

Health and Identity in between the Private and the Institutional. The Case of Catherine, the Princess of Wales

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Abstract. The singular objective of the present study is the examination of the relationship between private identity and institutional identity, labelled as ‘body natural’ & ‘body politic’ (Ernst Kantorowicz), with regard to Catherine Middleton’s oncologic experience in the period January 2024 - January 2025, as publicly announced by herself or by the Palace. With regard to the tense, dynamic and complex structural duality ‘private/institutional’, the subject becomes more visible than usual because illness makes this duality more conflicting: an ailing body is by definition natural and private, but it is the political/institutional body that has to ‘communicate’ it, to make it public. The focus is on seven press releases that are to be interpreted as an identity management act, attempting to see which of the two identities is speaking, which is visible, which is dominant, which is protected by being back staged, which is used to benefit the other.

Keywords: private vs. institutional identity, body natural vs. body politic, health, identity management, advocacy, communication strategies, reception

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1. Introduction

“What, then, is the need for a *further* debate about ‘identity’? Who needs it?”, asks Stuart Hall in a study published in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (2003, p. 1-17). The fact that identity is not a given, a stable ‘entity’ one is born with, but a fluid and dynamic process constructed in and through discourse has turned into a cliché in more or less recent years, in our post-postmodern or digimodern era dominated by accelerated globalization and exacerbated ICT development. Today’s social media and global networking mean hyper-connection and hyper-communication, in which the physical and digital realities are merged and the line between the private and the public gets indistinct, which problematizes the sense of self and belonging, and which consequently results in a conflicting type of identity or an identity crisis. Hence, to quote Stuart Hall again, the ‘necessity of identities’ should be “unambiguously acknowledged” because “the question, and the theoretization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance” (p. 16).

The dichotomy private identity/ institutional identity makes the subject of the present study. The interplay, tension and conflict between the two ‘realms’ is encompassed in the term ‘body politic’ – as the “ancient metaphor by which a state, society, or church and its institutions are conceived of as a biological (usually human) body”, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Rollo-Koster, 2017). The term has ancient origins, and Plato refers to it in his *Republic* when defining the state as a human body endowed with reason, spirit and desire that must function conjointly in harmony. In 1957, in *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Ernst H. Kantorowicz reinterprets the metaphor of the state as a living organism making the distinction between ‘body natural’ and ‘body politic’ while analysing this structural duality in the figure of the King. Recently, on 27 March, 2024, *The New York Review* publishes an article titled “Kate’s Two Bodies” in which the author, Frances Wilson, journalistically elaborates on the duality mortal-immortal (i.e. natural vs. political body) when discussing a PR crisis and Kate Middleton’s cancer diagnosis. The article concludes: “Until she can reverse her Faustian pact and reclaim her Body natural, she will remain on the bench reciting prepared statements, alone of all her sex”, therefore finding that there are no traces of the ‘natural body’ in the official statements coming from the Palace because Kate “traded her Body natural” “for a Body politic”, seeing it “at the heart of the mess the palace PR machine has got itself into”. (Wilson, 2024)

It is known that the Princess of Wales's health issues at the beginning of 2024 and the press releases related to them generated huge public controversies - starting from the lack of transparency related to her abdominal surgery in January 2024, followed by an altered family photo and then by a video announcement of the diagnosis. The so-far mentioned structural duality 'natural-political' body is evidently the case here: it is the disease which makes the conflicting duality visible. Between January 2024 and January 2025, there were seven press releases of the British royal family in relation to the Princess of Wales's oncologic journey and the relationship between private identity and institutional identity as represented in these seven texts is the singular objective of the present paper. Each press release is to be interpreted as an identity management act, attempting to see which of the two identities is speaking, which is visible, which is dominant, which is protected by being back staged, which is used to benefit the other.

2. Private versus Institutional or 'Body Natural' versus 'Body Politic': some theoretical considerations

There are five theories that are brought together here to outline the conceptual framework: Stuart Hall's *Who Needs Identity?* (1997); Ernst H. Kantorowicz' *The King's Two Bodies* (1957); Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959); Sandra Petronio's *Boundaries of Privacy. Dialectics of Disclosure* (2002), and Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (1973). They are heterogeneous theoretical contributions: one is a cultural theory, the second one is a medieval history of institutions, the third one is interactionist sociology, the fourth is an interpersonal communication theory and the fifth one views the dialogue of the media content creator and the public. Despite being incongruous, they all centre on the analysis of identity construction and communication by addressing the same question: how is identity constructed in relation to the other(s), institutions included here. Hall explains why identity is not fixed but it entails discursive strategic positioning. Kantorowicz points to the conversion of body natural/ private identity into body politic as institutional entity. Goffman refers to the mechanisms of presentation of the Self. Petronio focuses on the management of the boundaries between what it is shown and what it is hidden in an identity. Hall's encoding/decoding theory outlines the complex processes of media message interpretation and transformation in the circuit connecting content production and content reception.

To begin with the first one: identity in itself, explains Hall, occurs in the “relationship between subjects and discursive practices” (2003, p. 2) and this leads further on to the concept of identification, which corroborates the processuality of identity construction as a changeable, unstable hybrid that intersects linguistic, social, cultural and historical influences. Thus, identities are articulated by discursive practices and discursive positionality, that is, to quote Hall again: identification “is lodged in contingency”, it “does not obliterate difference”, it is a signifying practice that is “subject to the ‘play’, of *différence*” and it “obeys the logic of more-than-one” (2003, p. 3). In other words, identity is relational and it is constructed by what it excludes. Criticizing essentialism, Hall sustains that there is no primordial, authentic, inherent Self hidden in social strata but this is rather produced in and through *representation*, in a meeting point of “*suture*” between the discourses that “interpellate” us and the “processes which produce subjectivities” (2003, p. 5-6). Identity is therefore a relational discourse neverendingly constructed by and in contexts of power.

The King's Two Bodies of Ernst H. Kantorowicz (1957) as a study of medieval political theology uses the classical formula ‘The King is dead. Long live the King’ in order to make the distinction between the king’s natural body as mortal, vulnerable, unhealthy and his political body as immortal and incorporeal. Kantorowicz uses English jurisdiction in order to explain the difference: «“[...] to the natural Body [of the king] there is conjoined his Body politic which contains his royal Estate and Dignity,” or that “the Body politic, annexed to his Body natural, takes away the Imbecility of the Body natural.”» (Kantorowicz, 1957, p. 494). The corporeal structural duality of the king’s identity makes a unit, eventually, but the two bodies are analytically separable. Dignity in ‘*dignitas non moritur*’ is the juridical formula used by the German historian in order to refer to the modern idea of ‘institution’ as a separate entity in one’s identity. To sum up the perspective: ‘The Crown as Fiction’ (p. 336) is representative for the political body but even if it is ‘fiction’, it does not ‘lie’ because it solves a real problem by living beyond the biological and surpassing the fragility of those it represents. The ‘doubleness’ of one’s body (natural / political) in one entity is a tense condition that generates representation crisis.

Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959) is the well-known canonical text that introduces the idea of the dramaturgical pattern by seeing human social interaction as theatrical performance in

which individuals manage impressions for the public. The self is not some well located inherent essence to be externalised but rather it is “a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (Goffman, 1959, p. 252-253). In his view, there is the “front region” and the “back region” and a team on stage “from which the performed character’s self will emerge” coupled with another team, the audience “whose interpretive activity will be necessary for this emergence” (p. 253). Important in this arrangement is the duality of the two ‘regions’ because this is the condition for impression occurrence and impression management. Authenticity in the matter of self construction is not seen as a moral category but rather a matter of information dialogue and management in between front stage and back stage. One fundamental aspect in line with the present study is Goffman’s idea of the two types of communication that he calls “expressions given” and “expressions given off”, where the latter is unintentional even if communication is “purposely engineered or not” (Goffman, p. 4) – the important implications of what becomes unintentionally transparent in one’s ‘expression’, even if back staged or hidden.

The fourth theoretical approach to follow here is Sandra Petronio’s *Boundaries of Privacy. Dialectics of Disclosure* (2002). Her theory of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) sees the management of private information as a systematic process in which the tension between what is disclosed and what is concealed is regulated by people through some boundaries defined by three management processes: (1) privacy ownership, (2) boundary coordination – rules negotiated culturally, contextually and relationally and that include personal and collective boundaries, hence the importance of co-ownership of private information and the need to negotiate the shared set of rules, and (3) boundary turbulence as the case when the shared rules are infringed, resulting in conflict, distrust, the need for renegotiation. Disclosure and concealment coexist in interplay, Petronio states, and they are tense but not opposed. Moreover, there is no ‘natural’ and complete transparency or secrecy when it comes to private information. In Sandra Petronio’s words: “In order to fully grasp the nature of private disclosures, we not only have to consider the individual who is revealing or concealing, but we also must focus on how the decision affects other people [...] CPM assumes that others are also central to discerning the tension between being public and private. CPM uses the metaphor of boundaries to illustrate that, although there may be

a flow of private information to others, borders mark ownership lines so issues of control are clearly understood. Thus, regulating boundary openness and closedness contributes to balancing the publicness or privacy of individuals.” (Petronio, 2002, p. 3).

As already mentioned, the four theories above intersect in focusing on the dialogue and distinction between the public/ political/ institutional/ front staged individual *and* the private/ natural/back staged individual, more specifically: in the case of Catherine Middleton’s cancer journey, health issues and medical information become the negotiated co-property of the patient, the institution and the public. Each of the seven official press releases (in 2024 and the beginning of 2025), which make the object of study and analysis in what follows here, is to define and redefine the boundaries of both her private identity and institutional identity, as acts of negotiation of what of the private becomes public/ institutional and vice versa.

Stuart Hall’s reception theory, stated in his 1973 paper titled *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, argues that the communication process should be seen as a fragmented circuit, where a miss-alignment is frequently encountered between the communication intent of the media producer and the interpretation given by the audience to the message. As consumers decode the messages, they use different interpretive frames, derived from their own cultural, economic and social backgrounds. Hall offered an over-view of the predictable decoding perspectives the audiences could adopt, identifying the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the opposition one. Adopting the dominant position is ideal in communication situations, whereas the audience accepts and decodes the message and its codes as they were initially intended by the producer, thereby resulting in a perfect communication process. However, more realistic communication situations recognize the audience critically positioning itself either by negotiating its position by accepting the legitimacy of the message on a general level but also by assigning it a unique interpretation, or by adopting a clear opposition status, the case in which the audience actively reconstructs an alternative, a critical interpretation of the otherwise perfectly understood intended meaning and preferred cultural codes.

3. Media reporting and the right to private and family life in the UK. A turbulent recent history

3.1 The European Convention on Human Rights as an external guarantee of the right to private family life

The death of Diana, the Princess of Wales, in 1997 shocked the world and it focused the moral and legal scholarly lenses on the French, British and ultimately European legislation regarding the right to privacy of public figures and its delicate balance with freedom of expression of the media.

Although the UK signed the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in Rome in 1950 and ratified it in 1951, due to the country's dualist approach to international law, the ECHR remained an external and illusive point of reference for national judges, when exercising their discretion in case of ambiguity between the national and international legislation. It was only in 1998 that The Human Rights Act expressly incorporated the convention into UK law, giving effect to the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, including the rights comprised in articles 8 and 10 regarding the right to private life, home and correspondence and the right to freedom of expression within the UK legal system. Prior to this adoption, British citizens could not rely on domestic courts' capacity of enforcing the right to privacy, thus being forced to seek the recognition of this fundamental right by ratified international treaties and the international courts as venues providing the liability and enforcement mechanisms (Deringer, 2003, p. 208-211).

A testament to a tradition of fierce debate and probably fundamentally opposite views of what the right to privacy covers and includes, three of the nine photographers initially accused of manslaughter in the case were convicted to pay a symbolic fine of one euro each for intrusion into privacy by the French courts. The French debate on whether the interior of the car is still considered a private space after the accident forced it open span for almost a decade, being presented in front of multiple judges and courts prior to concluding that "by showing Dodi Al-Fayed mortally injured, bloody, his body broken by the shock of the accident, the photographers unquestionably committed a breach of the respect due to a human being and as a result violated the personal privacy of the individual concerned" (referred to in *Al Fayed v France*, Application no. 38501/02).

3.2 The European Court of Human Rights and the limits of private life of royalty in the Von Hannover cases. Definitions and balancing criteria

Similarly harassed by paparazzi in daily contexts, the eldest daughter of Rainier III, Prince of Monaco and Grace Kelly, Princess Caroline of Monaco, led a long-lasting legal fight for her right to privacy, as well as in support of her, and by extension, all “figures of contemporary society par excellence” as they will be defined by the judges of the Courts, to be able to freely enjoy their life in public (spaces and spheres) without the self-limitations imposed by the presumption that, even if not exercising public office or attending public functions, their private lives would still be subjected to public scrutiny through the ruthless lenses of the media and paparazzi.

The cases brought by Princess von Hannover, initially in front of the diligent and thorough German courts, and later at the European Court of Human Rights, offered the European court the possibility to contribute to the creation of a long-lasting European framework of accountability of the media for intrusion into privacy, along with guidelines and criteria for the national judges of all signatory States of the Convention to be used for determining and striking a just balance between the right to respect private life as provided by Article 8 of the Convention and freedom of expression and its limited exercise, as stipulated by Article 10 of the Convention, especially in the context of photographs of public figures taken in daily, non-official settings.

In *Von Hannover v. Germany* 1 (2004), the Court concluded that the Princess’ right to privacy was violated, as German courts failed to ascertain the legal framework necessary to offer the Princess sufficient protection. The European Court noted and emphasized that photographs published in the tabloid press are “often taken in a climate of continual harassment” and offered as a decisive criterion for the necessary balancing act that judges (national and international) need to perform between the free enjoyment of both rights - the “contribution to a debate of general interest”. The reasoning of the German courts regarding the “relative public figure” and “spatial isolation” criteria were rejected by the European Court as excessively vague, as it finally argued that the legitimate expectation of protection of private life is enshrined in the ECHR, irrespective of the status of the person requesting protection.

Von Hannover v. Germany 2 (2012), was decided by the Grand Chamber. The Court found no violation of Article 8 of the convention pertaining to the right to privacy, noting the fact that the German courts have successfully followed the recommendations made by the Court in its 2004 judgement and thus successfully reached a fair balance between competing rights, whilst exercising their margin of appreciation. The Grand Chamber took this second opportunity to introduce a clear structure in the balancing exercise performed by courts, distinguishing between five criteria, namely:” (i) the contribution made to a debate of general interest, an interest not confined to political or criminal matters; (ii) how well known the person concerned is and the subject of the report; (iii) the prior conduct of the person concerned, including any previous cooperation with the press; (iv) the content, form and consequences of the publication; and (v) the circumstances in which the photographs were taken, including consent and the manner of obtaining them”. Upon using the above-stated criteria, the Court concluded that the photograph accompanying an article on Prince Rainier's illness was related to an event of contemporary and general interest, and that the domestic courts had adequately weighed the criteria, thereby remaining within the margin of appreciation to be afforded to national authorities.

4. Case Study: The Private & the Institutional Catherine Middleton

4.1. Context

Between January 2024 and January 2025, history registered unprecedented news regarding the British royal family, about two cancer diagnoses, treatments and healings, of King Charles and of the Princess of Wales, a turbulent relationship of the royals and the public, including the press, and reduced public engagements. In January 2024 we found out about King Charles’ prostate cancer, followed by intensive treatments and no duties performed publicly but only behind closed doors, plus the same month recorded the planned abdominal surgery of Catherine Middleton, with no specific diagnosis mentioned. This was followed by absence from public duties and intensive speculations in the media till March 2024, when an altered photography was posted on the official social media accounts, followed by kill notices from major news agencies, and intensive speculation

about the princess' real health condition, controversies about transparency and trust in the royal family, as well as debates about misinformation, digital manipulation and reality – known as 'Kategate'. On the official account on X, the princess later apologised by mentioning her amateur skills in photo editing. After the manipulated photo, a private video was released announcing cancer and some details about what happened post-surgery with regard to health and family matters. Later, the public appearances of Princess Kate at Trooping the Colour, in June 2024, and at Wimbledon, in July 2024, were hugely acclaimed and the private family video released in September 2024 eventually announced the end of chemotherapy. In January 2025, Princess Kate announced cancer remission. Prince William continued his public activities but called 2024 a 'brutal' one, while trying to perform his duties and support his family. Good news marked the end of 2024, with Princess Beatrice's pregnancy news, and in January 2025, the public found out there were plans for the King's and Princess Kate's gradual return to regular public duties.

4.2. Research Objective and Research Questions

As previously mentioned, there is one objective in the present study: the examination of the relationship between private identity and institutional identity, labelled above as 'body natural' & 'body politic' (Ernst Kantorowicz), with regard to Catherine Middleton's oncologic experience in the period January 2024- January 2025, as publicly announced by herself or by the Palace. With regard to the tense, dynamic and complex structural duality 'private/institutional', the subject becomes more visible than usual because illness makes this duality more conflicting: an ailing body is by definition natural and private, but it is the political/institutional body that has to 'communicate' it, to make it public.

Each media message is to be seen as an act of identity construction *and* identity management in strict connection with the dichotomy private/institutional, focusing on delineating which of the two identities is expressed, which is visible or hidden and how it is revealed or concealed, which is dominant, which is used to benefit the other, what changes occur in the communication of the two identities over a year, since the beginning of the health issue till the complete clinical and personal recovery. Hence, the research questions (RQ) are the following:

RQ1 What type of identity is dominant in each text and what makes it dominant?

RQ2 How does the relationship private – institutional identity (or ‘body natural’ – ‘body politic’) change chronologically, from the first to the last official press release?

Building on Stuart Hall’s reception theory, with the aim of studying how the prominent top six British online news outlets have received and represented the public official statements made by the Kensington Palace or by the Princess of Wales, we complement the initial analysis with the following research questions:

RQ3 How do media outlets interpret and present the official statements, considering the initially intended dominant identity?

RQ4: To what extent do the media outlets respect the right to privacy of the Princess of Wales and her family when reporting on her health struggles?

4.3. Sampling. Data Collection & Analysis

In strict connection with the first two research questions, because the focus in this case is on analysing the underlying meanings and themes related to the topic, as they appear in media messages, QCA/ Qualitative Content Analysis is the method to use. Words, images and videos are to be categorized into specific thematic patterns/ codes that define both identity construction and identity management – for the two types of identity, moving beyond numbers and frequency in the specific media content, therefore beyond QnCA. Since it starts from the concepts and theories presented above – that contribute to identifying the coding categories, this is to be a deductive approach that implies systematic reading and/ or watching of the material to identify the codes and possible broader themes - all done manually.

For RQ1 and RQ2, the Corpus of analysis consists in seven official public announcements/ press releases made by Kensington Palace or by the Princess of Wales on official channels (videos released to the press or on official social media accounts) – all public and accessible through press archives (BBC, ITV, CNN, NBC), and available on *The official Instagram account of the Prince and Princess of Wales, based at Kensington Palace, @princeandprincessofwales*.

The materials have been manually and purposively selected for the period January 2024-January 2025, with a focus on identity matters in strict connection with Catherine's health issues, more specifically Catherine Middleton's oncologic journey, from the first official announcement of the health problem, namely the abdominal surgery, to the official announcement of cancer remission. Consequently, there have been identified seven media materials codified as U1, U2, U3, U4, U5, U6, U7, namely:

U1 = The Kensington Palace official statement, 17 January, 2024: the planned abdominal surgery;

U2 = The Kensington Palace official statement, 29 January, 2024: the return home and the progress in recovery;

U3 = Mother's Day manipulated photo + caption, 10 March, 2024;

U4 = The diagnosis disclosure video, 22 March, 2024;

U5 = A photo + caption announcing progress and the challenges of chemotherapy, 14 June, 2024;

U6 = The royal family video + caption announcing the end of preventive chemotherapy, 9 September, 2024;

U7 = A photo + caption about a public visit at The Royal Marsden, 14 January, 2025, announcing remission.

The unit of analysis for each of the seven media materials is the complete 'text' released to the public (the official written announcement, the posts – photos, videos and captions). There are five dimensions / codes to be used for gathering and analysing data, generated by the conceptual instruments presented in the theoretical part of the present study, as follows:

C1 = Medical information and level of specificity - Kantorowicz's concepts. This dimension is to see how private matters (aspects related to health, i.e. 'body natural') are made public (by 'body political'). 0. no medical information; 1. generic information; 2. treatment but no diagnosis; 3. specific diagnosis.

C2 = (Non)Disclosure Explanation - Goffman's and Petronio's theories; this is meant to justify the 'performance' and the exchange between front stage / back stage, revealed / concealed. 0. absent; 1. prevention of speculation; 2. protection of family / children; 3. advocacy; 4. privacy ownership.

C3 = Speaker & Dominant Identity Type - the concepts of Kantorowicz, Goffman and Petronio. This dimension points to the 'voice' speaking and signing the message, as follows: S1. the institution (the princess is addressed in the 3rd person singular); S2. the subject (in the 1st person singular) and S3. both / mixed; at the same time, it includes the type of 'body' that is expressed

as dominant; T1. body natural (as patient but also as mother and wife, considering familial status as part of Kantorowicz' 'natural' body; T2. body political. These two sub-categories (speaker & type of identity) are seen together because they both operationalize the duality private/ institutional.

C4 = Advocacy - in connection with the concepts of Kantorowicz, Goffman and Petronio; this code is meant to establish the level of connection between the person and the public; advocacy is the point of conversion of private identity into a capital of institutional identity; 0. absent; 1. expressed discursive solidarity; 2. institutional advocacy (patronage).

C5 = Pressure in connection with Sandra Petronio's borderline turbulence; the degree of pressure registered when the 'text' was released, in relation to the transparency of information and public speculation; 1. low; 2. moderate; 3. high.

In order to answer RQ3 and discover how media outlets interpret and present the official statements, considering the initially intended dominant identity, we suggest transforming the potential reception values based on Hall's theory into the following indicators:

C6 = Type of reception; 0 = conforming reception by the media, whereby the studied media outlet accepts the original intended meaning of the official statement and reproduces it with minimal challenge or reinterpretation; indicators of this framing include quoting official sources without additional critique; 1= negotiated reception, whereby the studied media outlet presents parts of the official narrative but contextualizes or questions aspects of it by including expert commentary and underlining missing information or opaque answers from the official sources; 2 = oppositional reception, whereby the news outlets reject the original meaning by creating an alternative interpretation. In order to distinguish between the negotiated reception previously introduced and coded with 1, the oppositional reception by the media will be attributed to the authors and articles that focus on controversies and contradictions, interpreting the official statements as examples of strategic communication.

In order to answer RQ4 related to the respect afforded by the analysed media outlets regarding the right to privacy of the Princess of Wales and her family when reporting on her health struggles, the indicators were derived from the criteria suggested by the ECtHR in its first and second Von Hannover v. Germany cases, surveying whether the article includes a public interest point of view, by referring to either office or official functions, and whether

the article respects the privacy requests made by the Princess of Wales, in the interest of protecting her family life and health related data privacy. Throughout the analysis, this indicator was marked with C7 for consistency.

The adequate research methods for answering RQ3 and RQ4 consist in performing qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the online articles published by the online media corresponding to the previously identified key moments. For this purpose, a corpus of 75 articles published online on the following websites have been manually selected and analyzed: bbc.co.uk, theguardian.com, reuters.com, mirror.co.uk, thesun.co.uk and dailymail.com. The articles were selected by using the available search engines on the media outlets' websites, introducing the specific dates of the events or press-releases as well as the name of the Princess of Wales or Catherine. For the numerous cases in which media reporting spanned over several dates, the articles were included in the sample for analysis if they presented either significant new developments or if they had the potential to align with any of the three potential types of reception, as derived from Hall's theory, or if they had the potential to illustrate a criteria recommended by the Von Hannover 2 jurisprudence.

4.4. Results. Discussion

4.4.1. Private and Institutional Identity in the official press releases of Catherine and/ or Kensington Palace – RQ1 and RQ2

With regard to RQ1 and RQ2, the Analysis Grid below synthetically presents the key findings for each dimension / code described above:

Table 1. Analysis grid

Corpus Units	C1 Medical Information Specificity	C2 (Non)Disclosure Explanation	C3 Speaker & Identity Type (dominant type in bold)	C4 Advocacy	C5 Pressure
U1	1 + 2	1 + 2 + 4	S1 + T1 + T2	0	1
U2	1 + 2	3	S1 + T1 + T2	1	1
U3	0	0	S2 + T1 + T2	0	3
U4	2	1 + 2 + 3 + 4	S2 + T1 + T2	1	3
U5	2	0	S2 + T1 + T2	1	1
U6	2	2	S2 + T1 + T2	1	1
U7	2	3	S3 + T1 + T2	2	1

The data in the table above allow for a discussion on identity construction and management that follows a transformative cyclic trajectory that chronologically corresponds to the seven ‘texts’ in the corpus of analysis.

The first two press releases (the official statements of Kensington Palace announcing Catherine’s abdominal surgery, with no specific diagnosis, and her return home) stand for the first phase, called here ‘*controlled institutional identity*’. It is the institution that talks front stage, that is dominant; the princess is mentioned with her full title and in the 3rd person singular; the return to public duties is announced for after Easter; the justification for non disclosure of medical details is linked with prevention of speculation, with children protection and there is explicit reference to her privacy rights; advocacy stands in the mentioning of The London Clinic, in the second text, which also expresses discursive solidarity. The private/natural body is invisible, back staged, to use Ervin Goffman’s terms. The ailing body that underwent surgery, the recovery and the family are protected by explicit borderline rules and the privacy rights formulated by the institution (Sandra Petronio’s concepts).

The problem with this type of ‘controlled institutional identity’ is not to be related to media content construction and identity representation but rather with communication strategy. The institution presupposed that the public would respect the borderline between ‘front’ and ‘back’ [Goffman and Petronio’s terms], seeing ‘back stage’ (the private) as a forbidden region. Instead, the social media of the year 2024 formulated the question ‘Where is Kate?’ as if collectively asking for access to the private individual or to back stage.

Unit 3 or the manipulated Mother’s Day photo corresponds to the second stage of identity representation. The table above does not identify any dominant type of identity here, of the two types, and this is because despite the fact that it is Kate that speaks in the caption and that signs the message with ‘C’, directly addressing the public and thanking for the support, the altering of the picture casts doubt on the credibility of the message itself, on who the real person addressing the public is. Considering the impact and the aftermath of the manipulated picture, this is the moment when the relationship between private/ institutional gets out of control. The private is moved front stage next to the institutional and the honesty and credibility of the two bodies, natural and political, are questioned. Kate’s

apologies issued later on X are to be seen as a private and strategic positioning front stage meant to correct an institutional error. Evidently, there is boundary turbulence here, Petronio's concept, and high pressure resulting from intensive speculation in the dialogue of the person (private and institutional Kate) with the public. This second phase in the management of identity could be called 'diffused identity' – because the line between the private and the institutional body gets blurred.

The next three units of analysis, U4, U5 and U6 correspond to the third stage of identity representation: the '*assumed private identity*', in which case the private is front staged and the institutional gets back staged – an exchange of positions and of roles. The famous diagnosis disclosure video belongs to the private individual that restates the reasons for the initial concealment of the health condition (those mentioned in the first Kensington Palace statement), namely: prevention of speculation, protection of family, privacy ownership. It is 'body natural' which dominates the dichotomy in these three texts: the 1st person singular speaking, in a natural setting, using words in the very emotional register. The performance (Goffman's term) is controlled by the source and the public eventually gets access to the 'private'. The initial confidentiality borderline (the ten weeks of silence) is explained by a very humane reason: the need to protect the children and the family, which can rarely be contested (Petronio's 'boundary coordination rules'). The disclosure in U4, 5 and 6 emphasizes privacy as intimate discourse not as intimate information. It is the case of the private individual that represents and constructs the 'body', not the institution.

Phase four of identity construction and management is registered in the last text, U7. The private experience of disease is turned into a resource for institutional identity. The news about the hospital that treated her, the Royal Marsden, the voice that speaks (1st person singular, the patient, but her new institutional role as Joint Patron of the hospital, as well) are suggestive for 'converted identity': a type of identity that successfully co-owns the natural and the political, as a result of transforming private experience into an institutional good. Illness is the instrument for advocacy. Thus, private identity or 'body natural' legitimizes the new institutional identity of Catherine, the Princess of Wales. In other words, the relationship private / institutional is no longer dichotomised because it gets new meanings that reinstate the duality in harmony.

A definite transversal finding is that the specific diagnosis (the type of cancer) is never disclosed. This precise frontier between the private and the institutional is never crossed.

4.4.2. Media reception of the official press releases of Catherine, the Princess of Wales, and/ or of Kensington Palace – RQ3 and RQ4

4.4.2.1. Media framing of Catherine's hospitalisation

The media's reception and decoding of the initial messages regarding the Princess of Wales's hospitalisation, in an initial corpus consisting of the six articles published by the six selected media outlets on the same day, were analyzed through the prism of the codes C1-C6. As previously observed, the initial official statements issued by Kensington Palace, marking *the controlled institutional identity* phase offer a strong initial emphasis on both the right and the desire for privacy strongly correlated, also from the emotional standpoint, with the desire to enhance children's protection.

The table below summarizes, per media outlet, the outcome of the qualitative analysis performed.

Table 2. Qualitative analysis

Outlet	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
BBC	2	1,4	S1 / T2	0	1	0
Reuters	2	1,4	S1 / T2	0	1	0
The Guardian	2	1,2,4	S1 / T2(T1)	0	1	0
Mirror	2	1,4	S1 / T2	0	2	1
The Sun	2	1,4	S1 / T2	1	2	1
Daily Mail	1,2	1	S3 / T1,T2	1	2	1

There are several constants in the values the codes register. In terms of presenting the information with medical specificity, as well as in terms of conveying to the audiences the non-disclosure rationale, the studied media outlets present a consistent pattern. By borrowing the exact institutional choice of words and tone, the media uniformly discloses the *abdominal surgery*, framing it as *successful*. The rationale supporting the limited disclosure is equally uniformly shared, conveying the initial institutional requests of refraining from speculation while exercising fully the right to privacy with the scope of protecting the family and children. We observe

thus Petronio's limits assumed proactively. Similarly, we observe the same institutional dominant speaker when reading the articles published by five out of six of the media outlets, with *Daily Mail* being singular in its brief insertion of a third-party patient testimonial, stimulating, albeit briefly, a perception of Catherine as a vulnerable natural body.

Advocacy perspectives were not registered explicitly, accurately reflecting the initial institutional code. The two coded values observed upon analysing *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* were recorded taking into account the sympathetic tone of the reporting.

The fifth code pertaining to a potential pressure exercised on the limits, as defined by Petronio, were low to moderate. The association of words *shock* and *health*, as well as the narrativization of the hospital environment found in the *Daily Mail* reporting were recorded as moderate and without breaching the set boundaries.

We can observe and conclude that, with regard to Hall's decoding categories, *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* quoted the institutional statement with minimal to no interpretation, thus conforming to its initial intended reading of the Princess of Wales as an institutional body performing a dignified and justified temporary withdrawal from future public functions. *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* were registered as presenting their audience with a negotiated reception, presenting third-party insider narratives of the hospital environment of by reframing the news enhancing emotional perspective (*The Sun*).

In terms of respecting the legal boundaries by fulfilling the criteria stipulated by the ECtHR in *Von Hannover v. Germany*, the whole corpus analysed complies with the scope of the provisions of articles 8 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The media institutions that positioned themselves in the conforming category, namely *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* fulfil almost automatically the criteria stipulated by the ECtHR in *Von Hannover 2*, since the included perspective is that of voluntary limited disclosure, with the scope of justifying the temporary withdrawal from the performance of the institutional functions. The media institutions that positioned themselves in the negotiated reception category are equally compliant but illustrate more closely the debate sparked and settled in *Von Hannover 1* case regarding the potential interest of the audiences and the reasonable expectation of privacy a public person might hold. If and as long as no clear intrusion into privacy is performed, the media outlets remain compliant, as we see in this case.

A potentially interesting observation is that when the private information is voluntarily disclosed, and the limits of the particular disclosure are respected by the media outlets, whilst still presenting the audience with the information that responds to the public's justified public interest, media institutions will find themselves ECHR compliant – a simple and foreseeable potential “solution” to the intrusion into privacy conundrum, when clear public interest can be identified.

4.4.2.2. *Media framing of the controversy about Mother's Day photo*

As previously discussed, this second stage of identity representation marks the turning point in which the relationship between the institutional and the private are no longer carefully balanced. The act of manipulation itself, as well as its consequences, cast doubt regarding the credibility of both the natural and the political body, and, in order to study the reception of this “diffused identity”, with privacy boundaries moved - if not removed - completely, we have identified, using the same selection method, twenty-three online articles, published by the same initially selected six media outlets, on the same dates. The monitored events that determined the inclusion into the corpus of analysis were the issue of Kensington Palace of the edited photograph, the speculations surrounding it, the withdrawal otherwise dubbed as a “kill order” by several news agencies, including *Reuters*, as well as the reports of Catherine, the Princess of Wales's apology and justification for the issuance of the edited photograph. The table below presents aggregated results per outlet and per code, registering the general tendency of the media outlet, for the purpose of presenting the results of the qualitative analysis performed.

Table 3. Aggregated results per outlet and per code

Outlet	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
<i>BBC</i>	2	1,2,4	S3/T2	2	2	1
<i>Reuters</i>	2	1,4	S1/T2	0	1	0
<i>The Guardian</i>	2	1,4	S1/T2	2	3	1
<i>The Sun</i>	2	1,3	S3/T1	1	3	1–2
<i>Mirror</i>	2	1,2	S3/T1	1	3	1
<i>Daily Mail</i>	2	1	S3/T1	1	3	2

In terms of disclosure of the medical data, the codes are consistently registered at an identical value. All media outlets continue to respect and reflect, in their reporting, the generic medical reason behind the treatment, without including the diagnosis that caused the initial press-release and the withdrawal of the Princess of Wales from the public eye. We observe in this regard the full compliance of the media outlets with the institutional original message, as well as with the previously set privacy boundaries.

The explanations for the non-disclosure of the information continue to be mainly the prevention of speculation, seconded by the original specific request for privacy and the protection of children. While *Reuters* and *The Guardian* underline the choice of non-disclosure as institutional and an exercise of privacy-ownership, *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* include the non-disclosure choice as a narrative catalyst, underlining “mounting pressure to reveal the truth”.

The third code, created to identify and investigate the speaker and dominant identity type and aiming at classifying and attributing a main frame either as a natural body or body political, also yields a series of interesting results when used to perform the content analysis of the published materials. As previously observed during the Mother’s Day photography controversy, the natural and body political aspects collapse and reciprocally undermine each other’s credibility. The dominant body is unstable and incoherent across the studied outlets, shifting from the clear institutional body observed at *Reuters* and *The Guardian* to the natural body in *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail*. Forensic attention to various details of the image, regarding blurred hands for example, convert the visual representation of the body into evidence, while channelling the attention of the audience towards personal aspects (like, for example, personal meaningful jewellery). The pronoun used to name the Princess (3rd singular) by *Daily Mail* for example, places direct culpability, clearly no longer shared with institutional communication. Directly linked, the fourth code studying advocacy is seen discussed directly by the *BBC* and *The Guardian*, that used the controversy as an opportunity to debate institutional accountability.

The fifth code registering pressure in connection with Sandra Petronio’s border turbulence is one of the most interesting analysis dimensions in this particular case, especially in connection with the codes related to medical confidentiality and (non)disclosure rationale. Due to what becomes now as clear tensions created by the privacy requests, the pressure points move towards either institutional pressure or personal pressure depending

on the editorial choice. Illustrating moderate to high institutional pressure, the *BBC* published not only exculpatory findings but also reflexive perspectives over the “unfairness”, whereas *The Guardian* for example performs a specialist 20 anomaly verification and analysis. *Reuters* is, in this group, the original yet most conformist outlier, as it created the original structural pressure through the rare kill notice of the photograph, whilst rhetorically performing almost no pressure whatsoever. In a stark contrast, pressure and turbulence are at their highest registered levels in the texts published by *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail*. Though all media outlets convey the admission-driven escalation of Kategate, in these cases we see either a high personal pressure exercised via crowd forensics and explicitly questioning the credibility of future health updates as addressed by *The Sun*, or, on a more factual basis approach, a high personal pressure by means of enumerating the kill-notice counting as escalation meter, complemented by the confession framing.

The sixth code, used to study the media’s reception overall, also registered significant variations between the studied media outlets. An “extreme” yet clear-cut position is adopted by *Reuters*, which initially publishes the photo, illustrating clear conformity, but it manifests firm alignment with its own standards and principles, issuing an almost surgical kill-notice in the light of the discovery that the photograph has been altered. The institutional and personal message is not just received and conveyed but also denied immediately from spreading once the miss-alignment with their own institutional role is seen, rather than reframed or interpreted. *BBC*, *The Guardian* and *Mirror* positioned themselves in a negotiated reception. Each presented the initial message, but it re-contextualized it, either by expert analysis, as seen in the case of *The Guardian*, or by initiating a reflexive questioning of the media’s own fairness, as observed in the case of the *BBC*. A clear oppositional reception is seen performed by the *Daily Mail*, which uses the admission of editing as evidence of a cover-up, and this constructs an alternative narrative of culpability. While each of the media outlets points out the potential inconsistencies and alterations of the image, *The Sun* adopts a mixed negotiated and oppositional reception of the message, inclining however towards attributing values of strategic communication to the Princess’s confession and apology.

When studying the potential intrusion into privacy, we observe, once again, the potential “blind spot” of the Von Hannover criteria: because the Princess acknowledged being the author of the edited version of the photograph, her prior conduct is the main reason that enables all media outlets, regardless

of how they have positioned themselves, to respect the threshold of maintaining a disciplined and strictly observed balance between information of public interest and the right to privacy of the portrayed person(s). Even considering all these aspects, recalling the fact that Von Hannover balancing criteria also recommend ethically obtaining the information deemed of public interest, we noted *The Sun* in breach of the right to privacy, by publishing paparazzi images other UK broadcasters declined.

4.4.2.3. Media coverage of the Princess of Wales's cancer announcement

The Princess of Wales's announcement was performed via a diagnosis disclosure video. The "body natural", as previously observed, is set in an environment controlled by the source. The Princess of Wales reinforces her initial reason of protecting her privacy as a means of protecting the children. In order to study the reception of this new shift, of "*assumed private identity*" by the selected media outlets, we have included in this new corpus of analysis a number of twenty-one online media products, published between 22nd and 23rd March 2024, corresponding to the date of the initial video and including the further debates and reframing by the media. The table below lists, as previously, the aggregated results of the analysis, per each media institution, to facilitate an over-all reading.

Table 4. Aggregated results of the analysis per media institution

Outlet	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
BBC	2	1+2	S2; T1	0/1	3	1	Compliant
Reuters	2	1+2	S2; T1	1	3	1	Compliant
The Guardian	2	1+2	S2; T1→T2	1	3	1	Compliant
The Sun	2	2 (+1)	S3; T1→T2	1→2	3	0	Compliant
Mirror	2	4 (+2)	S3; T1	1	3	0/1	Compliant
Daily Mail	2	3 (+2,4)	S3; T1→T2	2	3	0/1	Compliant

The analysis performed (based on the criteria of medical information disclosure and level of specificity) revealed, for all media outlets, the following predictable outcome: all studied articles included in the sample presented the previous surgery and the preventive chemotherapy, however the type, stage and prognosis of the cancer are withheld, and the Palace's anti-speculation instruction is transmitted verbatim by all six studied outlets. *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* remain aligned in their disclosure

rationale, the published materials registering prevention of speculation and protection of family as values. *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* diverge in their approach. *The Sun*'s own headlines contradict the assumed intent of children's protection as motive. *Daily Mail* frames duty and leadership, whereas *Mirror* is approaching the subject by underlining the exercise of privacy-ownership.

The third code, C3, aimed at discovering the speaker and dominant identity type, yield the most unpredictable results. *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* registered and conveyed to their audiences the Princess of Wales's own, first-person voice, as present throughout the video, with the body natural present as patient and mother, and the institutional body clearly fading. *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* were recorded as S3 values for including commentary and externally sourced experts into the narration. The study of the advocacy code revealed a clearly expressed discursive solidarity in *BBC*, *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun* and *Mirror*. An initial attempt to convert the confession into institutional advocacy is registered in the case of *Daily Mail*. The pressure code noted with C5, aimed at studying the borderline turbulence, was scored as high. Although the tone of the media articles remains sympathetic, they all refer to the edited Mother's day photograph / "Kategate" as previous notable incidents.

As the video itself embodies the assumed private identity, during the study of its reception and decoding we have the opportunity to study the media outlets' framing of it, as well as, where appropriate, in conjecture with the past incidents and their attributed meaning. As the Princess of Wales uses her own voice, and a calm yet emotional frame, reminding the reasons behind previous choices, namely the protection of children and of the "young family", the viewer is introduced to a narrative of owned privacy that reinforces and reinstates the boundaries. *Reuters* and *The Guardian* convey the message from a negotiated position, questioning the timing of the institution, rather than the person or the message. *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* revive the institutional body by introducing secondary meaning via expert commentary and various formulas. As a consequence of their negotiated positioning, we see the institutional body revitalized and the body natural in a supporting role, framed as performing a valiant act of duty rather than a personal communication on a delicate theme. *The Mirror*'s article, offering an intrusive non-verbal communication analysis and attributing it meaning and feelings, represents one of the clearest examples of reconstruction of meaning, rather than a negotiation.

In terms of the legal perspective of the potential intrusion into privacy, the initial articles presenting the message exhibit clear respect towards the re-established and reinforced boundaries of privacy. *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* use the moment as an opportunity to reflect on previous media failures, whereas the *Daily Mail* is the only media outlet outwardly recognizing the tension that this “compelled disclosure” exhibits and creates.

4.4.2.4. Media framing of the Princess of Wales’s cancer update (14 June 2024)

A corpus of eleven articles published by the six media outlets was selected in order to study the reception of the ‘body natural’ made public. The selected articles conveyed or debated the written statement released by Kensington Palace on the evening of 14 June 2024, in which the Princess of Wales confessed that she was making “good progress” through ongoing chemotherapy, had “good days and bad days”, and would attend Trooping the Colour event the following day, thus officially announcing her first public appearance since the diagnosis announcement.

Similarly to the previous qualitative analysis, the same analytical criteria were used and are presented below in an aggregated table, facilitating an over-all perspective of the media outlets’ approach to the topic.

Table 5. Aggregated results of the analysis per media institution (synthesis)

Outlet	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
BBC	2	2	S3 / T1	1	1	0	No
Reuters	2	4	S3 / T1	1	2	0	No
The Guardian	2	1	S3 / T1	1	2	0	No
Mirror	2	2	S3 / T1	1	2	0	No
Daily Mail	2	4	S3 / T1	1	3	0	Yes
The Sun	2	1	S3 / T1	1	3	0	Yes

In terms of medical specificity, in all studied media outlets we can observe the disclosure of the treatment, framed as “preventative chemotherapy” without a clearer than before diagnosis. No stage or type of cancer is mentioned. All studied media outlets, except for the *Daily Mail*, use the same language as the language present in the written statement. *The Daily Mail* underlines the lack of specificity of the information offered, recasting the same tension that we have previously observed in its case between the ‘body politic’ and the ‘body natural’. When discerning between the media outlets’ approach to the reasoning behind non-disclosure, we observe that *Reuters*

and the *Daily Mail* explicitly mark the tension with the institutional framework, pointing out the fact that the palace “declined to give any details about the type of cancer”. The Princess is portrayed in her role as agent by the *Daily Mail*, which stresses, on multiple occasions, the fact that she has personally asked for “time, space and privacy”. *The Guardian* and *The Sun* align in offering the explanation on not placing additional pressure on the family. Similarly, the *BBC* and *Mirror* explicitly mention the scope of protecting the children. In terms of identifying the speaker and dominant identity type, all media outlets align once again in their representation of a mixed voice that includes the Princess’ first-person statement mixed with third-person institutional narration. The dominant identity type observed is the ‘body natural’, framed as patient, mother and wife. The ‘body politic’ remains present via the performative act of attending the public event, as the balcony, as well as her rank as Colonel of the Irish Guards are mentioned. We therefore observe directly, as the duality of the body natural and body political is simultaneously performed.

The common approach regarding advocacy or patronage is that of expressing gratitude for the citizens who have expressed solidarity in support, without transforming her illness into a formal cause. The shared however private experience is virtually expressed in order to be transformed into a form of affective capital. The fifth criteria pertaining to external pressure is linked to the degree in which each media outlet reiterates previous speculations regarding “where is Kate?”. *Reuters*, *The Guardian* and *Mirror* reiterate the “cancer scare” correlated with the lengthy absence. *The Guardian* underlines “the extra pressure” that the family was subjected to due to various speculations. Sitting at a more extreme end of the spectrum, *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* reiterated the audience’s speculations. There is an article published by *The Sun* conveying speculations almost in its entirety. We can conclude that the registered tension spans from editorial choice, rather than from the statement itself.

Performing the qualitative analysis of the selected sample from Stuart Hall’s reception and decoding perspectives, we observe that all six studied media outlets adopt a dominant position, conveying the statement’s initial intent of informing further the audiences regarding the measured progress. The oppositional decoding is performed minimally and contained in both *BBC*’s and *Reuters*’s case. *The Sun* actively reinforced the Palace’s own request for privacy, its decoding of the message reading still aligned with the original intent of the message.

The study of the media outlets' respect afforded to the right to privacy, verified through the prism of the criteria stated by the ECtHR in order to perform the balancing act between the two fundamental rights to privacy and family life and freedom of expression, resulted in the majority of outlets being classified as respecting the right to privacy. Registering an interesting yet predictable evolution, the *BBC*, *Reuters*, *The Guardian* and *Mirror* treated the health of the Princess as a matter of legitimate public interest. At the opposite end of the spectrum, *The Sun* admits “exclusively revealing the video of Kate and William”, thus proudly confessing the surveillance of private life and using the fable justification of a public interest. In this case we can observe a clear similarity with the Von Hannover 2 case, leading us into observing that, perhaps, the European Court should be offered also the possibility to establish a new threshold for the criteria of public interest to be adequately refined, in light of the transparency and consensual sharing of information that we have observed through this case study.

4.4.2.5. Media framing of the announcement of the end of preventive chemotherapy - September 2024

A corpus comprising fourteen media products published by the six media outlets was selected in order to study the final reception of the body natural, as the news of the end of preventive chemotherapy is shared. The table below presents the aggregated results obtained by performing the qualitative analysis of the selected articles.

Table 6. Qualitative analysis

Media Outlet	C1	C2	C3 (Subtype/Type)	C4	C5	C6	C7
BBC News	2	4	S3 / T1-T2	1	2	0-1	No
Reuters	2	2-4	S2-S3 / T1	1	1-2	0	No
The Guardian	2	0-4	S1-S3 / T1	0-1	1-2	0-1	Yes/No
The Sun	2	2	S3 / T1	1	2-3	0	Yes
Mirror	2	1-2	S1-S3 / T1	0-1	1-2	0-1	No/Yes
Daily Mail	2	4	S2-S3 / T1	1	1-2	0-1	Yes/No

The analysis performed in order to discover the medical information disclosed and its level of specificity showed, repeatedly, for all studied media outlets, the same degree of conformity as previously observed. The treatment, framed as preventive, is stated within all studied media products included in the sample; however, the type and stage of the cancer remain undisclosed. We can conclude that the 'body politic' strictly controls also the limits of the 'body natural', allowing it to appear in a patient role, whilst preserving the strict non-disclosure standard regarding the diagnostic. The choice of justification regarding non-disclosure remains split between privacy ownership as observed by the *BBC* and *Reuters*, and the initial appeal to protection of children, as observed by *The Sun* and *Mirror*. The analysis of the speaker and dominant identity type reflected by the media coverage indicate that the majority of the studied media outlets conveyed a mixed institutional and subjective voice. The 'body natural' represented by patient, mother and wife is omnipresent.

The advocacy dimension recorded discursive solidarity across all studied media outlets. The disclosure tone of the articles is meant to enhance affective public capital, as we observe across all six studied media outlets. In connection with Sandra Petronio's borderline turbulence, we observe it at its lowest value when we analyze the texts that are closest to the original statement. Examples of these include *Reuter's* transcript and the *Daily Mail's* "message in full". Turbulence is recorded however at its highest when analyzing *The Sun's* article focusing on Prince William, which also is the only media product reassembling the entire history of the case. As previously observed, pressure relates to editorial memory rather than the overtly calm September announcement.

In terms of Stuart Hall's reception theory, the majority of the studied media products were marked as decoding dominantly. As evidence of this, *Reuter's* pieces, the *Mirror's* ones and the *Daily Mail* media products, they all decoded and conveyed to the audiences the same original institutional celebratory frame. Less than a third of the analyzed media products decoded in a negotiated frame, presenting clinical caveats, like, for example, in one in *The Guardian*.

The discussion regarding intrusions into privacy based on the Von Hannover criteria is no longer one of relevance. The clear positioning, through both bodies, natural and political, is that of sharing a limited consent for intrusion into privacy, as it is seen as a necessary sacrifice to reduce tension and to ensure that the dominant institutional message is decoded accordingly.

5. Conclusions

To conclude and answer the second research question in this study – related to the gradual complex and dynamic process of identity construction, there is evident change within the relationship private – institutional, in the case discussed here. The dichotomy follows a transformative process of construction and management, in four phases, from the initial ‘controlled institutional identity’, to ‘diffused identity’, respectively to the ‘assumed private identity’ and lastly to the ‘converted type of identity’ in which the private becomes an institutional capital.

The four theoretical concepts that have been operationalized across the current study, in order to discuss the data gathered in the seven official press releases about the Princess of Wales’s cancer experience, could be summed up as follows: Ernst Kantorowicz’ duality ‘body natural’ – ‘body political’ evidently defines the characteristics and problematic of the relationship person-function, with the function transcending the individual; Erving Goffman’s performative self sees the person as a creator of impressions for the public, where the self is not innately possessed but rather produced in the dialogue front stage – back stage, within the interaction between Catherine’s media messages and her public; Sandra Petronio’s *Boundaries of Privacy* and the Communication Privacy Management, outlined as a pattern to follow, have provided the relational/ communicational perspective of analysis, therefore allowing for an interpretation of the public’s access to the princess’ private realm. Stuart Hall’s approach, with his epistemological debate on identity as discourse, unites the theoretical and empirical data of the present study, seeing Catherine’s identity as strategically constructed and communicated while the ‘subject’ is ‘interpellated’ across and by certain media discourses.

With regard to RQ3 and RQ4 – that aimed at exploring how the selected media outlets received, decoded and further recoded and imparted the information – the sample selected for analysis can be clearly divided into two clusters of outlets. *The BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian* provided their audiences with perspectives that can consistently be interpreted as dominant decoders, by conveying the Palace’s and the Princess’ intended framing. Therefore, the institutional identity, or ‘body political’, is seen as notifying the media and the citizens of the intended withdrawal from the performance of public duties. The negotiated positioning, rarely occurring, tends to criticize circumstantial rather than fundamental meaning, as it was the case of

expressing skepticism regarding the timing of the video confessing the vague cancer diagnosis. By contrast, *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* presented, throughout the analysis, a significant element of unpredictability. Although initially subscribing to the dominant reception during the “abdominal surgery” and subsequent hospitalisation period, as well as when relaying the confession regarding the cancerous nature of the health problems, these media outlets shift towards the negotiated or even oppositional decoding during the edited Mother’s Day controversy. A potential conclusion can be drawn from these observations, namely the confirmation that when the factual basis illustrates an alignment between the political and the natural body, as well as the intended readability encoded in the initial message, these media outlets subscribe to the dominant frame. However, when the misalignment between the natural and the political body becomes apparent, their decoding shifts towards the negotiated and oppositional type of decoding of the message, in an attempt to discover reason and offer enriched meanings to the audiences, even if it relies on speculation, rather than facts. The separate legal dimension of the analysis of the selected media products, aimed at discovering whether we can clearly identify elements of the balancing criteria from the Von Hannover jurisprudence, proved not to be relevant for the study. Most of the media products illustrate a clear respect towards the institutionally and personally requested right to privacy, while sharing medical information that was consensually disclosed and while responding to legitimate public interest.

There are certain aspects that have not been viewed in this exploratory perspective: the paper does not discuss the authenticity of exposure in the corpus of analysis of the official press releases. There is no in-depth focus on who the ‘real’ author of the manipulated photo is, for example, or one may further debate on whether Catherine’s private story in the diagnosis disclosure video is authentic, or it is rather a performance of authenticity. It would also be interesting to see what happens if the conversion of private identity into a resource for institutional identity construction, through advocacy, might be reversible.

Several methodological and scope-related limitations of the qualitative media monitoring need to be acknowledged. While the selection of the analyzed media institutions and media products has been restrictively developed in terms of the surveyed dates, in order to include the date of specific official statements and events, the negotiated and oppositional decoding frames, in

Hall's sense, often require a longer period to fully develop, since reinterpretation, commentary, and counter-narratives tend to evolve over time. On a similar note, the corpus of analysis did not include articles built around the narrative perspectives of the extended royal family. Such an inclusion could have contributed to an improved analysis and understanding of the tension between the 'body natural' and the 'body politic'. The study is not complemented by an analysis of audience comments posted online. Considering Stuart Hall's reception theory, a fully rounded study should analyze not only the decoding and recoding of the original message performed by the media, but also the study of the decoding performed by the audiences of media. Future research incorporating audience-level data would therefore be necessary to complete the reception circuit and to test whether the decoding positions of the media, as identified here, correspond to the patterns of audience reception.

Lastly, for further research, it would be interesting to compare this specific case of identity construction and management regarding the duality 'body natural' – 'body political' with similar media phenomena in connection with the Princess of Wales and / or other British royal figures.

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