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English

A Sixteenth-century “Common Whore”?

*Katherine Howard’s Controversial Legacy in Popular History
and Public Imagination*

B.A. Thesis

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Abstract

History texts and popular media alike have long portrayed Henry VIII's fifth queen, Katherine Howard, as a wanton, empty-headed material girl. Many biographers have expressed biased opinions in purportedly factual texts, even resorting to labeling Katherine a "common whore." The popular Showtime television series *The Tudors* depicted the young queen as a giggly and promiscuous mean girl. Such one-dimensional portrayals have undermined Katherine's reputation and influenced public opinion of Katherine as a historical figure. A survey was conducted to examine how pop culture representations of Katherine Howard have influenced audiences. This essay presents the main findings of the survey, revealing that while Tudor enthusiasts generally like Katherine as a historical figure, a considerable percentage believe she was at least partly guilty of the charges leveled against her and deserving of her fate on the executioner's block. This essay questions whether Katherine's reputation is deserved, drawing on psychology and law to present alternative explanations for her behavior. With its focus on why people think and act the way they do, psychology provides an ideal framework for digging deeper into Katherine's psyche and seeking rational explanations behind actions that many find incomprehensible or downright stupid. Hundreds of years later, it is impossible to properly diagnose Katherine based on physical and cognitive symptoms, but using written accounts of Katherine's life and behavior, it is possible to hypothesize that she was a victim of neglect and sexual abuse as a child. This essay also argues against using contemporary Tudor law to justify Katherine's treatment, as law is not necessarily a reliable measure of what is right or moral. A brief consideration of age of consent laws through the ages suggests that such laws have historically been written by men and failed to take the female experience into account or prioritize women's welfare. In fact, it wasn't until the nineteenth century that child welfare was taken into account when devising laws governing the age of consent.

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Introduction

Historical novels and television portrayals have turned the Tudors into celebrities and presented a more imaginative and limited version of history, which audiences are often all too ready to accept as factual (Bordo 527-528). Fictional portrayals inevitably affect public opinion of the real historical figures. Since original historical sources are not available to the general public, those interested in delving deeper into Tudor history must rely on the work of historians for more information. This presents a problem when historians are so interested in “courting” general audiences that they “juice up the dry bones of the historical record with a narrative drive and color of a novel” (Bordo 31, 61). The six wives of Henry VIII have, in a popular sense, been defined more by the way their lives ended than by how they were lived (Fraser 1). Katherine Howard, the fifth wife, is no exception. Instead of viewing Katherine’s story as part of a complicated, multi-faceted narrative, historians, media and popular culture have turned to overly simplified and largely negative interpretations of her as a historical figure. While her cousin, Anne Boleyn, has reached celebrity status as a “feminist icon” and is often considered “a feminist ahead of her time,” Katherine is still regarded in a negative light, though she and Anne Boleyn met the same tragic end on the executioner’s block (Bordo 19; “Anne Boleyn”).

There are limited historical records on Katherine Howard’s life and most of what is known about her is derived from state records written by those in power, including observations of her life as queen and accounts of her downfall (Gregory, “Background”). On a similar note, author and historian Philippa Gregory suggests that Katherine Howard’s “childhood is better known, but drawn almost wholly from evidence given against her” (*The Boleyn Inheritance* 515). In other words, the information available on Katherine Howard is based on what men in power thought and said of her; men who may have been serving their own political agendas or trying to save their own skin by assuring Katherine’s ruin. Even more recent historical accounts of her life have failed to achieve objectivity, instead reflecting historians’ personal views. David Starkey describes Katherine as a rebellious “good-time girl” and a “crass, self-indulgent teenager without a thought in her head” (654-655, 683). Alison Weir apparently agrees with Starkey when she writes that Katherine “was no Anne Boleyn” for she was “much younger and far more empty-headed” and “certainly promiscuous”

(*Six Wives* 25, 41; *Traitors of the Tower* 34-35). Antonia Fraser has written that Katherine was “no intelligent adult woman” and even Lacey Baldwin Smith, known as one of Katherine’s more sympathetic biographers, has described her as “wanton,” “promiscuous,” “a juvenile delinquent” and a “common whore” (Fraser 316; Smith, qtd. in Lindsey 169). Katherine Howard has not been as prominent a figure on screen as her cousin Anne Boleyn, but the most recent and by far best known film portrayal of Katherine is performed by Tamzin Merchant in Showtime’s *The Tudors* (2007-2010). Merchant’s depiction of Katherine reinforces the idea that Henry VIII’s fifth queen was a licentious and foolish mean girl who thought only of pleasure and material things. There are no authenticated portraits of Katherine Howard, although there are a few that have been traditionally associated with her. This lack of authenticated portraits has led many popular Tudor accounts on social media, namely Instagram, to use artistically edited screenshots of Tamzin Merchant in the role of the fifth queen when writing about Katherine as a historical figure (Byrne, “The Portraiture” 57). Therefore, it is not unlikely that Tudor history enthusiasts’ views of Katherine Howard as a historical figure have been influenced by the way she is depicted in *The Tudors*.

Given that Katherine Howard has been portrayed negatively by historians, film producers and even authors of Tudor fiction, it is worth investigating whether the general public’s perception of her as a historical figure has become tainted as a result. In this essay, Katherine’s story will be examined through the lens of historical facts and her depiction in *The Tudors* considered, and the results of a survey conducted to explore Tudor fans’ different perspectives of Katherine Howard will be examined. Finally, in order to address popular misconceptions of Katherine Howard and emphasize the complexity of her character, her story will be considered from her own point of view in the context of law and psychology. Although a big part of Katherine’s life will forever remain a mystery, every attempt to challenge her undeserved ill reputation through the known parts of her life is worth the effort. The point is not to redraw Katherine Howard as an innocent martyr, but to acknowledge her as a real human being who ate, drank, slept, dreamed, hoped, and loved like anyone else.

1 Historical Background: The Girl Behind the Label

Despite being of noble birth through her Howard lineage, Katherine was raised in poverty with limited material comfort and security (Fraser 317; Russell 37). She was one of many born to the indebted Lord Edmund Howard and Jocasta (Joyce) Culpepper, who died when Katherine was a child (*Six Wives* 434; Russell 37). Katherine's exact age when she lost her mother is unknown, as her birth year is a matter of great speculation among historians (Russell 27, 33, 37; Starkey 644). Suggestions have ranged from 1518 to 1527, with her most recent biographers, such as Conor Byrne, Josephine Wilkinson and Gareth Russell, agreeing that she was born between 1522 and 1525 (Russell 15; Byrne, "Katherine"). Shortly after Joyce's death, Edmund remarried and Katherine was sent to live in the household of her step-grandmother, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, to continue her education (*Six Wives* 415). Katherine's rudimentary education involved etiquette, dancing, reading, writing and music (Russell 45, 53).

In 1540, Katherine's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, secured her a position at court as lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves, who was Queen of England at the time (*Six Wives* 415). It is difficult to establish whether this position was secured for her in hopes that she would attract the advances of King Henry VIII just as her cousin Anne Boleyn had, but it is certain that before long the King fell more in love with Katherine than he had with any of his four previous wives (Starkey 650-651; *Six Wives* 416). The first official signs of Henry's affection for Katherine were in the form of gifts and lands (Fraser 322). Such was the showering of gifts that the French ambassador Marillac reported that the King was "so amorous of her that he cannot treat her well enough and caresses her more than he did the others" (qtd. in Starkey 651). After taking care of his divorce with Anne of Cleves, Henry VIII was wedded to Katherine at Oatlands Palace in Surrey on 28 July 1540, the same day Thomas Cromwell, Henry's long-term trusted advisor, was executed (Fraser 330).

Henry was finally happy "after sundry troubles of mind, which have happened unto him by Marriages, to have obtained such a jewel of womanhood" whose "virtue and good behaviour which she shewed outwardly, did her all honour accordingly" (Cobbett 445-446). However, by this point, the man who had once been considered the most handsome man in Europe had become exceedingly obese and was nearing his fifties, while Katherine had not yet turned twenty. As a result of a jousting accident in 1536, Henry also suffered from an ulcer that continually oozed pus, smelled terribly,

and considerably reduced his mobility. Dark depressions and unpredictable bursts of temper also accompanied his physical ailments. In other words, a king in this condition who had aged beyond his years couldn't have had much to offer a teenage girl like Katherine, except riches and the highest position a woman could obtain. Although the King was not easy to live with, Katherine remained dutiful in attending to her husband's needs (*Six Wives* 416). Unfortunately, the King's marital bliss would not last long. Neither would Katherine's young life, for rumors of her dark past would reach court before long.

On 1 November 1541, All Saints Day, Henry led the country in prayer, thanking the Lord for giving him a wife entirely suited to his inclinations, after all the strange "accidents" that had befallen his previous wives. After the ceremony, he found a letter in his private chapel written by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury (qtd. in *Six Wives* 447; "Catherine Howard"). The letter contained accusations against Katherine for "dissolute living before her marriage with a man named Francis Dereham" and reported that it "was not secret, but many knew it" (*Six Wives* 447). Furthermore, it informed the King that Henry Manox, Katherine Howard's former music teacher, "knew a privy mark of her body" (qtd. in Starkey 667). At first, Henry could not believe that his wife had engaged in illicit sex and wrote off the accusations as "rather a forged matter than of truth" (qtd. in Starkey 688). Surely, his luck with wives could not be that bad. However, he agreed that Cranmer should further investigate the charges in secret (qtd. in Starkey 688; "Catherine Howard"). In the meantime, Katherine was to be confined to her apartments with only Lady Rochford, one of her ladies-in-waiting, until her name could be cleared. From this point, Henry would never see his jewel of a wife again. (*Six Wives* 447).

Due to statements made by other ladies who had lived with Katherine in her step-grandmother's household, Cranmer knew Katherine had engaged in immoral behavior. One witness named Margaret Bennet proved to have the most vital testimony. She testified to having seen Dereham "pluck up Katherine's clothes above her navel so that [she] might well discern her body" and having heard him say that he could enjoy the company of a woman without impregnating her (qtd. in Starkey 670). These testimonies were enough to convince Cranmer that the rumors about Katherine being no virgin upon her marriage to the King were true. Cranmer also discovered that Katherine had taken Francis Dereham into her service as her private secretary, possibly in response to blackmail and to keep Dereham silent about her past (*Six Wives* 448; Fraser

334). Armed with his discoveries, Cranmer presented his evidence to the King. Upon hearing of his wife's past, Henry broke down in tears. The King's Council was astonished to see such emotions revealed from "one in his courage" (qtd. in *Six Wives* 448; "Catherine Howard"). The Council found the fact that the Queen had employed a former lover very suspicious, for if she betrayed the King in thought, she was certain to betray him in deed if the opportunity presented itself. Consequently, Cranmer confronted Katherine on 7 November and described the charges of misconduct against her (*Six Wives* 448, 450; "Catherine Howard").

At first, Katherine became hysterical, crying "like a madwoman" in fear of ending up on the block like her cousin Anne Boleyn (qtd. in *Six Wives* 449). Cranmer did not learn much from Katherine but gained enough information to assume that a precontract between her and Dereham had taken place prior to her marriage to the King. When Cranmer explained to her that the King meant to "deal gently with her" in order to trick her into confessing, she admitted that Dereham had lain with her, "sometimes in his doublet and hose, and two or three times naked, but not so naked that he had nothing upon him ... but ... naked, when his hose was put down" (qtd. in *Six Wives* 450, 454). Then she wrote a confession begging for the King's mercy and pleading her "youthful frailty and the wicked ways of young men" and explained how she had been so "blinded with the desire of worldly glory" that she had not considered "how great a fault it was to conceal [her] former faults" (qtd. in *Six Wives* 456; Starkey 672). Katherine could not be found guilty of a crime at this point, since her liaisons with Manox and Dereham happened before her marriage to the King. At this point, her only blame lay in failing to disclose the fact that she was no virgin (Starkey 673).

After Cranmer had left with Katherine's confession, Katherine sent that she wished to change her testimony. When Cranmer returned, he again emphasized the King's willingness to show her mercy. Katherine confessed that Dereham had raped her and asserted that she had never freely consented to his advances, in hopes that her plea for the King's forgiveness would soften his heart. Instead of admitting to a precontract, which could have spared her life and convinced the King to annul their marriage, Katherine wrote in her confession that when Dereham had brought up "the question of matrimony" she had never accepted his proposals. Cranmer did not believe Katherine's new version of the story and therefore suspected her of lying about other matters, such as whether she had been disloyal to the King (qtd. in *Six Wives* 452). The King's Council was still not convinced that Katherine's sexual liaisons were a thing of the past

and Cranmer was therefore determined to discover the truth by any means necessary. Although Henry was angry and wanted Katherine punished after reading her confession, he decided to spare her life for the time being and remove her to the nunnery at Syon Abbey until the matter could be fully resolved (“Catherine Howard”).

When Henry Manox was interrogated, he admitted to having “felt more than was convenient” and swore “upon his damnation and most extreme punishment of his body, he never knew her carnally” (qtd. in Starkey 669-670). Manox stuck to his story despite brutal pressure and, being found blameless, he was released (Starkey 670). An examination of Francis Dereham conversely revealed that “he hath had carnal knowledge with the Queen” (qtd. in Starkey 670). Consequently, Dereham was arrested and taken to the Tower, where he was pressured, under horrific torture, to disclose further information that could satisfy the Council’s suspicions that an affair had taken place *after* the King’s marriage with Katherine. Despite the brutal torture, Dereham denied any wrongdoing. On 11 November, Dereham attempted to prove his innocence by throwing suspicion on a gentleman of the King’s privy chamber, Thomas Culpepper, claiming that Culpepper “had succeeded him in the Queen’s affections” (Starkey 674).

Following Dereham’s confession, Culpepper was arrested and taken to the Tower for interrogation on 12 or 13 November. Culpepper admitted his feelings for Katherine but insisted that Katherine had taken the initiative to which he had eagerly responded. He said he intended and meant “to do ill with the Queen and that likewise the Queen so minded with him” (qtd. in Starkey 680). Culpepper, however, while subjected to torture, still denied having had sexual relations with the Queen, and Katherine likewise maintained her innocence. Nevertheless, the intention to commit treason was in itself enough to sentence a person to death (Fraser 353). Culpepper and Dereham were tried for treason and sentenced to death on 1 December at Guildhall. Dereham was punished with a traitor’s death, which meant that he was hanged, castrated, disemboweled, beheaded and quartered. Due to Culpepper’s higher position and former favor with the King, his sentence was reduced to simple beheading (Starkey 680-681). Both men were executed in December 1541 (“December 10th”).

Katherine was transferred from Syon Abbey to the Tower of London on 10 February. The following day, King Henry assented to passing an act of attainder which stated that any woman who married the King without declaring her sexual impurity could be found guilty of high treason (Fraser 353; Mackie 419). Moreover, this bill enabled Henry to punish Katherine without any need for a trial and spared him the grief

of having to hear the “wicked facts of the case” (qtd. in Starkey 682; Ridgeway “21 January”). Lady Rochford was also charged with high treason for abetting Katherine’s affair with Culpepper (Mackie 418).

On the evening of 12 February, the day before her execution, Katherine made a strange request. She asked for the block to be brought to her cell as a “way of experiment” to figure out “how she was to place her head on it” (qtd. in Starkey 683). This wish was granted. The following morning, on 13 February 1542, Katherine Howard and Lady Jane Rochford were to be beheaded. After delivering her final speech, declaring that she had been “justly condemned . . . to die” by “worthy and just punishment” and urging the assembly “to take example at [her]” and “obey the King in all things,” she laid down her head on the block as she had practiced and suffered the final blow (qtd. in Starkey 684). After meeting this “most godly and Christian end,” Katherine’s decapitated body was moved and buried in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, the same chapel where her cousins Anne Boleyn and George Rochford lie to this day (qtd. in Starkey 684; Fraser 353-354). Katherine Howard may never have reached twenty-one years of age (Fraser 354).

2 Katherine Howard in *The Tudors*

The best-known dramatic portrayal of Katherine Howard on screen is found in Showtime's television series *The Tudors* (2007-2010), with Tamzin Merchant in the role of the young queen. *The Tudors*, which is the longest filmic event ever to deal with the Tudor dynasty, has been described as "a genuine cultural phenomenon" (Robison 2). Even though the last episode of the series aired in 2010, *The Tudors* remains one of the highest-rated programs in Showtime's history and to this day continues to inspire blogs, websites, Facebook pages and Instagram profiles centered on the popular series' adaptation of famous Tudor figures (Robison 2). Due to all the recognition the TV series has received, it is reasonable to assume that Merchant's portrayal of Henry VIII's tragic wife has greatly influenced viewers' interpretation of Katherine Howard. During Katherine's story arc, which runs from the final episode of season three to the fifth episode of season four, the most controversial factual historical events in Katherine's life are dramatized, and her stereotypical reputation as a frivolous, foolish material girl is exaggerated to create a compelling story that appeals to viewers.

As narrated by *The Tudors*, Katherine's early relationship with the King can be described as a millennial Cinderella story with an early modern twist. Every day is like Christmas for Katherine, as Henry showers her with expensive gifts, jewelry and dresses on a daily basis. According to Lady Rochford, one of Katherine's ladies-in-waiting, Henry spoils Katherine and apparently "cannot treat her well enough" ("Sister"). The young queen's attitude and stunts frequently resemble those expected from a teenage chick flick. Instead of pillow fights, Katherine and her ladies engage in a mud fight in their underclothes or throw rose petals in the air. There's even a scene that resembles a slumber party in which Katherine gathers her ladies-in-waiting around her throne and points a scepter, instead of a flashlight, while telling the giggling ladies that they are to "dress in the French fashion" like her ("Moment of Nostalgia"). Katherine is also shown lying on her stomach and eating a snack while reading a book on midwifery, instead of a magazine.

The presentation of Katherine as a spoiled and immature teenage girl is often overly exaggerated and best demonstrated through her interactions with Henry's daughter, the Lady Mary. Mary treats Katherine with coldness and contempt. Her attitude is deeply frustrating to Katherine, who believes that as queen she is entitled to

respect. Katherine's extreme irritation, practically palpable as she rolls her eyes and plops down angrily on her throne, reveals her immaturity and lack of adult communication skills ("Sister"). Instead of putting in the work to earn Mary's respect, Katherine confronts Mary with the attitude of a typical "mean girl" ("Sister"). Katherine attempts to compensate for her insecurity and inability to command authority as queen by arrogantly placing her hands on her hips and seeking the support of her giggling ladies when patronizing and punishing Mary. Mary's reply, however, both underscores Katherine's immaturity in the show and reflects common views people have towards Katherine Howard as a historical figure: "I think you desire almost nothing else than pleasure! It pleases you, it seems, to do nothing but wear pretty clothes and dance. Some people may think it frivolous..." ("Sister"). In other words, *The Tudors* reinforces Katherine's notorious labels as a frivolous material girl.

Merchant's portrayal of Katherine also repeatedly supports the popular belief that the real Katherine Howard was an uneducated, naïve and foolish young woman. When Culpepper presents the book *The Byrthe of Mankind* to Katherine, she stumbles as she reads the title. When she flips through the book, looking at pictures related to midwifery, she acts as though it were a foreign subject and finally bursts out giggling like a blushing innocent schoolgirl, even though we know she was sexually experienced before her marriage ("Sister"). Katherine's foolishness and naïveté are made known through the way she runs through the whole court and inappropriately interrupts Henry during a council meeting to tell him that she believes she is with child ("Something for You"). She encounters an angry and disappointed Henry when she discovers she was mistaken ("Something for You"). Katherine's ignorance towards the ways of court and her inability to take important matters seriously lead to her downfall, and her sexual inclinations ultimately seal her fate. At one point, Lady Rochford demonstrates Katherine's large sexual appetite by suggesting to Culpepper that the King "would needs be fit, if he wants to satisfy her" ("Sister"). Once the King starts neglecting Katherine due to the worsening condition of the ulcer on his leg, Culpepper and Lady Rochford are able to use Katherine's sexual weakness to manipulate her into having an extramarital affair with Culpepper. After all, to them Katherine is nothing but "a sweet little fool" ("Sister").

The Tudors has been criticized for its "sex sells" agenda and has often been likened to "soft-core pornography" (Robison 22). Producer Michael Hirst has confessed to placing too much emphasis on sex in the first two seasons, and yet he offers the most

sexualized depiction of one of Henry's wives in the latter two seasons (Robison 2). None of Henry's other wives, or even mistresses, appears naked on screen as often as Katherine, nor is as generous about displaying her nude figure. Merchant adorns the TV screen with her bare body at least once in every episode in which she appears, leaving little to the imagination. Some of her performances include lying naked on Henry's bed with only red rose petals to conceal her private parts, conducting a bawdy puppet show with moaning dolls performing oral sex, giggling while sitting naked on a swing and dancing naked behind Henry's bed curtains. Along with the frequent display of rose petals, Katherine is repeatedly shown wearing scarlet dresses as a symbol of her sexual nature, that is, when she is fully clothed (Taylor 32). In one scene, the show even hints that Katherine may in fact have been bisexual, with gentlewoman Joan Bulmer jumping into Katherine's bed, stroking and blowing on her shoulder suggestively and asking, "Do you remember this?" ("Moment of Nostalgia"). Those well-informed about Katherine Howard's history are familiar with Katherine's unusual request to have her execution block brought to her so that she "might know how to place [herself] and make trial of it" ("Bottom of the Pot"). The extremes the producers of the show are willing to go to in their delivery of an oversexualized version of Katherine Howard are demonstrated through Merchant's completely nude appearance on screen, with her breasts bare and hair wildly let down, while making practice of the block on the eve of Katherine's execution ("Bottom of the Pot").

Katherine's role as a sexual object in the show is emphasized from the first moment she is introduced to viewers. Courtier Francis Bryan is tasked with finding a mistress to "amuse the King" and distract him from his tiresome life and current wife, Anne of Cleves. He makes a visit to the Dowager Duchess of Lambeth, who acts like she owns a brothel when she invites Bryan to look over her dormitory full of female "aristocratic bastards" ("The Undoing of Cromwell"). Chosen as "fit for a king" is the young and pretty Katherine Howard ("The Undoing of Cromwell"). Katherine performs her task as a mistress efficiently and instantly manages to distract the King from his troubles. During her first private encounter with Henry, she lifts up her skirt and uses a ring she borrows from the King to erotically stroke her bare legs and bring attention to her body. Henry's instant lust for Katherine evolves into secret meetings in the night and soon enough Henry's pillow is replaced by Katherine's buttocks ("The Undoing of Cromwell"). By the end of the first episode of season four, Henry has announced Katherine as his new wife, claiming she attracted him by "a notable appearance of

honour, cleanness and maidenly behaviour,” although it is quite obvious to viewers that Katherine started out as Henry’s mistress (“Moment of Nostalgia”). Throughout the episodes in which Katherine appears, she is continually objectified by men. Most people around her, in fact, seem to regard her as less than a “full, actualized person” (Taylor 31). Even her eventual lover, Thomas Culpepper, speaks about Katherine in sexualized terms, describing her breasts, thighs and “sweet plump little arse” (“Moment of Nostalgia”). The only time Katherine is spoken of in a more positive manner is when Henry calls her his “rose without a thorn (Taylor 31; “Sister”).

Katherine’s frequent nude scenes are disturbing in terms of her young age in *The Tudors* and have deservedly been compared to “child pornography” (Robison 4). The fact that she is both young and at first unmarried and yet displays tremendous experience in sexual matters never raises any questions amongst Katherine’s elders. The only time the series vaguely implies that a King married to a girl young enough to be his daughter is objectionable is when a dinner guest expresses shock when hearing Henry tell the French ambassador, Marillac, that Katherine is seventeen years old. From a historical point of view, Henry would have been forty-nine years old. However, actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers, who plays Henry VIII, is only ten years older than Tamzin Merchant, who was twenty-two when she started playing the role of Katherine Howard. The actors’ historically inaccurate age gap and Rhys Meyers’ refusal to gain weight or have his appearance aged through makeup or prosthetics for the role affects *The Tudors*’ portrayal of Katherine Howard, making it more problematic and deserving of criticism (Robison 45, 206). Unlike Anne of Cleves, Katherine appears unaffected by the disgusting odor of Henry’s leg ulcer. Katherine, understandably, is not repulsed at the sight of a Henry trapped in Rhys Meyers’ muscular and handsome body and is enamored with him as long as he gives her gifts and can keep up with her sexually. Ultimately, Katherine’s decision to pursue an extramarital affair with Culpepper is, in this depiction, due to a handsome Henry’s inability to attend to her sexual desires and his declining health rather than her disgust with an old, overweight king with a foul-smelling ulcer. It is therefore quite understandable if viewers lack sympathy for Katherine in her decision to get romantically involved with Culpepper.

One of the most controversial aspects of Katherine’s history is the nature of her relationship with Culpepper, and the question of whether they did or did not have sexual relations is a subject of much debate among historians. Some historians, such as Josephine Wilkinson for example, have theorized that Katherine may have been a

victim of sexual abuse by at least one of these men, if not all of them. Katherine's relationship with Dereham raises concern when their age difference and the start of their supposed intimate relationship is taken into account. It is believed that Katherine and Dereham may have first become intimately involved in 1538, when Katherine may have been as young as thirteen years old and Dereham perhaps twenty-five (Russel 58). In essence, there are convincing arguments supporting the theory that Katherine may have been a victim of sexual abuse, but of course, until historians have concrete proof, these arguments cannot be accepted as fact. However, when all is said and done, there is sufficient reason to argue that the real Katherine may not have been as promiscuous, villainous and foolish a young woman as *The Tudors* makes her out to be.

Culpepper and Dereham's execution scene is one of the most notable and brutal scenes ever presented in Tudor popular culture, as noted by Emma Taylor (Taylor 29). Taylor argues that even amidst the brutality portrayed, the sexuality encoded into Katherine Howard's character in the show "spills over into the deaths of Culpepper and Dereham" (Taylor 28). Juxtaposed with the two men's journey to the scaffold, Katherine is shown dancing sensually in her white underclothes in what appears to be an empty and dark attic in Syon Abbey ("Bottom of the Pot"). At this point, Katherine has not received her death sentence and still believes the King will forgive her. The color white is often used to symbolize purity, and in Katherine's case the white color of her dress and corset seems to reflect Katherine's own view of herself as innocent. The indication of sensuality and innocence is not only manifested in her apparel but also through her dance. This scene is one of the few where Katherine looks more like an innocent child trying to disconnect from her terrible reality and escape into another world of peace. At the same time, Katherine's dress and dance movements carry heavy connotations of her more sexual spirit. The dance moves switch between being sensual and innocently angelic depending on whether Culpepper or Dereham is being executed.

While Culpepper is being led to his death, Katherine's dance becomes more sexual and passionate. Katherine's voice is concurrently audible in the background reciting parts of her famous historical letter to Culpepper, such as: "It makes my heart die to think I cannot always be in your company" ("The Bottom of the Pot"). As soon as Culpepper's head is chopped off, Katherine's dance becomes less sensual and more angelic as if in an attempt to make herself appear as the victim. Dereham vomits in fear at the sight of Culpepper's execution and is next led to the center of the stage to be hanged. While Dereham wriggles in the noose, Katherine audibly recounts: "He called

me wife and touched the secret parts of my body ... and he kissed me passionately” (“The Bottom of the Pot”). Dereham, still alive, is carried down to be disemboweled in front of a large, noisy crowd. As a considerable amount of Dereham’s blood spills all over his body, Katherine silently kneels before a window. Melancholic violin music plays in the background as light from the window shines upon her. The rest of the room remains dark (“The Bottom of the Pot”). The contrast of sensuality and innocence in this scene not only appears to symbolize the conflicting childlike and sexual character within Katherine, but also seems to represent how she perceives herself in relation to the two men. With Culpepper, Katherine was able to express her sexual side and experience romance, while with Dereham she was a victim of abuse. When Katherine is led to the Tower after being charged with treason, she sees Dereham and Culpepper’s heads on spikes and sobs in fear. However, her gaze is focused on Culpepper and she mentions only his name out loud (“The Bottom of the Pot”). It is clear that Culpepper is the Romeo of this story.

The Tudors exaggerates written records of Katherine’s interrogation, depicting her as a lunatic after her arrest. One of Katherine’s guards explains to Bishop Gardiner that Katherine “has been in such lamentation and ... sometimes in a frenzy, that [he] had to remove every implement that might have harmed her” (“The Bottom of the Pot”). Katherine then comes out of hiding in the back of the room, swollen from weeping and altogether unkempt, when called upon from across the big dark room. The only light in the room is a blue light that shines through colorful window tiles and onto Katherine’s face. This lighting effect resembles some disturbing scene with a mentally ill person in a scary movie. Bishop Gardiner later tells Edward Seymour and Charles Brandon that Katherine has confessed to being raped by Dereham. Gardiner is convinced that she is lying just as he is sure she is “lying about other things” (“The Bottom of the Pot”). After all, who would believe anything a “madwoman” says?

Katherine behaves scandalously to the very end. She turns down the offer to have a confessor brought to her, for she has “spoken to God so rarely, [she] did not think He would know who [she] was” (“The Bottom of the Pot”). The concern on the face of the guard who offers her the confessor implies that Katherine may be on her way to hell. While Katherine is practicing placing her head on the block, viewers are given a look at Henry, who is drunk and enjoying the company of many beautiful women, feeding them strawberries. The message is clear: unlike Katherine, who is a woman, it is acceptable for a man like Henry to explore his sexual side without being punished.

Katherine's final scandal is claiming, as her last words, that she has come to die, but "would rather die the wife of Culpepper" ("The Bottom of the Pot"). These words are based on myth. In reality, Katherine died respectfully, and her execution speech followed the usual convention (Ridgway, "The Executions").

Due to the prolonged popularity of *The Tudors* series, it would be logical to assume that its negatively overblown portrayal of Katherine has affected the opinions and attitudes of Tudor history fans towards Katherine Howard as a historical figure. A recent survey I conducted explores whether there is a connection between people's assumptions about Katherine Howard's life and the way *The Tudors* reinvents the young queen to the public. The following chapter presents the results of this survey.

3 Katherine Howard Survey

3.1 Methodology

Social media pages hosted by fans of Tudor history provide significant insight into the general public's perception of early modern historical figures such as Katherine Howard. Users of Facebook and Instagram have frequently uploaded posts asking other users for their thoughts and opinions on key figures and events in Tudor history.

Discussions on Katherine Howard have certainly fueled hot debates. Fans have shared their honest thoughts on the fifth queen, debated whether she was a whore or a victim and asked for other people's opinions as to whether she deserved her tragic fate or whether her execution was "a travesty of justice" (Cartwright). Many responses appear to reflect the negative picture of Katherine that has been drawn by historians, novelists and filmmakers, including the team behind *The Tudors*. However, among the negative comments, there are also more sympathetic perspectives, with people describing Katherine as an abused child and victim of her circumstances. Moreover, articles have appeared online with headlines such as "Did Catherine Howard Commit Adultery?" and "Katherine Howard: Vixen or Victim" in an attempt to temper the more unsympathetic views ("Did Catherine Howard"; "Vixen or Victim?"). Even bloggers intending to evoke sympathy for Katherine use words that reveal an inherent bias. For example, one sympathetic blogger describes Katherine as "ignorant and ditzy, too materialistic and fun-loving." He encourages readers to "think again of the hysterical and suicidal teenager imprisoned at Syon Abbey" ("Whore or Victim"). In light of the negative portrayals of Katherine Howard through the years and the more recent sympathetic press she has received, I conducted a survey to examine Tudor fans' current views of Katherine.

Surveys were e-mailed to 200 subjects with the goal of analyzing how Tudor enthusiasts perceive Katherine Howard as a historical figure in the present day. The results were gathered and analyzed using Google Forms. The only requirement for the participants was that they be sufficiently well versed in Katherine Howard's historical background to be able to offer personal opinions on the most debated aspects of her life.

3.2 Participants

Participants were drawn from two different sources: first, students who had already participated in a course on the Tudor period in contemporary literature and film at the University of Iceland, and second, members of popular Facebook groups focused on the Tudor period. Creating a Facebook post within the groups requesting participants to participate in a survey on Katherine Howard was sufficient to gain all 200 subjects who took part in my survey. The Facebook post included a short description of the study and informed interested group members that they could participate in the study by sending their e-mail addresses in a direct message to me on Facebook. Next, I sent the quiz I had prepared on Katherine Howard to the participants through Google Forms, which is connected to my Gmail. Participants received a reminder a week later. Table 1 gives an overview of the age and gender of the subjects that took part in the study.

Table 1: Participant age and gender

Age	Total	Male	Female
Younger than 18 years	0.5%	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)
18-24	6%	0 (0%)	12 (6%)
25-34	35%	1 (0.5%)	69 (34.5%)
35-44	20.5%	0 (0%)	41 (20.5%)
45-54	23%	1 (0.5%)	45 (22.5%)
55-64	11.5%	1 (0.5%)	22 (11%)
65 or older	3.5%	0 (0%)	7 (3.5%)

As shown in Table 1, 98.5% of all the participants were female, and the majority of participants were between 25 and 34 years old. None of the participants from the course on the Tudor period in contemporary literature and film at the University of Iceland were male. The three male respondents were found in Facebook groups dedicated to Tudor-related subjects. The division between male and female participants is interesting, as it indicates that women in general may be more interested in the Tudor era.

3.3 The Survey

The survey consisted of 22 questions. Some were intended to gather basic background information on the participants, including age, gender, and information about their interest in the Tudors. The remainder were designed to measure participants' personal views on Katherine Howard, focusing on controversial issues such as her personality, sexual history, and ultimate demise. Most questions were multiple choice, though some were open-ended. Google forms automatically produces a statistical analysis of the results. To make sure the calculations were correct, I compiled the results in Word and systematically analyzed each response. The results are presented in multiple tables below.

3.4 Results

The tables in this section present results from questions related to Katherine Howard's negative reputation and romantic relationships. The results indicating whether the subjects liked Katherine Howard as a historical figure or not are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Do you like Katherine Howard as a historical figure?

Response	Percentage
Yes	66.5%
No	5%
I don't like her, but find her interesting	28%
I don't like her and she's not interesting to me at all	0.5%

As shown in table 2, most participants have a favorable view of Katherine Howard as a historical figure. In contrast, table 3 reveals whether participants believe Katherine deserves her infamous reputation as a "silly materialistic teenage whore."

Table 3: Do you believe Katherine Howard deserves her well-known labels and reputation?

Response	Percentage
Yes	53%
No	6.5%
Only some of those labels	40.5%

Here we see that although Katherine is well liked by 66.5% of respondents, over 90% feel she deserves at least some of the negative labels that have been assigned to her.

Table 4 illustrates respondents' opinions on Katherine's affairs with Henry Manox and Francis Dereham.

Table 4: What is your attitude towards Katherine Howard's affairs with Henry Manox and Francis Dereham? In your opinion, were they consensual?

Response	Percentage
Yes to both	40%
No to both	24%
Yes with Manox, no with Dereham	5%
No with Manox, yes with Dereham	31%

Forty percent of respondents believe Katherine willingly consented to both sexual relationships, while 60% believe she was coerced by Manox, Dereham, or both. Table 5 shows less ambiguity in respondents' attitude about Katherine's relationship with Thomas Culpepper.

Table 5: Do you believe Katherine Howard was guilty of adultery with Thomas Culpepper?

Response	Percentage
Yes	63.5%
No	3%
I think they had an affair that was physical but not fully consummated	28%
Other	5.5%

All in all, a shocking 91.5% of participants believe Katherine had some kind of affair with Culpepper, while 8.5% remain unconvinced. The responses from table 5 coincide with the results from table 6, which features responses indicating whether the subjects believe Katherine Howard was guilty of all charges, including failure to disclose her sexual past prior to her marriage with the King, adultery and treason for intending to commit adultery.

Table 6: Do you believe Katherine was guilty of all charges?

Response	Percentage
Yes	43%
No	4%
Only some of the charges	53%

According to the results in table 6, a great majority of participants (96%) believe Katherine was guilty of at least some of the charges leveled against her. Table 7 shows whether participants believe Katherine deserved her fate.

Table 7: Do you believe Katherine Howard deserved her fate on the block?

Response	Percentage
Yes	6.5%
No	74%
Partially	19.5%

It is interesting that while 96% believe Katherine was guilty to some extent, a majority (74%) do not think she deserved to be executed. This discrepancy indicates that the public is generally sympathetic toward Katherine, regardless of her alleged crimes.

3.5 Discussion

Given that historical fiction often characterizes Katherine's relationship with Dereham as the reason she broke things off with Manox, it is hardly surprising that only 5% of respondents believe the relationship was not consensual. In contrast, fully 55% of the subjects believe Manox took sexual advantage of Katherine.

These results are interesting, considering Manox never appeared on screen in *The Tudors* and was only briefly mentioned in dialogue. In the series, as well as in reality, he managed to escape punishment for his liaison with Katherine. Dereham, on the other hand, was portrayed as a likely sexual abuser. However, the negativity of Dereham's portrayal in *The Tudors* may not be obvious to viewers during their first viewing of the episodes in which he is featured.

Concerning Katherine Howard's alleged affair with Culpepper, only 3% believe there was no affair at all. Twenty-eight percent of the subjects are of the opinion that Katherine's supposed affair with Culpepper was physical but never consummated. The fact that Katherine and Culpepper were charged with treason for their intention to commit adultery, rather than actually charged with adultery, may have influenced the 28% who believe the relationship never resulted in the ultimate act. Katherine and Culpepper's relationship is commonly portrayed as a romantic affair due to Katherine's desperation to escape the bed of the old and smelly king. In *The Tudors*, Katherine has an affair with Culpepper simply because she is a promiscuous teenage girl, but not necessarily due to any physical shortcomings on Henry's part. This common representation of Katherine and Culpepper's relations possibly explains why the majority, or 63.5%, believe that they were guilty of adultery. It is noteworthy that only 53% of the participants believed that Katherine was guilty of some of the charges she received, which included the failure to disclose her sexual past prior to her marriage with the King, adultery and treason for intending to commit adultery, while less than half of the participants (43%) considered her guilty on all counts.

When considering whether Katherine Howard deserved to be executed, the participants were quite sympathetic in their responses. Most participants, 74%, found the young queen undeserving of her fate, while a 6.5% minority found her completely deserving. The remaining 19.5% believed Katherine was partly deserving of her punishment. In other words, 26% of participants believed Katherine fully or partly deserved having her life cut short on the executioner's block.

Overall, it appears that Katherine is generally liked as a historical figure, although some may believe that she was at least in some way guilty and deserving of her end on the block. However, most participants appear to be sympathetic towards Katherine and do not believe she deserved her tragic fate even though she may have been guilty of committing adultery with Culpepper. Since 53% believe Katherine deserves all of her negative labels as a "silly materialistic teenage whore" and 40.5%

believe she is worthy of at least some of the labels, a striking 93.5% of the participants agree with Katherine's negative reputation to some extent.

4 Possible Reinterpretations of Katherine Howard in the Context of Psychology and Law

The general public may be less likely to blindly accept Katherine's negative reputation if provided with more nuanced possible interpretations of her character. In an interview with Natalie Grueninger, producer of the *Talking Tudors* podcast, Gareth Russell addresses the tendency to oversimplify Katherine's character and declare her to be either an innocent victim deserving of sympathy or a "promiscuous moron" deserving of judgement. This is a false dichotomy, says Russell, adding, "in general, the idea of if you can't sympathize with a young woman who was executed unless she was a victim ... is a little odd" (Grueninger). As has been mentioned, a number of books and articles have attempted to answer the question of whether Katherine was a "vixen or victim" or whether she was indeed guilty of treason, as if these questions might suggest the amount of sympathy that should be allocated to her ("Katherine Vixen"). Too often the behavior of Katherine and the decisions she made during her fall from grace are dismissed as "stupidity" rather than analyzed in terms of her personal life experiences and psychology. Katherine Howard's reputation can only be restored when Tudor popular culture is willing to contemplate a more multifaceted view of the tragic queen.

Taking a more humane approach does not necessarily mean declaring Katherine Howard a completely innocent victim. After all, no human being in history has been free of blemish. Since Katherine was a real person with her own thoughts, emotions, body, opinions and agency, she too had her faults. One of the many questions that the field of psychology attempts to answer is why do people think and act the way they do? This particular question allows us to dig deeper into an individual's situation and consider from his or her point of view what conditions may have caused the individual to do something which we find inconceivable or even stupid. The following questions regarding Katherine Howard are commonly asked: Knowing what happened to her cousin, Anne Boleyn, why did Katherine risk her life and believe she would get away with having an extramarital affair with Culpepper? Why did she not claim to be precontracted to Dereham when interrogated, as it could have saved her life? Why did she agree to marry Henry VIII? In most cases, it is believed that the answer to these questions is simply that Katherine must have been foolish. This assumption is the root of most of the negative labels attached to Katherine and it must be reevaluated.

It is safe to assume that mental illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), existed long before they were recognized as such, and in fact, it is possible to find descriptions of symptoms consistent with PTSD in texts dating back to ancient times (Olive 37). Many PTSD symptoms can for example be seen in William Shakespeare's character Henry IV (Olive 37). Therefore, it is only logical to assume that the Tudors, just like people today, dealt with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and personality disorders. Studies estimate that between 50 and 70 percent of all people will at some point experience some sort of psychological trauma, and of those people, up to 20 percent will develop post-traumatic stress disorder (Olive 25, 37). These traumas can be a result of rape, physical assault or other violent crime, natural disaster, terrorism or even the major illness or death of a loved one (Olive 25). Contrary to popular belief, PTSD does not only appear after one specific event. It can be a result of a more prolonged difficult or stressful situation (Olive 38). PTSD is more likely to develop as a result of a traumatic event that is sexual in nature, among people who have limited social support, long-lasting traumatic childhood experiences, and among those who live in a culture which associates guilt and shame with the traumatic event (Olive 38). With these facts and figures in mind, it is not difficult to imagine that Katherine Howard struggled with some kind of mental illness. Of course, hundreds of years later, it is impossible to properly diagnose Katherine based on physical and cognitive symptoms, but using written accounts of Katherine's life and behavior, it is possible to hypothesize that she was a victim of neglect and sexual abuse as a child.

In 1536, Katherine Howard began taking music lessons from Henry Manox, a teacher employed by her step-grandmother (Russell 54; Starkey 646). According to historical records, Manox took sexual liberties with Katherine which included kissing and fondling (Weir; Russell 53). Katherine was likely born between 1520 and 1525 and Manox in 1515, meaning Katherine was probably between eleven and sixteen and Manox about twenty-one when he became her teacher ("Henry Manox"). This flirtation that went on for approximately two years involved pressure from Manox towards Katherine to consummate their relationship until she agreed he might "caress her private parts" (Russell 54, 58; qtd. in Weir). In Manox's own words he "felt more than was convenient" (qtd. in Weir). Mary Hall, who also lived in the household of the Dowager Duchess, confronted Manox for leading Katherine on with "empty offers of marriage" (*Six Wives*, 446). Manox replied:

Hold thy peace, woman! I know her well enough. My designs are of a dishonest kind, and from the liberties the young lady has allowed me, I doubt not of being able to effect my purpose. She hath said to me that I shall have her maidenhead, though it be painful to her, not doubting but I will be good to her hereafter. (qtd. in *Six Wives*, 446)

Manox reportedly boasted about knowing private marks on Katherine's body and having "had her by the cunt" (Weir; qtd. in Starkey 669-70). However, he denied having had sexual relations with Katherine (Starkey 670). Katherine, on the other hand, testified that she had "suffered him a sundry times to hand and touch the secret parts of [her] body, which neither became [her] with honesty to permit, nor him to require" (qtd. in *Six Wives* 455). Katherine's liaison with Manox ended when she transferred her affections to a man named Francis Dereham (*Six Wives* 446).

Katherine is believed to have had sexual intercourse with Dereham. Dereham would sneak into the ladies' dormitory and climb into Katherine's bed, as verified by witnesses whose sleep was interrupted by the noises at night (*Six "Wives* 446). The age difference between Dereham and Katherine was greater than between Katherine and Manox, as it is believed that Dereham was born in 1513 ("Francis Dereham"). It was common gossip within the Dowager Duchess's household that Katherine and Dereham would marry since they had gotten into the habit of referring to each other as husband and wife. According to historian Alison Weir, the Dowager Duchess either "deliberately ignored" the rumors or was "deaf" to them (*Six Wives* 453). Apparently, she had little care for the moral welfare of those within her household (*Six Wives* 453). Katherine and Dereham's dalliance ended as Dereham went to Ireland and Katherine received a position at court. Katherine reportedly showed little emotion and shed no tears over their parting (*Six Wives* 454). Katherine later testified that Dereham's night visits were never at her request or with her consent. Katherine claimed Dereham had "raped her with importunate force," but her interrogator, Cranmer, was convinced that she was lying (*Six Wives* 451).

Scholars may argue that Katherine's relationships with Manox and Dereham were unobjectionable, as it was lawful for women as young as twelve to marry during the Tudor period. However, time has proven that the law is not always a reliable measure of morality (Bryson; Garlikov). Rather than being based on moral values and principles, laws have often been written and amended for personal and political gain (Garlikov). It is important to keep in mind that throughout most of history, including the

Tudor period, laws have been written by men. Since men introduced and interpreted laws, their own personal experiences and worldviews formed the basis of the law (Hermansen). Women's personal experiences and welfare have long been overlooked when passing new laws. In fact, the nominated age of consent was not chosen with child protection in mind until the nineteenth century (Bates). Throughout history, women were expected to marry from the age of 12, and men had the right to take a girl's chastity with or without her consent within the bounds of marriage (Bates).

It is often argued that women matured at a younger age in earlier time periods than they do today, and many believe that the age of sexual consent is considered with this in mind. However, sexual consent laws were not passed with women's maturity, protection or well-being in mind, but rather to control women's sexuality. After all, women were considered incapable of consenting on their own terms and thought to require protection from men and from their own "disorderly sexual feelings" (Bates). Furthermore, there are known cases in which men accused of rape were exonerated because they had "reasonable cause to believe" that a girl under the age of consent looked older than she was. This way, the law has protected men's reputations rather than female victims of sexual abuse. Although women during the Tudor period were considered adults as soon as they were physically able to reproduce, it is safe to assume that development of mental and emotional maturity varied widely between individuals. Connecting sexual consent laws to a specific age based on "normal puberty" is problematic, as it is difficult to define normal puberty. There is always the question whether maturity and the age of consent should depend upon physical or mental development (Bates). This is a broad subject that could be addressed in more detail, but it is clearly precarious to claim that Katherine's dalliance with Manox or Dereham could not have harmed her simply because the contemporary legal system considered her an adult. Katherine may have encouraged Manox and Dereham's advances and even actively flirted with them, but that does not necessarily mean she was mature enough to consent or realize the seriousness of her actions. Besides, it is arguably morally inappropriate for a man in a position of authority, like Manox, to take advantage of one of his pupils. Today in England and Wales, it is considered a criminal offence for an adult 18 or older who holds a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a minor. This also applies to teachers ("Law on Sex").

Authors such as Gareth Russell have dismissed recent theories that suggest Katherine Howard was a victim of sexual abuse during her childhood (Russell 53). Russell argues that child abuse was recognized, reported and prosecuted in the early modern era. For this reason, theories claiming that Katherine may have been a victim of abuse can only derive from “willful or accidental ignorance of every piece of relevant surviving evidence” (Russell 54). This reasoning thereby implies that since Manox and Dereham were never reported or prosecuted, Katherine must not have been a victim of sexual abuse. However, if nearly 80 percent of rapes and sexual assaults still go unreported in a modern society, it is difficult to believe that there would have been lower rates of unreported sex crimes under the patriarchal justice system of the Tudor era (Kimble and Chettiar). Reasons for abuse victims hesitating to come forward include fear of revictimization, retaliation, not being believed as well as doubt that authorities will do anything to assist them (Kimble and Chettiar). If Katherine Howard was sexually assaulted by her music teacher and reported the crime, she would have most likely been ignored in favor of the male in a position of power. Although Russell acknowledges there is evidence that Katherine Howard may have been forced into sexual relations, he asserts that she was “beyond reasonable doubt” lying due to desperate circumstances. After all, there is “a mountain of precise evidence” that argues against the validity of the abuse theory, namely evidence from “the men involved about [sic] when her relationships began” (Russell 54). It is interesting that despite Russell’s attempt to rule out a possible abuse theory in Katherine Howard’s case, he writes that Manox “certainly put [K]atherine under pressure to consummate their relationship” and mentions how he “reacted tastelessly” when Katherine decided to end things between them (Russell 54). According to Russell’s research, Manox was “the stereotype of an arrogant, young, shallow, emotionally impulsive musician” who was “passionate to the point of possessive” (Russell 53). Rather than disproving the abuse theories, Russell’s arguments and descriptions of Katherine’s situation actually reinforce these theories. He writes that “if not horrible, their relationship was nonetheless inappropriate, on several levels” (Russell 54).

With the limited historical data available on Katherine Howard’s life, it is impossible to determine with certainty whether she was a victim of sexual abuse. However, it is possible that she may have suffered some kind of abuse in her childhood. Childhood abuse could explain why Katherine would do something as “stupid” as having an affair with Culpepper, while married to a king known for disposing of his

wives, and later sealing her death warrant by denying that she had been precontracted to Dereham. Some common symptoms of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, lying, intolerance of or constant search for intimacy, suicide attempts, sexual promiscuity, distorted self-perception, self-injury, risk-taking behaviors and emotions such as fear, shame, humiliation, guilt and self-blame (Daniels). Believing that they are responsible for the sexual abuse and that they deserved it, many victims consequently engage in self-destructive relationships. They may also be less skilled at self-protection and are therefore more likely to accept being victimized by others, thus exposing themselves to dangerous situations and to dishonest people (“Adult Manifestations”). Some of these symptoms can be identified in historical accounts of Katherine Howard.

After interrogating Katherine Howard, Bishop Cranmer wrote an account to the King describing how Katherine had been “in such lamentation and heaviness as [he] never saw no creature” (qtd. in Weir). Katherine’s condition made it impossible for Cranmer to speak rationally with her and therefore he had to return the following day. However, the next morning, Katherine was still “quite frenzied” and had been in a “vehement rage” the whole night (qtd. in *Six Wives* 450). Katherine’s uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, witnessed Katherine’s “hysterical reaction” when she was informed of the charges against her. He described to Marillac, the French ambassador, that Katherine had refused to eat or drink and that due to her constant weeping and crying “like a madwoman” they found the need to “take away things by which she might hasten her death (qtd. in *Six Wives* 449). This “hysterical and vehement frenzy” as has been described fits the symptoms of someone who could be dealing with coexisting post-traumatic stress disorder and Norfolk’s description of Katherine implies that she may have been depressed and suicidal. The claim that Katherine was too “naive” to save her own life by confessing that she was precontracted to Dereham is too simple an answer to a situation almost impossible to decipher today. A more reasonable suggestion would be that she wanted her life to end. A logical explanation to Katherine’s mysterious request to make practice of her execution block may be that she was struggling with performance anxiety and low self-esteem as a result of difficult relationships in her past (“Sexual Performance Anxiety”). Of course, it is not odd for someone to have a nervous breakdown upon being handed a death sentence, but it is noteworthy to mention that descriptions of Katherine’s lamentations and frenzy predate the charges of adultery and treason. It has never been proven that Katherine and Culpepper had a sexual

relationship, but if they did, Katherine's shocking conduct, which many may label as "silly," could be interpreted as risk-taking behavior due to constant search for intimacy. These are all symptoms that could be found in adults who suffered childhood abuse.

As a result, it is impossible to decipher why Katherine did what she did and to know for a fact how much control she had in her life. Unfortunately, we have no first-person account of Katherine's personal thoughts and no way of accurately judging her mental or emotional state. Since Katherine was a real human being with her own thoughts, feelings and point of view, it is reasonable to assume that the motivation behind her unfathomable actions was something more complicated than stupidity. After all, a close reading of available information on Katherine reveals that if she was not a victim of abuse, she at least had been exposed to trauma. Many may have heard the saying "there is no smoke without fire." A person who remains unaffected by the pressure of marrying young and being expected to produce a male heir for an aging tyrant dealing with physical and mental illnesses can hardly be considered a human at all. Neither can a person who manages to pass through life without making any mistakes. It is normal to experience hardships that affect one's life choices at some point. Unfortunately, Katherine's hardships proved fatal. The main point is that Katherine deserves human understanding and sympathy whether she was guilty of the charges against her or not. Everyone deserves the chance to learn from their past and make amends for their failures. Katherine Howard was robbed of this chance and for that she deserves our sincerest sympathy.

5 Conclusion

Katherine Howard's afterlife has been shaped by negative labels and sentiments. People's unfavorable attitudes toward her have undeniably been shaped by the way she is covered in historical biographies, film, novels, and social media. As with many women throughout history and in the world today, Katherine's reputation has fallen prey to the power of the patriarchal system and the way the men of her time chose to regard her. Discrimination and negative coverage of Katherine Howard have influenced how the general public perceives her today. Therefore, it is important that readers of history understand that prejudice is not only found in popular media, which tends to use artistic license and sugarcoat historical events for profit, but also among historians, who are responsible for communicating real-life events to the general public. This notably applies to historical accounts of women that have been written from the biased perspectives of men in power. After all, history has in most cases focused more on "his-story" rather than "her-story." If the goal is to eliminate undeserved negative labels and decrease discrimination against the dearly departed, history must not only be read and interpreted critically, but historical figures must be understood as multifaceted human beings. When viewing Katherine Howard's story from her perspective and with regard to her possible psychological state, it becomes clear that her situation was the result of something more complicated than "stupidity." Katherine Howard was not a frivolous good-time girl as *The Tudors* portrays her. Neither was she a mentally unstable child who died a martyr. Katherine Howard was a three-dimensional individual capable of both doing good and making mistakes. In other words, she was a human being.

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