from the Queen and using the Queen’s past style during her youth as inspiration for how Catherine should dress as she enters royal life.

The High Street Recycler: Catherine and “Nannette”

For the next outfit of this analysis we must go back in time before the wedding, and then jump forward to after the wedding. Already firmly established as “Queen of the high street” before her wedding, it should have come as surprise to no one—especially after wearing an Issa dress to announce the engagement—that Catherine would reach into her wardrobe for a high street dress to wear for her official engagement photographs. Catherine had already been very strategic about when and where she would wear designer or high-end luxury pieces, and became even more strategic in these choices after the wedding. That she wore an old, altered coat to her first official appearance after the engagement set a tone that would be replicated again and again throughout the engagement and after the wedding--Catherine was a normal woman, going about her life. She would wear what she wanted, what she felt comfortable in, price and/or trend didn’t matter. Catherine was showing to the world that she had her own personal style, and while she would defer to royal protocol when necessary she was not a clothes horse or fashion slave.

For the official engagement photos, taken nearly a month after the announcement, renowned fashion photographer Mario Testino shot the couple in the historic Council Chamber at St. James Palace. William wore a charcoal grey suit with a navy-blue tie. Catherine, wore ivory. If she had been playing up the color of her engagement ring in the blue Issa dress, with the engagement photos she was hinting at wedding white. The soft ivory dress was by high street retailer Reiss, and was from a collection already almost a year old. The dress featured three-quarter length sleeves, and had a modest V-neckline that was made out of the overlap of the dress crossing the bust before falling into a trap of cascading ruffles just off center on the front of the dress. The hem falls just above the knee, repeating the subtle wrap detail from the top of the dress. The ruffles conceal a zipper which allows for no zipper to be needed in the back. The dress, named “Nannette,” is made from an acetate and rayon blend, and originally retailed for approximately £159 (see Figure 10). At the time of the photographs, the dress was already over a year old. No doubt Catherine considered what outfit to wear for the photos very carefully, but the resulting effect of choosing the Reiss dress, that wasn’t even a new purchase, gives a casual, down to earth feel to the portrait. Combined with the simple suit that William is wearing, the focus portrait ends up being the couple, and not what designer dress Catherine is wearing. Not that it didn’t stop the press, or the public, from going crazy over Catherine’s choice.



Figure 10 - William and Catherine in their official engagement photo by Mario Testino.

Almost immediately interest in the dress skyrocketed and consumers wanted to get their hands on it. Remaining stock sold out instantly and the dress soon popped up on Ebay by people wanting to make a profit. The brand eventually re-released the dress and sold out in their various locations around the world. Andy Rogers, Reiss's Brand Director believes that part of Catherine's appeal because of the way she is able to express herself and her personality through clothing, "People perceive people like Kate to have a limitless supply of designer clothes, they're surprised by [Catherine wearing high street options]...But in general, this is what we all do, this is the real world, real people dress

that way” (qtd. in Allsop). I argue that a major part of Catherine’s appeal to the public is that, as Rogers points out, she dresses as real people do. When the public looks to Hollywood celebrities, they expect the latest designer creation, because designers will give/loan celebrities clothing to wear. But for those in the position like the British monarchy, where more and more people are complaining about how much the monarchy costs taxpayers, members of the royal family have had to take a more practical and economical approach to their lifestyles. Catherine set a tone very early on that she was not going to be a frivolous fashion fanatic. She would make use of what was already in her closet and would add to her wardrobe strategically and judiciously. Something she continues to do today at the time of writing this study.

But that wouldn’t be the end of the “Nannette” dress for Catherine. She would bring the dress out again several months later after the wedding when she and Prince William went on a royal tour of North America in the summer of 2011. On July 1st, 2011 Catherine wore the “Nannette” dress to a Canada Day citizenship ceremony in Quebec. Whereas before, in the engagement photos, her only accessories were a small pair of earrings and her engagement ring, this time she used the white dress as a canvas from which her bright and bold accessories were made even more obvious (see Figure 11). She wore a scarlet red hat by Lock & Co., adorned with maple leaves of the same color, a subtle but noticeable nod to the host country. Carrying on the maple leaf theme, she also wore a diamond brooch fashioned in the shape of a maple leaf and a loan from the Queen for the tour. The brooch was a gift to the Queen from her mother and had been worn by the Queen on previous tours to Canada, Catherine’s wearing of it throughout the tour

continued a long-standing tradition²⁴. Other jewelry on the day was a simple silver bracelet and necklace with a round pendant. Carrying the red theme of the hat down through the rest of the outfit Catherine carried a red and tan, fan-shaped clutch by British accessories designer Anya Hindmarch and red square cut pumps by Albini.



Figure 11 - William and Catherine in Quebec on the 2011 Canadian Royal Tour.

²⁴ The Queen originally wore the brooch in 1951 on her first tour to Canada, so it seems especially poignant for the Queen to loan it to Catherine to wear for her first official royal tour and first tour to Canada.

With this look we see her recycling an existing dress from her wardrobe but combining it with more premium and designer accessories with the hat, bag, and shoes, as well as the addition of the loaned brooch from the royal jewelry collection belonging to the Queen. With this being the first royal tour for the newly married couple, so soon after the wedding, and such a high-profile event, it would have been expected—and acceptable—if Catherine had purchased all new clothing and accessories. The appearance of the “Nannette” dress—and a few other of Catherine’s wardrobe staples throughout the tour—mixed in with new and high end pieces during the royal tour demonstrates her use of clothing as an extension of her personality and as a professional tool, rather than being the dress up doll the media tries to make her out to be. Her clothing is beautiful, but first and foremost it’s functional and serves a purpose. The red and white combination nicely references and pays homage to the Canadian flag, and the two maple leaf items reference a national symbol. This is one of Catherine’s earliest examples of sartorial diplomacy, something she mastered on the Canadian tour, either through symbolic references like the hat and brooch in this case, or by wearing Canadian designers, or designers with Canadian heritage. This look, in a way, shows a happy medium between the simplicity of the “Nannette” dress—without accessories—in the engagement photo, and the elaborate and lavish designer opulence of the wedding gown.

The ensemble she combined for the Canada Day appearance—along with the entire Canadian tour wardrobe, showed a young woman who knew herself, and how she wanted to portray herself. Her personal style would be her stateswoman style, with little difference between the two. Where Diana had struggled to assert her identity within the role of Princess of Wales—and only came into her personal style after giving up her role

in the royal family—Catherine had set her personal style from the outset and would adapt it when the needs of her role required it. It is also worth noting that Catherine did not have a personal stylist accompany her on the tour, her choices were her own and her instincts were spot on each time.

With Catherine, we see an interesting blend of all three previous women examined in this study. She has the natural elegance and instinct for style that Jacqueline did, she's not afraid to assert her own identity and style the way that Diana did in her later years, and she's in touch with the public she represents, a friendly, down to earth, practical person, much like Michelle—with whom she shares a friendly acquaintance with²⁵. However, unlike Michelle, whose term as First Lady is now over, and therefore allows her to follow her own rules to a certain extent, Catherine's role will be for life²⁶. If anything, focus on her will only intensify as the monarchy continues to progress. As the Queen slows down her public work, it falls to the next royals in line—namely the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, Prince William and Catherine, and Prince Harry and his soon to be wife Meghan Markle—to pick up additional royal duties. At the time of writing this study, Catherine is in her third pregnancy—with “bump watch” in full force in the press—and what she wears is of great focus. Ultimately, Catherine has the ability to use her style in a variety of ways.

²⁵ The Obamas visited the UK a few times since the royal wedding and visited with the Cambridge's each time.

²⁶ Though Michelle will always be a former First Lady, and her husband always a former President, and both will still conduct themselves in a way that befits their historic statuses, the primary focus will always be on the current administration, whoever that may be at the time. Much has already been made in the press about Michelle wearing her hair naturally since leaving the White House, and for the most part she and her husband are able to live as relatively private citizens if they choose to do so. Unless Michelle were to make an obvious fashion misstep, it is unlikely that much attention would be paid to her, and at this point she is free to wear whatever brands and designers she chooses and spend her money on clothing however she wishes.

Brummett states that style, “organizes our social world. It gives us places to be and to shop and it gives us places to be and to shop, and it gives us places where we don’t belong. Style affirms who we think we are and expresses who we want to be” (43). All of the women I examine have shown this to be true, they all use their style to affirm who they believe they are and express who they would like to be. Each woman has used style as a means of personal identity communication. Catherine especially seems to have learned from the women who came before her, and from women like Michelle who are doing similar work and facing similar pressures—though Catherine has to contend with pressures that most U.S. First Ladies typically do not have to deal with²⁷. While pressures and rules have definitely relaxed over the last few decades, for stateswomen many of the rules still apply and dress has become one of the few rhetorical spaces they have access to. As Wilson states, “The social meanings of dress have likewise changed; dress marks social class, age and even gender less strictly than was former the case, but although the signs are subtler, they are still there to be read” (249). And it is in stateswomen that those subtle signs are especially still visible. Whether it’s the symbolism stitched into the floral lace of the wedding gown or the combination of accessories, colors, and mix of high end with high street as in the case of the “Nannette” dress for the engagement photos and the Canada Day ceremony, Catherine is negotiating and creating a new era of court dress for the British monarchy, one that is a blend of the old and the new. She is also crafting a new identity for herself, as we all do as we grow older, as a wife, mother, and royal, and along the way is creating a personal style that best represents herself and how she wishes

²⁷ With a few exceptions, most First Ladies enter the White House having already been married and having their children. Jacqueline had recently been pregnant prior to the campaign but still did not have to contend with the media pressures that Catherine, or any other royal, had to deal with during her first two pregnancies.

to be perceived. Brummett claims, “Identity would seem to relate to the individual; it is the sum (and perhaps a shifting and unstable sum) of who we are, which whole we affiliate, and against whom we align. If identity is a ‘possession’ of people, then it is not material like a nose or a car—although it may be embodied in the material—but it is a way we represent ourselves and others. Identity is thus inherently symbolic and imaginary” (83). I have shown in my analysis of these two dresses, and the three occasions they were worn in, balance the symbolic and imaginary identity of Catherine, as well as the individual style she is actively creating for herself.

One final thought before I conclude this chapter, while the press likes to compare her to Diana, I think it is far more likely, and far more interesting, that she seems to be modeling her style—at least in part—after the Queen. Catherine has worn designers favored by Diana, particularly Catherine Walker, but in those choices, there are also similarities to the Queen’s dressing. Most of Catherine’s Catherine Walker suits and dresses are solid color choices in simple, classic designs, very similar to the style the Queen has adopted in her later years, just a bit younger and more stylish in cut and silhouette. Also, while fashion commentators will discuss Catherine’s habit of recycling clothing, that is also not something only she has done. As Murphy and Davies-Strodder explain, “Efforts to economise are not unusual in royal dressing. The Queen often wears her dresses on more than one occasion and has been known to recycle items from her wardrobe from past decades” (118). For the Queen, who grew up during an era of rationing and “make do and mend,” she also has balanced a mix of designer and couture items, mostly from court dressers like Norman Hartnell or in recent years Angela Kelly.

While most of the rumors of Catherine receiving lessons in etiquette are largely unfounded, it is clear that the senior members of the royal family have been working closely with both Prince William and Catherine and that they in turn look up to the senior members for guidance. It would hardly be unreasonable to assume that Catherine has received a certain amount of style advice and guidance from the Queen, or that at the very least she has looked to past images of the Queen at public appearances to use as a frame of reference. And for a young woman more concerned with doing her job well and raising a young family, there would be no better style role model than the Queen, which would certainly explain why Catherine does tend to play it safe and traditional with her clothing.

Conclusion

It's worth noting that while Catherine's wedding gown for the ceremony and also the Sarah Burton gown worn to the evening reception, were both standout, couture creations, with a price tag to match, virtually every other outfit surrounding the official appearances of the engagement and marriage has been high street. The Issa dress and Reiss dress were definitely from the premium end of the high street, with higher price tags, but Catherine also wore a bird print Issa dress (£400) with L.K. Bennett wedge heels (£175) when she arrived at the Goring Hotel the night before the wedding. And for the appearance on the lawn of Buckingham Palace the day after the wedding, she wore the same wedge heels and a blue, polyester dress from Zara, which retailed for £49.99. In the appearances both before and after the wedding, Catherine demonstrated that she is most comfortable in the more practical and affordable high street clothing.

Catherine has become a champion of both the high street and British fashion in general, with many designers singing her praises. Designer Alice Temperley, whose designs Catherine has worn a number of times, says, “There is no one else who has an effect like her. It has really brought British fashion to the forefront again...She’s been brilliant for British fashion and great for the whole economy” (qtd in Murphy and Davies-Strodder 118). Not since Diana had a British public figure championed British fashion so strongly. Catherine sparked an increase of sales of sheer hosiery (Armstrong 143) and demonstrated that you can shop your own wardrobe and still be stylish. She also has exemplified the idea of putting your own style first, and not being a slave to trends. Her appeal lies in women not only being able to replicate some of their favorite looks worn by Catherine but also in the idea that all she’s really doing is being herself, something that every woman already has the power to do.

Though comparisons to Diana are common, they often miss what seems to be at the heart of Catherine’s clothing philosophy. As Armstrong points out, “If anything, [Catherine] is the anti-Diana...Diana was a different time. The Princess of Wales set off on her first mega state trip to Australia in 1985 with...20 day dresses, 12 ballgowns, and two tiaras. For her eight-day tour of the Far East, Kate took 16 dresses, 13 pieces of unspecified jewelry and nine...pairs of nude tights” (142). In many ways, it would seem that Catherine is intentionally trying to stay out of her mother-in-law’s famous shadow, for precisely the reason everyone seems to think Diana is Catherine’s style icon: replicating anyone’s style is a sure-fire way to diminishing your own unique identity. Catherine’s style may be safe, even boring at times to some, but her style—much like the

Queen's—is still incredibly relevant and important. Lisa Armstrong for *British Vogue* sums it up the best:

[T]hose who dismiss what [Catherine] wears as irrelevant are so hopelessly wide off the mark. This is a woman who will, increasingly, play a central role on the world stage, helping to shape how Britain is seen internationally. Yet, anachronistically...she must remain mute. Of course her clothes count. They won't define her—her service to her country and relationship with her husband should do that—but they're one of the most effective and instant means of communication she currently has at her disposal, as well as an outward manifestation of how she's feeling. (142)

Clothing for Catherine—as it has been shown in the previous three chapters for Jacqueline, Diana, and Michelle—is truly the one means of expression she has control over. Her speeches may be written for her, for the rare times she is able to speak publicly, but what she wears is her choice alone. When one looks at her individual choices subtle references and symbolism abounds in each outfit²⁸. With very few—and only minor—missteps in her early years as a royal girlfriend and then fiancé, and with a practically flawless sartorial record since the wedding, Catherine truly learned from the best stateswomen of the past to help her create the ultimate stateswoman style for the 21st century.

In the following chapter I will conclude my analysis and offer some final thoughts about these four women as well as discuss the ways their clothing lives on in digital spaces as well as in museum exhibitions around the world.

²⁸ Catherine has taken sartorial diplomacy and subtle signals to new levels compared to the other three women in this analysis. Due to the constraints of the study I have only been able to touch on a small fraction of the examples I have uncovered. A breakdown and analysis of all of the times Catherine has incorporated symbolism into her wardrobe or found some way of acknowledging a host country while on tour or a visiting country to the UK would be a separate project in itself.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: SIMILARITIES, NEW MEANINGS, AND DIGITAL AFTERLIVES

In the previous chapters, I argue for the various ways that the stateswomen selected for this study have used their professional wardrobes—and at times their personal, private wardrobes—to create a public style identity for themselves. While Jacqueline established a new baseline for stateswoman style, I show how Diana, Michelle, and Catherine have embraced, challenged, and/or subverted that style. These arguments are important because of the way style of dress functions as unique expressions of identity. By examining the style of public women, we can better understand the way that style functions in the lives of everyday people. This is especially important for women, for whom style can be a nonverbal way of making statements about themselves and their beliefs. Though this study has looked at prominent figures in public life, the examples discussed in the various case studies could be adapted to the average woman.

Throughout women's lives they have formal occasions to attend: weddings, the first day at a new job—times women want to follow the rules and dress “appropriately” and times they want to break the rules and dress how they want. As I argue specifically with Catherine, but would also apply to the other women, part of her mass appeal with the public is that she doesn't seem that different from them in regard to what she wears. While style is a unique expression of personal identity, it is natural to look to certain women, particularly those labeled by society to be “fashion icons”—a term that has long been associated with Jacqueline and Diana and in recent years has been applied with increasing frequency to Michelle and Catherine—and use their style as inspiration. When

those women also happen to shop at the same places the average woman shops, that's even better.

This final chapter has a few different goals. First, I explore the similarities and overlaps among the women examined in the previous chapters and present my conclusions from the analyses in the previous chapters. While each of the women have used style in slightly different ways, they have many similarities that link them in a shared stateswoman style and these are worth looking at in order to see bigger picture of how stateswoman style functions and is reported on by the press. Second, I discuss the digital afterlife of these women and the ways their clothing and style is being preserved, both online and offline, by amateurs and professionals alike. Third, I explore the meanings these women have today, both the lasting legacies of Jacqueline and Diana, as well as the cultural significance of Michelle and Catherine today. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts on future directions of this research and final questions and ideas about style and the women I've been examining.

Similarities & Overlaps

Each of the women I've discussed represent different time periods, ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as different official roles and duties. Nevertheless, there are many ways that the style of these women is similar and overlaps one another. Obviously, Jacqueline's style is singular as she comes first in the timeline of these four women. She set the tone and established a baseline on which we can speculate that the other three women followed. But as we move further along the timeline, it is evident that there are ways that Michelle and Catherine reference Diana in their style. Their references are particularly evident in the way that they navigate when to embrace

the expectations and values placed on their official roles and Jacqueline did, and when to challenge those expectations, as Diana did—even if they don't transgress or subvert the rules entirely. There are also ways that Michelle and Catherine make similar sartorial choices.

Michelle has frequently been compared in the fashion media to Jacqueline, and both Michelle and her husband have been compared in the media to the Kennedy's. After a long line of First Ladies between herself and Jacqueline, Michelle seemed to be the first to finally bring fashion and style back into the White House. While their specific style choices were different, there was a general style sensibility and appreciation for fashion as an art, but also as a major American industry. Both women, but Michelle especially, used their platforms to highlight the best of American fashion and to demonstrate American style abroad. And while Jacqueline just may have written the book on modern sartorial diplomacy, Diana certainly refined it, and Michelle and Catherine have seemed to add entirely new chapters. Michelle and Catherine also frequently take on more symbolism in their official dressing, finding even the smallest ways to make a subtle statement or reference through their clothing. Their use of symbolism and sartorial diplomacy is far from limited to just the garments examined in this study.

In a way, being a stateswoman is like belonging to a sorority; new stateswomen can look to existing and previous stateswomen for examples of how to dress and how to craft their own personal stateswoman style. Arthur, in her examination of dress and the social construction of gender in sororities demonstrates that clothing becomes a metaphor for organizational belonging. She argues, “[T]he body is a site for the social construction of gender in general and femininity in particular. The social construction of gender occurs

through adherence to a system of gender role obligations” (93). Arthur found that “The social construction of femininity occurred as young women actively worked to reconcile a personal sense of self with other salient identities, notable that of sorority member” (92). Each of the stateswomen analyzed in this study were still young at the time they began their official roles, particularly Diana and Catherine. And while most of them were still older than the average sorority girl—Diana being the exception—they all still had to navigate and negotiate many similar gender expectations and obligations that sorority sisters contend with when they pledge a sorority. Ultimately, stateswomen are all part of a larger organized collective of women who represent their country in a representative and symbolic capacity

The similarity in stateswoman style and the public expectations, is why so many current stateswomen get compared to previous stateswomen. It also can create a sense of familiarity and belonging among stateswomen, the friendship between Michelle and Catherine seems to exemplify this. Being a stateswoman, particularly one whose style is constantly watched, is like being a member of a very exclusive club. Throughout the years, each of these women have struggled—some more publicly than others—to grapple with the gender roles, obligations, and values they must conform to, without feeling like they are giving up a part of themselves. This was something that Diana clearly struggled with in the early years of her marriage, particularly during the years of struggling with bulimia. But Jacqueline, Michelle, and Catherine all have had their moments of struggling to abide by the rules and expectations their roles placed on them. This struggle can be made greater for the newer generations of stateswomen as the roles women play in society have greatly changed over the past several decades, but the official roles they fill

still adhere to often archaic and antiquated notions of modesty and femininity. Arthur states, “Ideal beauty is ideal because it does not really exist. Between the ideal woman and the real woman lies terrain filled with ambiguity and vulnerability” (92). Between the expectations from the press, the public, and the institutions they represent, there is an always ongoing struggle to navigate this ambiguous and vulnerable terrain, and if there are similarities to previous generations of stateswomen it could likely be because following the example of someone who’s already succeeded at what you are currently struggling with could be one method of slowly finding a way through the struggle.

An entire separate study could be conducted on the many and various times each of these women have emulated or reference the style of one another. Online image sharing platforms like Pinterest and Instagram (which will be discussed further in the next section) are filled with examples of side by side comparisons of Michelle and Jacqueline, Diana and Catherine, Diana and Jacqueline, Catherine and Jacqueline, as well as Diana, Catherine, and a young Queen Elizabeth. Some of the similarities are as simple as wearing the same color, or similar print. But others are almost identical in the style and sometimes also the event the garment is worn to. For example, Diana and Catherine both wore blue dresses with white polka dots during the first public appearance outside London’s Lindo Wing of St. Mary’s Hospital following the birth of their first-born sons. Online magazines and websites love compiling lists like “37 Times Kate Middleton Dressed Like Diana” (Kosin). Some of the moments are a bit of a stretch, but there are enough strong similarities to suggest that the current generation of stateswomen probably do look back to the previous generations as a style reference. And even if the current generation of stateswomen isn’t looking back to the previous generation, the public

certainly is. Fashion is known to be cyclical, what fades from prominence in one decade will only get reinvented in a later decade, so it is natural that we look at our current style icons and find ways they are following in the footsteps of the icons that came before them.

As I demonstrate throughout the analysis of these four women, clothing has power—it can give power or it can take power away from the wearer. Clothing is continuously functioning in various social circumstances and combined with the social context clothing can convey great meaning. The way clothing is interpreted by the individual wearing the garment as well as by the public that receives the garment is a combination of our own internalized social perception and our internal interpretation plus cultural interpretations.

What makes these women special? Each of the women in this study seem to have possessed an innate sense of how an outfit would be read by the press and the public, as well as a keen understanding of the press and the feedback loop the press provided. They all made interesting and creative choices with the way they constructed an outfit—or in the case of official tours, a series of outfits—and those choices were always led by their individual style, rather than by following trends. Each of these women, in a way, were reluctant fashion icons. Each of them wished to be known for something more than just the clothing that they wore, but they also understood that clothing was still an important part of the roles they performed and that their official positions came with expectations for the way they would dress. They each learned how to challenge and negotiate a space for their individual styles within those expectations of their roles. These women are real working women, the way they dress makes them relatable to the general public.

Though the press refers to them as fashion icons, they are not the same kind of icons as women like Marilyn Monroe or Audrey Hepburn, or more recently the Kardashians or the Hadids. For fashion icons in the popular culture sphere their clothing serves a different function. Their clothes are based on film characters or the public persona they have constructed, their clothing and style can change based on whatever role they are playing or brand they are collaborating with. For celebrities, clothing becomes a form of body as advertisement. For stateswomen icons, their clothing is representative of their construction of personal identity and is not influenced by other factors. The outfits worn by stateswomen icons is also judged by different factors, such as how it represents the country the stateswoman is from and a bad choice can be read as disgracing their country. This leads to their choices being read differently than popular culture celebrities. While stateswomen are culturally considered “fashion icons,” I argue that stateswomen style operates outside of celebrity style. As I show in the preceding chapters, stateswoman style is a separate, unique, identifiable style that is different from political women or celebrities. We need to make this distinction because the term stateswoman style captures the specific work that their style performs and helps us understand their popularity and their fashion choices and the way the public wants to replicate these women’s style. Stateswomen women have an agency and authenticity that fashion icons don’t have and provide examples of how “normal” women can use their own style choices to gain agency.

They are “not body as advertisement”—as celebrities are—but “body as a source of agency.” This helps to challenge the broad sweeping claims about fashion being patriarchal or an unimportant, frivolous topic to study. Stateswomen, like many ordinary

women, face what Banim, Guy, and Green refer to as the “wardrobe moment” of having to decide what identity we are going to be that day. Every woman has expectations placed upon her that she must meet day to day, her clothing plays a part in how she meets those expectations. Stateswomen provide examples of what that can look like for the average woman. For every woman, stateswomen included, clothing is a rhetorical statement that they make every day. These women exemplify the way choices can be made powerfully—because they are “like us” more than fashion icons.

These stateswomen have such enduring impact because the public is able to have access to their transitions and evolutions in style in a way that fashion icons don’t have—because of their continuing status and longevity of their public role. Models, musicians, actors, and other popular culture figures eventually fade away but stateswomen remain, and many—particularly the ones identified in this study—have a digital and cultural afterlife. These stateswomen icons show the public evolving negotiations between personal and public style and identity. They demonstrate the ways that clothing choices can be empowering ways to construct identity and use clothing as an identity statement. This is instrumental in helping average women of the public learn how they can use clothing as a rhetorical statement that creates agency and identity.

Digital Afterlife & Preservation

Times are changing. Jacqueline and Diana are no longer alive. Michelle is no longer in the White House with the intense public scrutiny that comes with living there and working as First Lady. Only Catherine remains and active, full time stateswoman. But all of their histories are being recorded and preserved. While their official histories have already been written and rewritten in traditional forms over the years, Jacqueline

and Diana's digital histories have largely been done well after their deaths. Michelle became First Lady at a time when social media had finally exploded. And with Catherine, everything she wears in public is blasted around the world via platforms like Instagram or Pinterest in less than 24 hours²⁹. As Church Gibson explains, "[I]mages 'bleed' across the media...the traditional boundaries between the different media institutions and strands within the media have themselves broken down, partly through the new power of the Internet. Not only does content now seep across these boundaries, but the different forms of media text are taking on new configurations and creating new relationships" (125). While the news cycle reports new information in a never ending progression, old news always gets replaced with new, and the old pictures are replaced. But online, particularly on image sharing platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, or Flickr, the images can live on carefully chosen and curated by the operator of each profile on each platform. A quick search of any of the women in this analysis on these popular sights will pull up countless images and profiles/accounts dedicated to collecting images of these women and preserving them online. There is an appeal to this sort of amateur digital preservation. Church Gibson, discussing fashion blogs, states, "Part of the appeal of blogs, perhaps, is the fact that they are interactive; with a few clicks, a reader can become part of the fashion text and a participant in the dialogue" (135). I argue that just as fashion blogs allow the average person to engage in dialogue about the fashion industry and trends, digital image sharing sites allow average people to participate in what history gets

²⁹ Throughout the planning and execution of this study I have followed a number of Pinterest boards and Instagram accounts dedicated to all of the women I would examine. In the case of Catherine, I often knew of a new outfit or public appearance due to new images popping up on these platforms well before I managed to find images from more mainstream news sites reporting on the event.

preserved and which stories get told, something that previously would have been the territory of museum curators and scholars.

Pinterest, as one example, features a number of “boards³⁰” dedicated each of these women filled with anywhere from a couple dozen images to a few thousand. And older icons like Jacqueline or Diana are just as popular, if not more so, than newer icons like Michelle or Catherine. Sites like Pinterest are giving these women a digital afterlife that just might rival their officially recorded histories. Though this does come with some issues, as users are able to preserve the aspects of the women that they like the most and overlook any less favorable images, or vice versa which I’ll discuss in a moment. There are boards that are filled with all of the most fashionable and stylish looks worn by these women, and a number that play into the seemingly effortless grace and elegance of Jacqueline, or the innocent “shy Di,” overlooking Jacqueline’s tenacious attempts to control her public image or Diana’s more subversive moments. Even if Diana’s subversive moments like the black Stambolian dress discussed in Chapter 4 are shared online, the context is usually dropped, and the image might only be accompanied by a comment from the user saying they like the dress she’s wearing, and demonstrated knowledge of the significance of the dress. Pinterest users who *are* dedicated to carefully and accurately recording and preserving the images of these women are plagued with the problem within the way the site was designed, that allows new “pinners” to replace the text when they “repin” the image. But that doesn’t stop users from doing their best, and it’s interesting to see how users on different sites, like Pinterest, are working in unofficial

³⁰ Pinterest functions as a digital cork board. Users create different “boards” for different topics (Michelle Obama, for instance) and then “pin” or save images related to that topic to that board.

capacities to collect and curate images of these women. But there is a less flattering and negative side. On Pinterest, and no doubt on other online spaces³¹, there are boards created by anti-fans of these women, notably anti-fans of Michelle and Catherine. There are many images that portray what I will call “oppositional viewings” of these women. In the case of Catherine, it can be as simple as an unflattering angle, an awkward facial expression caught at just the wrong moment, or an image from one of her unfortunate moments when a gust of wind caught her skirt and blew it upwards exposing her body. But with Michelle it can be much more vicious. There are several that compare her, unfavorably to Jacqueline, usually accompanied by a claim that there is no longer any class in the White House. More than a few images border on racist hate speech. These types of images are in the minority, but they are still visible if one searches long enough and would be worthy of future study.

Another type of image that is seen on Pinterest are what I call “alternate viewings” of these women, particularly Diana and Catherine. These images involve the use of Photoshop and also pop up on the popular blog site Tumblr and then get pinned/shared to Pinterest. These images take different forms for Diana and Catherine. In the case of Diana, her face is photoshopped onto the bodies of celebrities in designer gowns on the red carpet. For Catherine, sometimes she is photoshopped into designer gowns she never wore, other times it is a nearly unaltered image, save for the addition of a tiara when she was never wearing one in the first place. There seems to be a desire to play the “princess” angle out even further than what we have seen so far. Today tiaras are

³¹ As digital preservation was outside the main goals of this project it was not an area I delved deeply into, but these were things that I noticed just through my casual use of Pinterest as a holding place for the images I was collecting.

only worn to a limited number of formal, white tie, state functions. Catherine has only attended a handful of these types of events since her marriage and entry into the royal family, so there are limited photos of her in formal dress wearing a tiara. Fans online seem to want to change that.

On Instagram, there are a number of accounts dedicated to these stateswomen, but some of the most active and robust accounts are centered around Catherine, with Instagram being used as a running record of her style highlights. Some of these accounts can be incredibly detailed. One such account is “@katemidleton” run by a young woman named Katie in New Zealand. Katie posts on a daily basis either posting outfits worn that day by Catherine if there has been a public appearance or posting older photos, usually with some sort of thematic purpose, such as all the times Catherine has worn a certain designer or a rundown of what was worn on a previous trip or appearance if a second one is coming up. For example, recapping what was worn to the 2011 Canadian royal tour ahead of the 2017 Canadian tour. Each post is accompanied by a long and well researched caption, and Katie takes great care to find accurate prices, checks if the item is still for sale, includes relevant historical information (as in the post on tiaras Catherine has worn), as well as includes pertinent current information from official press releases and credible news sources. Far from being merely a fan and gossip page, accounts like “@katemidleton” is perhaps one of the best examples of what can be done by individuals outside of the official historical preservation process to preserve this information, particularly for a figure like Catherine who will only become more interesting over time, but for whom much of this information is not currently being recorded.

Outside of online spaces, in the offline real world, work has already begun on preserving the actual garments themselves worn by these women, with Catherine as a slight exception, as I will discuss below. Over the years there have been numerous attempts to tell the fashion stories of these women, indicating the interest of the public in learning more about these women. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., has had the First Ladies Collection on display in one form or another since 1914. The collection features a variety of clothing worn by former First Ladies, but it was Helen Taft in 1912—in advance of the opening—donated the gown worn to her husband's inaugural ball in 1909 that established a precedent for future First Ladies to donate their inaugural gowns, a tradition that continues to this day (Graddy and Pastan 7). Additionally, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in collaboration with the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, put together an exhibition from May 1st-July 29th, 2001, of Jacqueline's clothing from her White House Years. It was then remounted at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Massachusetts from September 15th, 2001-February 28th, 2002.

Diana's clothing has been displayed a number of times. The most widely covered display was in conjunction with the 1997 auction at Christie's where she auctioned 79 of her dresses for charity, raising over \$3 million. Diana's wedding gown, along with other clothing and personal items from her childhood and later years have previously been on display at the Spencer family home Althorp, in an exhibition titled "Diana: A Celebration", as well as in traveling exhibitions throughout the U.S., but the exhibition

was closed worldwide in 2014³². Kensington Palace, in London, has featured Diana's clothing in "Fashion Rules" in 2013 and "Fashion Rules: Restyled" in 2016, which featured items worn by Diana as well as by Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. From February 2017-February 2018, Kensington Palace featured a new exhibition of Diana's clothing, titled "Diana: Her Fashion Story," which features 25 of Diana's dresses and "tracks her evolution as a princess, trendsetter, humanitarian, and woman, whose ability to connect with people remains powerful today" (Lynn 1). In addition to these there have been a scattered amount of displays of Diana's clothing, primarily of the dresses that were part of the Christie's auction who either display the dresses themselves or have loaned the dresses to be part of larger collections/exhibitions, but these have not been officially sponsored by her estate or the Historic Royal Palaces charity—the organization who have run the exhibitions at Kensington Palace.

As stated above, Catherine is a bit of an exception to all this. As her wardrobe is still in active use, nothing from her official working wardrobe or her private wardrobe has been on display, with a few interesting exceptions. Her wedding gown was initially placed on display, the summer following the wedding, in Buckingham Palace during the Palace's summer opening to the public. However, after it's time on display—during which 626,7678 people saw it in 73 days, and earned £10 million in ticket sales (Lydall)—it was cleaned, preserved and returned to Catherine, it is unknown if it will ever be on display again. Additionally, there have been two unofficial displays. First, the black sheer dress Catherine wore in a fashion show while at St. Andrews University was

³² The terms of Diana's will state that on Prince Harry's 30th birthday, all of her possessions, including those on display at Althorp, would revert from the Spencer family to Princes William and Harry (C. Wilson).

briefly displayed when it went up for auction. Second, a selection of garments—identical copies of some of the dresses, both high street and designer items—worn by Catherine are on display on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, California as part of a Princess Diana exhibition. But both of these have been done without the cooperation of Catherine herself. Catherine’s lack of interest in participating in exhibitions of clothing or in donating/loaning her clothing for such exhibitions indicates a perspective on her wardrobe as still being in use and being a functional, working wardrobe, rather than a bunch of show clothes. Like Diana, Catherine has consistently tried to emphasize that she wants to be taken seriously for her work and official duties, and not be seen as just a fashion icon.

The combination of digital preservation for these women, their images, and their clothing, in online spaces by amateur preservationists and unofficial and officially sanctioned exhibitions of their clothing brings up an interesting conversation of what is happening to the cultural memory of these women. Chancey, in her examination of images of Diana following her death, argues that the internet could either erase or preserve images and official identity. Chancey states, “Clearly the field of imagery is being edited in the wake of her death, which years yet a new and more socially conventional simulacrum of Diana, one in which she performs all of the roles of traditional femininity (mother, wife, princess) and has no transgressive qualities (sexually active, aggressive, aging)” (170). While Diana was alive, the press was more than happy to post unflattering pictures of her, but following her death, there was a clear shift in which images were printed. Chancey continues, “Now that the flow of images must stop, the press has stopped to sift through the extensive photographic evidence of her life and

re-publish those photos that are respectful and sentimental” (170). But what that does is alter the total memory of her life. Chancey’s article was written in 2001, only a few years after Diana’s death, while the internet was still exploding and before the creation of sites like Pinterest or Instagram. Still, a survey of the images available on these sites shows that Chancey was likely correct. While there are images of Diana in the Stambolian cocktail dress, they are usually framed around Diana’s style, rather than the motivations behind the choice to wear the dress that evening. And virtually none of the unflattering tabloid and paparazzi images can be found, unless searched for diligently online.

Chancey argues:

As her death becomes more and more distant, the simulacrum that photography has created becomes more contained, more altered, and more appropriately feminine. Those sex scandals, street brawls, and bad cellulite days are being edited out of the record. Instead the living and complicated Diana defined by scandals, eating disorders, and friction within the royal family, a newer, streamlined, prettified post-mortem version is being created. The Diana memorial industry has edited the massive visual record of Diana’s life so that we see only the fairytale side of her life. (172)

While the images and the stories behind them can be altered, edited, or sanitized, the clothing in them remains the same. By studying Diana’s clothing, we can get a better understanding of the complex life she lived beyond the fairytale. In the various gift shop and tourist stand books and magazines sold throughout London featuring Diana, many of them focus primarily on this memorialized, fairytale version of Diana, rather than the truly dynamic, complex, and imperfect woman she was.

This is also evident in the images I continually saw online and the way users interacted with images they felt did not represent Diana. The photoshopped images are largely deemed a disgrace and shameful by other users, but it is not frowned on within the online community to see images of a ghost like Diana photoshopped as a layer over

images of William and Catherine at their son George's christening. The image of the "saintly" Diana is allowed, but any image that does not fit that ideal is not. It leads one to wonder if, as Chancey says, "Given the self-censorship on the Internet and the lack of archived back issues of tabloids, one wonders if the entire photograph record of the transgressive, scandalous Diana will one day be impossible to retrieve" (174n11). Only time will tell. But it appears likely that could be what happens if the example of Jacqueline is any indication.

While there is an extensive photographic record of Jacqueline's life, by far the most popular images are the ones from her White House years and the mythical "Camelot" days. Jacqueline lived before the height of paparazzi intrusion, so unlike Diana there was never much of a record of a transgressive Jacqueline. Michelle has managed to stay out of any scandalous tabloid stories, so there aren't really any "embarrassing" photos from her past. But there is a question of what will one day happen to images of Catherine years down the road. Images of the black sheer dress worn in the fashion show have already begun to fade from prominence in online spaces, and Catherine's version of the Stambolian dress worn by Diana, a short, black beaded dress worn to a club during her and William's break, is also less frequently circulated. One thing Chancey doesn't articulate is where the average consumer of these images fits in this argument. Before the internet, what images were circulated was the decision of tabloid and press editors. But these days even when an organization tries to pull an image off the web, someone else is there to upload it again. Nothing ever really dies on the internet. So as long as even one person has an interest in preserving a certain aspect of history, that artifact or image stands a chance. It will be interesting to see over the next

several decades what happens to the memories of Jacqueline and Diana, and how the stories of Michelle and Catherine are told.

Their Meanings Today

Though Jacqueline and Diana are no longer alive, their style legacies live on today. Michelle may no longer be in the White House, but she will always be one of the most stylish First Ladies ever in its residence and we have yet to see what the next chapter of Michelle's public life will bring. Given her and her husband's philanthropy and work with the Obama Foundation, it is unlikely Michelle will live a totally private life in her post White House years the way that Jacqueline did. Catherine's style journey is still being written. Stateswomen are not the same as celebrities but they are viewed by the public in a similar way, mostly because the public is not always aware of the various rules that come with being a stateswoman, whether that is as a First Lady of a country or a high ranking royal. First Ladies can deal with additional backlash against their perceived "celebrity" status during a campaign, something both Jacqueline and Michelle had to deal with. Though neither Jacqueline nor Michelle were national household names at the start of each of the presidential campaigns, their individual styles and approaches to fashion soon garnered attention by the opposition. Jacqueline was depicted as not supporting American business due to her love of European fashion. During the campaign, Pat Nixon proclaimed, "I like American designers... I think they are the best in the world. I buy most of my clothes off the racks in different stores around Washington" (qtd. in Bowles 27). Clothing has the power to represent different ideologies and philosophies, and the wrong choice of clothing can counteract the message and platform a campaign is running on. In 2008, there was focus on the perceived celebrity status of the Obamas,

Church Gibson points out that while Michele, “made it quite clear that she herself wanted to be taken seriously as a well-qualified lawyer with her own political ideas.

Nevertheless, public interest in the new American first lady quickly became focused on her clothes and appearance” (39). While the public and press may have wanted to focus on her clothing, as if Michelle was just another celebrity actor or music star, in choosing to give attention to emerging and/or minority designers, clothing became one way that she could still make political statements, without opening her mouth. Her clothing also helped her negotiate the judgements placed on her by others, something rarely dealt with by men who are rarely judged for what they wear. Michelle briefly discussed the sartorial double standards between her and President Obama when getting ready for formal events and confided that he wore the same tuxedo for every formal state event during his eight years in the White House, while she had to create a different look for each one (Gonzales).

Since royals don’t have elections, they don’t have the intense spotlight pointed at them for a short but sustained period of time the way First Ladies do. However, they do have attention focused on them on a near daily basis, and the slightest misstep gets reported. This started from the very beginning with Diana. The notorious tabloid photo of Diana as a kindergarten teacher posing with two of her young students with her skirt backlit by the sun, showed the very clear outline of her legs. As Denney explains, “The picture divulges her total humiliation and subjugation to the media men, setting the precedent for future such infringements of her privacy. Press photographers were making choices for her about how she would be represented to the public; she was continuously exposed, [in this case] literally” (48). There was also much attention placed on Diana

after her first official appearance with Prince Charles following their engagement announcement, a gala charity concert at Goldsmith's Hall in London. She wore a black ruffled dress with a strapless bodice designed by design team Emanuel's. They say, "We hadn't considered the fact that when Diana bent over—as she would have to when getting out of the car—she would show quite a lot of cleavage. We just thought she looked fabulous" (Emanuel and Emanuel 33). Instead of focusing on the event, or even just that Diana was wearing a beautiful dress, the focus was on the cleavage.

The press and the public didn't quite know what to make of such a revealing design on a young woman who so far had been perceived as shy and demure. Denney points out two issues important to the public reception of this dress, "For one, Lady Diana did not repeat the experience of the décolletage black dress. This action indicates her own willingness to conform to what her audience wanted: a more demure, innocent representation. Nonetheless, these observers hint at the uncomfortable dichotomy of having a young, sexually inexperienced woman appearing simultaneously as a sexualized being" (47).

Similar to Diana being a little too revealing in that black dress, Catherine has also found herself in uncomfortable situations related to not being covered enough. There have been the little moments, such as when a gust of wind has caught her skirt and blown it upward on a few occasions, which always gets put in the paper. Then there have been the more serious moments, such as when Catherine was on a private holiday with her husband in 2012, and was sunbathing topless, unaware that paparazzi with telephoto lenses were taking her picture. No British tabloid would print the pictures, for fear of backlash from the Palace, but a French tabloid did. For a regular celebrity, outside of an

official public role like stateswomen, such a scandal would be unfortunate but rarely destroys a career, but it can be particularly damaging for stateswomen who are held to higher standards than a film or music star, perhaps impossibly high standards, after all, they are still women entitled to a certain amount of privacy (in the case of the topless photos of Catherine) and to not have cameras aimed at areas of their bodies in the hopes that a gust of wind will come along at an opportune moment or that she will be leaning forward too far as she gets out of the car, revealing too much cleavage. Diana eventually developed a strategy for the latter situation and began using her clutch handbags to cover her chest as she stepped out of cars. Cameras have the ability to freeze time, and a wardrobe glitch that lasts on a second, can be caught by the camera and last forever³³. There are also moments from Catherine's pre-engagement life that continue to be brought up and used to portray her in a different light. The university fashion show outfit is certainly not in line with what a royal would, or should, wear, and had she grown up within the aristocracy, she likely would not have been permitted to participate in such an event. Likewise, the hot pants worn to a charity roller skating event, during her break from her relationship with William, are reported to have not been a favorite for the Palace. Even something as simple as not wearing hosiery could land a royal in hot water. A rule Catherine has always followed, which sparked an increase in hosiery sales.

Another area stateswomen differ from regular celebrities is that First Ladies or royals are not allowed to overtly take advantage of their celebrity status in the same way that celebrities in other arenas are able to. They are not allowed to receive free gifts from

³³ When watching video footage of the times Catherine's skirts have been blown upward, these moments typically last for only a second or two, but the photos expand that second into something that seems as if she was walking around on show.

brands, everything must be paid for. There is a slight exception for First Ladies, clothing can be donated, but it is then considered property of the National Archives—or in the case of the Inaugural Ball gowns, donated to the Smithsonian collection. What is worn during a photoshoot is also exempt, as the clothing goes back to the magazine, as in the cases of various cover shoots Michelle did with US fashion and ladies' magazines during her tenure, or the cover shoot Catherine did with British *Vogue* in 2016. But the usual free gifts of everyday clothing, jewelry, shoes, and more that brands and PR companies lavish on regular celebrities in the hopes of free publicity and social media coverage is strictly against the rules for stateswomen³⁴. There are not brand sponsorships or collaborations in the way that celebrities might exclusively wear one designer throughout the promotion of a film or album release. This is for important and practical reasons; the fashion and beauty industries are multi-billion dollar industries. For stateswomen to be sponsored by particular brands or designers would be comparable to politicians who receive money from industries to try to sway their vote on policy decisions. However, this could be precisely the reason why their style still holds so much power and significance over the public that follows them. If an actor like Emma Watson wears something from Burberry, the public might assume that that choice is—at least in part—because she had been sent something, particularly after her 2009 campaign with the brand. But if Catherine wears Burberry, it is because she liked it enough to pay for it, and that can have huge selling power for consumers. Catherine and Michelle have both been

³⁴ I am specifically referencing stateswomen from the US and UK here, I am not sure what the rules regarding gifts in other countries for First Ladies or high-ranking royals, and this could potentially be an interesting line of new researching given the rising trend of influencer marketing.

known to crash websites and sell out items simply by wearing them on a public appearance.

It's not that this doesn't happen with other major celebrities, but it seems to happen more frequently with stateswomen, and I argue that it is because of the perceived authentic connection and choice to wear the item, rather than wearing something that has been gifted in exchange for free publicity. Likewise, because stateswomen make their own wardrobe purchases, they re-wear those items multiple times, even in today's social media age where every outfit is captured, Michelle and Catherine recycle their clothing and shop their closets more frequently than it seems Jacqueline or Diana did, even though Jacqueline and Diana had the benefit of not having every single outfit recorded by the press. In some ways, women like Jacqueline, Diana, Michelle, and Catherine are icons of anti-fashion. They operate within the fashion system and outside of it simultaneously. In an industry where there is something new every week, particularly the world of fast fashion on the high street, to have high profile women—that many designers would love to have wear their designs—recycling clothing and choosing from within their existing wardrobes, puts stateswomen like the ones analyzed in this study in a separate category from fashionable celebrities who are not bound by the same rules and expectations as stateswomen. This makes stateswomen more like the average women they represent, which thus allows their clothing choices to serve as a lesson in true power dressing and identity construction that ordinary women can learn from. Ultimately, it's not just about the pretty clothing these stateswomen wear, it's what we can learn from them about identity construction and expression and how clothing can give women agency in a world

that's constantly trying to tell women who they should be and what they should look like and that constantly holds them up to an unattainable "ideal" standard.

But it is not just in their celebrity status and selling power that these stateswomen demonstrate their continued cultural significance. The increased popularity of museum exhibitions internationally that feature garments worn by these women illustrates just how fascinated the public is with these women and what they wear. It could be just one or two items featured as part of a larger display, such as the small selection of garments worn by Diana included in the Bellville Sassoon exhibition in 2014 at the Fashion Museum in Bath, England, or the Catherine Walker "Elvis" dress included in the "Ballgowns: British Glamour since 1950" exhibition in 2012 at London's Victoria & Albert Museum. Or it could be an entire exhibition, of one dress or more, dedicated to one of these women, such as the Met exhibition of Jacqueline's White House clothing, the display of Catherine's Alexander McQueen wedding gown, or the "Diana: Her Fashion Story" exhibition of Diana's clothing at Kensington Palace in 2017. These exhibitions draw in visitors from around the world who are either lovers of fashion, fans of these women, or both. There is also the increase in online spaces and accounts devoted to collecting and sharing images of these women and their clothing (as discussed in the section above).

There is also the desire to emulate and replicate their style, whether that's in every possible way, such as the "RepliKate" community discussed in Chapter 6 or simply choosing a pair of sunglasses or skirt because it is similar to one worn by an iconic stateswoman. This could also be why some stateswomen seek to emulate others. Diana's choice in 1995 to wear a pink Versace suit with the Philip Somerville pillbox hat that was

a clear reference to Jacqueline, could be seen as an attempt to have some of the grace and elegance attributed to Jacqueline.

Admirers of these women often have a desire to emulate what is perceived as the glamorous lifestyle of these women. In her discussion of the glamorous image, Postrel states, “By inviting projection and making the ideal feel attainable, the glamorous image intensifies longing and, in some cases, moves the audience to action” (49). In the case of these stateswomen and their audience, that action could be the purchase of something worn by the stateswomen, or something that was inspired or similar to what was worn. Emulating their fashion style is a way of feeling as if you have a piece of their lifestyle in general.

Final Thoughts

In this last section, I’d like to discuss potential areas for extending and expanding the research begun in the study. To start, a detailed exploration of the online preservation of the style legacies of these women is necessary in order to record and preserve their style so that we can continue to study and learn from the way the clothing functions in public life. But it would also be of value to explore the different digital platforms used and why people choose one platform over the other as their space to create a digital archive for each of these women. Second, while I touched on it at a few points while discussing Michelle and Catherine, a study looking specifically at the impact of choosing high street clothing over high end or designer clothing, and how that may or may not alter public perception of a stateswoman would be a worthy continuation of this current study, as it seems to be the direction some stateswomen are going with their style, and may—in time—alter the baseline that Jacqueline set in the 1960s. It’s too soon to tell, but it could

be that stateswomen like Michelle and Catherine are in the process of establishing a new version of stateswoman style, a more economically feasible style for an economically challenged 21st century. With the exception of her wedding gown, a good percentage of Catherine's clothing has been worn multiple times, and the majority has come from the high street, even if sometimes the more premium end of the high street offerings. Even in Catherine's first official portrait, painted by Paul Emsley and is on display at the National Portrait Gallery in London, Catherine wore a navy silk blouse by high street shop French Connection.

Three other areas of potential research relate to three women whose names came up during the course of conducting this research. And while it wasn't right to insert them into the research done for this study, it would be wrong to exclude them entirely. Those women are Hilary Clinton, Melania Trump, and Meghan Markle. Clinton poses a different perspective on this discussion as she has been a First Lady, a Senator, and a presidential candidate. She has been both a stateswoman and a political woman. A study that would compare and analyze her style in each of these three roles to see how they are similar and/or different could show even more how style performs a variety of different functions for the wearer. Trump, is another potential source for future research. Unlike the stateswomen in this study, Trump is an immigrant to the US from Slovenia, giving her a multinational perspective to public style. She is also a former model and had a career in fashion before becoming First Lady. There is also the issue of the public response, both in the US and internationally to the Trump administration, so it would be intriguing to see if her style choices differ from the stateswoman style established by Jacqueline. Does Melania Trump embrace, challenge, or subvert stateswoman style as

First Lady? How are her clothing choices impacted by her role and by the controversies surrounding her husband? At the time of concluding this study, Trump has been a much quieter presence as First Lady, more similar to Jacqueline perhaps than to Trump's immediate predecessor Michelle. At this point it is far too soon to tell, but after she has finished her tenure as First Lady, it would be of value to study her choices while she held the role to see if or how they compare to the First Ladies in this study.

Meghan Markle is a Hollywood actor and celebrity who is also soon to be the wife of Prince Harry. Theirs will be the first major royal wedding since Catherine's to Prince William. While Catherine and Meghan share some similarities, there are also some significant differences that make Meghan worth watching and studying over the next several years. Meghan was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She is biracial, her father Caucasian, her mother African American. She was raised on film sets; her father was a lighting director for television. As an adult, she has worked as a model, actor, and as Editor-in-Chief of a popular lifestyle blog and brand called *The Tig*. She's best known for her performance on the popular Canadian based TV show *Suits*, co-starring in several seasons before ending her run on the show in 2017. She'll be giving up her career in Hollywood to take on a new career as member of the British royal family and all the charitable work that the family supports, much like Grace Kelly did when she married Prince Rainier. She also brings a glamour and style that people frequently attribute to Hollywood. But she also has a casual "coolness," she loves to travel and much has been made in the press that very early in her relationship with Prince Harry, the two traveled to Botswana. Not the typical glamorous locations for the jet set crowd. Will she follow in Catherine's footsteps and blend high and low, laid back casualness with all out glamour

depending on the what the event calls for? It remains to be seen. But already there have been some interesting differences. While Catherine chose the simple, and affordable “Nannette” dress, discussed in Chapter 6, for her official engagement photos, Meghan chose a couture dress by British designer Ralph & Russo, valued at \$75,000. Quite the contrast in sartorial messages.

With the wedding scheduled for May 2018, it remains to be seen what choices Meghan will make with her wedding gown and its designer, and if her dress will hold as much symbolism as Catherine’s. With Meghan entering the ranks of the senior royals in the royal family, she will have a stateswoman role similar to Catherine. But her biracial identity, combined with her American citizenship and upbringing provides a very different perspective from which to analyze her choices. My current study would greatly benefit from revisiting Michelle and Catherine, and adding in Melania Trump and Meghan Markle.

These are just a few ideas of the potential future directions this research could take, but there are many more. Far more than one scholar can tackle on their own. There are numerous other stateswomen around the world. I have focused exclusively on western stateswomen in the US and Great Britain, but looking outside of the US and Europe, Queen Rania of Jordan for example, could give more examples of how style functions on the international public stage. In countries around the world, there are women serving as public figures in their countries in relatively silent roles. Their style is the one crucial element they have in their power to make statements and have a voice. With fashion choices being shared around the world at a faster and faster rate, future fashion icons can come from anywhere. We are no longer bound by who the glossy fashion magazines like

Vogue or *Harpers Bazaar* choose to feature within their pages as our style inspiration. These stateswomen give other women an example of what having true individual style looks like, and demonstrate how that style can be used for powerful rhetorical affect and give women agency in the way they are perceived by those around them.

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