And We Will Never Be Royals

The Royal family consists of the Queen, her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, all of which whom are worth millions of dollars from birth. They receive a lot of publicity and fame for being wealthy and have access to anything that they desire. Similar to the Royal family, many wealthy celebrities appear to have everything right at their fingertips, whether it be an $800 blazer, or a $200000 vacation. It appears as though this luxury life of the minority of wealthy people is becoming desirable to many young adults, even though this lifestyle is rare and not realistic to the majority of society because it is too good to be true for everyone. The reasons for consuming more material objects vary from case to case, but there is no reasonable evidence for the extent it has gone. This has upset some people and even some celebrities who want to remain realistic in a materialistic and celebrity-obsessed society. The method that is typically used to make society desire more is nostalgia through advertising and encouraging society to work and have more. It is not just that explicit however, but rather its hidden in the celebrity-obsessed world we live in. In 2013, Lorde, a famous singer from New Zealand, released a music video called “Royals”. The music video shows a contrast between Lorde’s “normal” and average lifestyle along with her friends, while also expressing her feelings about the luxurious and unrealistic lifestyle and fantasy that is portrayed in celebrity-obsessed culture that makes us have tunnel vision. Throughout the music video, two young men are shown eating breakfast, listening to music, and riding the bus. They are a vessel that drives the idea that
we are not “Royals” and we can be content without being obsessed with consumerism. They seem to be content with their lives even though it appears as if they lead boring lives. It leads the viewers to question what Lorde is trying to convey specifically regarding consumerism and society. Through the dull and simplistic shots of two boys in a house enjoying their life surrounded by rich people, “Royals” by Lorde emphasizes an obsession for materialism trend found in the oppressor, like celebrities and the rich, versus those who are oppressed, like the poor, to show consumerism is increasing and is unrealistic for most of society.

When the video commences, it appears to be a normal pop-song music video that is all for the aesthetic. The pan shot of houses on either side of a road with a light and dark sky is shown right as the video begins - a typical shot shown in many movies and music videos. This depiction represents that there are the rich and there are the poor in a society. This contrast creates a division between what is realistic to want and what is not. For example, Lorde talks about how the youth wants gold chains and expensive things. Lorde constantly repeats the line “and we’ll never be Royals”, specifically after she describes the luxurious desires of the youth these days. As the music video continues, there are many close-up shots shown of the two boys that live in the small house. These close-up shots are very simplistic without a lot of bright colors or lighting in the background. This could show that their lives appear to be dull, but truly they aren’t. They are living a life that completely different than the Royal family, but that is simply their way of life. They are normal people who go through normal life routines. It is evident that Lorde is showing a fantasy that the youth has about a luxurious life, and that the rich part of society creates this fantasy. In addition to these simplistic shots and dull lighting, Lorde does not show her face often. By her not showing her face in the video often, she is further supporting her claim that she does not want to be one of those rich celebrities or influencers that creates an
unrealistic fantasy for the youth who are listening to her song. Moreover, she expresses her opinion that society is constantly running through showing a bus with poor and rich people on it. The bus is constantly moving, and the poor boys are resting their head against the windows of the bus, showing that they are tired of the cycle of rich people creating this negative stigma around poor people and setting expectations for the rest of society.

The ideas of wealth pressure in society also connect to “24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep” because Jonathan Crary, a Professor of Modern Art and Theory at Columbia University in New York, discusses how the unrealistic and fantasy-like nonstop demands of consumers are damaging society to the point it doesn’t know the difference between wakefulness and sleep - which is beyond the point itself. Crary describes this concept of stripping away an identity and influencing a society to be different is an aspect in consumerism, similar to what Lorde expresses, but he uses identity to argue for his claim, while Lorde uses celebrities and the rich. More than not, capitalism is a breeding ground for perfection and this strive to constantly work and be the best to the point people cannot be themselves or function properly. Additionally, Crary says, “The routines of 24/7 can neutralize or absorb many dislocating experiences that can undermine the identity” (Crary 20). It is suggested that the constant pursuit of perfection and desire to always want more can lead one to be blind to who they truly are because it is an unrealistic dream. Furthermore, the unrealistic dream that consumerism portrays can hurt its consumers by making them lose track of their own time and life. In “Royals” by Lorde, she blames celebrities and wealthy people for creating this unrealistic dream, like how she says “Bloodstains, ball gowns, trashin' the hotel room, We don't care, we're driving Cadillacs in our dreams”. These are common things that celebrities and wealthy people participate in and own, such as a Cadillac- things that are not common for a typical person.
This idea of creating a fantasy of living a luxurious life without realizing the consequences is shown in “Consumed by Nostalgia”, written by S. D. Chrostowska, a writer and intellectual historian of modern critical thought. He explains that we have become obsessed with this idea of having everything and have become tunnel visioned. He argues, “Capitalism saw nostalgia’s potential for profit and, channeling it now into its waters, gave it unprecedented currency” (Chrostowska 52). When he says this, he is pointing out that consuming more over time creates this desire to have more. Lorde says, “But everybody’s like Cristal, Maybach, diamonds on your timepiece, Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash.” Although she refers to the fantasy life portrayed in Hollywood and the wealthy, I think the real point, similar to Chrostowska’s view however, is not to contrast Lorde with other pop artists, but rather with the youth who are obsessed with the fantasy of consumerism and celebrity worshiping. This nostalgia is shown when she goes from, “and every song is like” in the first part of the song to “and everybody is like”. When she says “and everybody’s like”, she is suggesting that normal people are not necessarily living this way, but that they cannot stop fantasizing about the luxuries that Lorde describes. This creates a linear way of thinking, and all of a sudden everybody wants the new thing. Chrostowska claims that “the addiction behind the addiction – becomes infinitely more desirable” (Chrostowska 52). He is possibly arguing that nostalgia is to blame to the obsession with consumerism, thus creating society to be irrational and unrealistic in terms of being consumers. Furthermore, he alludes to a possible schedule or agenda that the rich part of society expect from everyone else, because when he refers to the “addiction”, he is referring to celebrities and the nostalgia of consuming everything. Contrary to what her primary message is, Lorde understands that imagination is a part of every human, but I think her appeal to nostalgia and this fantasy is more about how recent parts of society recognize the need for imagination or
fantasizing in how we live our lives. She says, “Let me be your ruler, you can call me Queen Bee, And baby I’ll rule, let me live that fantasy.” The final line, “Let me live that fantasy”, shows that she possibly has not exited the fantasy or her own nostalgia, but just went from one to another. It is possible that she thinks materialism is good. The song shows us a difference between the youth who fall for the fantasy and have nostalgia that is sourced from celebrities, and Lorde with the two boys who choose their own way of life, but the she does not have a clear meaning of her own view on what a decent life is. She sings, “Life is great without a care.” This is shown in the video when the most intense event in a day for the two boys is a boxing match in their dull living room, further showing that your imagination does not have to consist of expensive cars to be content and lead a fulfilling life.

Sometimes, the reason behind the obsession with having more materialistic things is hidden. In “Agenda, Identity, and Attribution: Consumerism’s Effect on Modern U.S. Society”, Jonluc Borno, a graduate researcher at St. Thomas University, argues that it is difficult to understand the meaning behind this nostalgia that comes with consumerism and why society is obsessed with it. He describes how consumerism divides a society, and “makes people feel like they are helpless” (Borno 72). Lorde shows the two boys shaving their heads in a medium shot, possibly representing how the boys feel helpless in this society full of wealthy people, while they remain poor. Furthermore, Borno shows how the wealthy influence by discussing agenda settings and advertising. He uses an example of a mother buying her daughter only a barbie doll and the daughter was still not satisfied because on the advertisement, barbie had a car, nice clothes, and a house. This supports his claim that people desire more based off what is available and appealing to the eye, rather than appreciating what they already have. Similarly, “Royals” shows the two boys enjoying breakfast together in a pan shot. By showing the two boys in a simple light, and
not showing Lorde, she is pointing out that celebrities influence too much of how we view what is appropriate to desire. The influence is controlling to some, and makes people question what is causing this recent addiction. This questioning is shown by the lack of community surrounding the poor boys. When there is a lack of community, it is harder to influence people or get support, especially in terms of consumerism.

There is an obvious absence of a community in “Royals”. Other than the two boys, there other family members are not shown. As mentioned at the beginning, there is a street shown that is empty with a dark and light sky rows of suburban houses. Nobody is in sight. In the video, the two boys are shown after the street simply spending time together doing cheap things, showing that they question or do not agree with the consumerist and celebrity-obsessed culture that enchants other people. They boys evidently have no support system or a community to offer a better way of life, but they question what the addiction is to a luxurious lifestyle. Peter Whybrow, an English psychiatrist, in “Dangerously Addictive”, explains that this addiction to consume more is questionable and unreasonable. He expresses this when he states, “at all levels of society we hunger for more – more money, more power, more food, more stuff…This comes from “the dangers of addiction from firsthand experience” (Whybrow 3). This firsthand experience that he is referring to the American dream of consuming everything that one possibly can, creating pressure for everyone to be the same way. This causes people to not know truly why they are obsessed with something. Similar to Crary’s claim that consumerism is running constantly causing this altering of identity, Whybrow says “We finance by working longer hours and sleeping less” (Whybrow 3). This shows that this fantasy that society seems to have of having everything is unrealistic and does not fit with out natural buzz, as Lorde sings “we crave a different kind of buzz.” Nick Stevenson, a Professor at the University of Nottingham, in
“Sociology in the Age of Celebrity”, furthers this idea that the majority of society should be craving a different “type of buzz”, however, the recent celebrity-obsessed lifestyle is overtaking. He states, “our culture has transformed the extent to which it has expanded the culture of consumption” (Stevenson 52). He explains that celebrity culture impacts society by influencing people to be more invested in consumerism and materialistic things. He claims that we are so obsessed with the television and what celebrities are doing and that impacts the way we interact in society by focusing on that more than focusing on important things such as politics. Lorde shows this physically in her music video, while the two boys sit in front of a television with no signal and just static. This shows that the two boys are not buying into this materialistic fantasy that is shown. This also connects to Crary’s idea that the society is running “24/7” and we are buying into what its demands are, similar to how the television in the music video keeps rolling, but the boys are not affected by it.

“Royals” by Lorde reveals that she longs for a lifestyle that is more authentic than the celebrity-obsessed and materialistic lifestyle that her peers dream of. “Royals” strives to show the youth that they make their own choices and should not be influenced by other wealthy people because it causes the rest of society to have a linear way of viewing consumerism. She sings, “Let me be your ruler, and you can call me Queen Bee.” Lorde exclaims this in the voice of other celebrities. The music video wants us to question what it means to be ruled by the part of society that is obsessed with consumerism. Lorde gives us reasons to be suspicious about the addiction to buy more. At the beginning of the video, it appears to be just a video about some random boys in California, but after pondering the deeper meaning behind the filmic elements and lyrics, we can see that the video shows anti-consumerism and its lasting effect.


