Gender and Jewelry

A Feminist Analysis

An honors thesis for the Department of Women's Studies

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction to Gender and Jewelry

Body decoration is a ubiquitous phenomenon that transcends time and space. There is not one civilization, however limited its available materials may be, that does not practice self-ornamentation. As long as our species has existed, the human body has been a focal point of adornment and a versatile medium for our every longing and fantasy.[1]

1.1 Introduction

Jewelry responds to our most primitive urges, for control, honor, and sex. It is at once the most ancient and most immediate of art forms, one that is defined by its connection and interaction with the body. In this sense it is inescapably political, its meaning bound to the possibilities of the body it lies on. Indeed, the fate of the body is often bound to the jewelry. This paper aims to look at gender and jewelry in order to gain some understanding into how jewelry is constructed by and constructs not just a single society, but human societies. It will explore how societal traditions that have sprung up around jewelry and ornamentation have affected the possibilities available to women, determining which have served women well and which are constrictive and destructive.

Scholarly writing has traditionally discussed the topic of jewelry in relation to marriage, engagement, or inheritance, in terms of its technical, artistic, and aesthetic aspects, without adequate critique of its impact on the women who wear it. However, jewelry is far from an

[1] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 16

arbitrary aesthetic expression. "There is nothing accidental or gratuitous about a people's passionate desire for self-ornamentation. For them, symbolism is not just intertwined with body adornment; symbolism is its very essence."[2] By teasing out the commonalities between superficially varied jewelry traditions that have emerged in divergent contexts, it may be possible to draw some conclusions about the ways that we as humans adorn ourselves and others for meaning. Specifically, jewelry can be used to understand more fully the construction of gender and power dynamics from a feminist perspective.

1.2 Theories of Adornment

In my survey of the literature, research to this point has mostly addressed the sociological implications of a single culture. On occasion, an author has attempted to compare two or three cultures, but few seem to have developed a more general approach. The sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel is an early exception, proposing the beginning of a general theory of jewelry in his work, in a section entitled, roughly, "An Excursion on the Sociology of Adornment."[3] In it, he postulates man's first property as weapons, and women's first property as jewelry. For him, "all sexual difference flows from the original division of property... Men first use weapons to impose their will by force on others, above all on women; women use their first form of property, ornamental jewelry, to seduce, to charm, and to please others with their beauty, chiefly men but also other women."[4] He therefore sees jewelry as a tool and a means to power, but of a limited and bestowed type. Women can only extend their power over the world through

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2 Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 3

3 Simmel, George, translated by Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free, 1964

4 Klein, Richard. *Jewelry Talks: A Novel Thesis*. Vintage, 2002: 33

their power over men, and are not, in and of themselves, inherently powerful except through their beauty. “Whereas men achieve rank as a result of explicit achievement, differences among women are generally seen as the product of idiosyncratic characteristics, such as temperament, personality and appearance.”[5] This limits women in several serious ways. Firstly, since concepts of female beauty are closely linked with age and fertility, it is generally impossible for a woman to remain beautiful throughout her life. Furthermore, since beauty generally remains unlinked to intelligence, achievements, or merit, women's power remains similarly unconnected to matters of substance. It is bestowed power rather than earned power, and as such differs radically. Bestowed power can be revoked, it is not earned as a permanent status but based on a fleeting characteristic.

Simmel makes this even more explicit in his discussion of women's ornamentation. “One adorns oneself for oneself, but can do so only by adornment for others. It is one of the strangest sociological combinations that an act, which exclusively serves the emphasis and increased significance of the actor, nevertheless attains this goal just as exclusively in the pleasure, in the visual delight it offers to others, and in their gratitude.”[6] In this analysis, women receive not only power, but also pleasure, through their providing pleasure to others. They are eternally passive actors, deriving their satisfaction through endless giving. Simmel assumes that these characteristics come naturally to women, that they are all they are capable of. Through elevating passivity to a virtue, women remain tame and easily controlled.

Judith Butler provides an opposing point of view in her work on gender performativity.

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5 Zimbalist Rosado, Michelle, and Louis Lamphere. A Theoretical Overview. *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford UP, 1974: 29

6 Simmel, George, and Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free, 1964: 339

She theorizes gender as a constructed category that is reinforced through action and tradition: performing gender.

> *Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.*[7]

Gender in culture must be understood through the socialization that males and females undergo as part of developing an identity. Jewelry can be seen as such a method of socialization – not a result of innate differences between the sexes, but one of many methods used to inculcate difference, in status and in self perception.

Ornamentation delineates specific boundaries, to situate the wearer precisely. "Dress serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group, but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others: it includes and excludes. This property of inclusion and exclusion is also carried over to the meaning of dress within the group. Dress is an indication of the general social position of the person in society... [which] may vary within a lifetime."[8] Each society makes explicit the realm of possibilities available to individuals based on their gender, age, and status.

> *That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and (b) that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering*

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[7] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 519

[8] Barnes, Ruth, and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Oxford: Berg, 1992: 1

> *specific of a set of historical possibilities. Hence, there is an agency which is understood as the process of rendering such possibilities determinate. These possibilities are necessarily constrained by available historical conventions.*[9]

Butler emphasizes that while gender is performed by individuals, those individuals can only act within the spectrum of possibilities permitted given their place in a society. Therefore, similarities in the ways gender is performed across cultures says as much, possibly more, about how societies are constructed than about innate differences between genders. Traditions, in this case around gender and jewelry, can be used as a lens to help understand how cultures reach stasis, how power dynamics develop within human groups, and how gender is perceived and constructed.

Laura Mulvey provides a counterpoint to George Simmel's theories on the performance of gender and the gaze. In her work on narrative cinema, she discusses the way the gaze interacts with the female figure in terms that can be applied to ornamentation as well.

> *In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.*[10]

When ornamentation occurs in a patriarchal society, there is always a political slant to the act of adornment. Woman is othered through the presentation of the body, modified by adornment to connote to-be-looked-at-ness which, as a form of gender performance, both stems from and reinforces power dynamics between males and females. The passivity attributed to females in

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[9] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 521

[10] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18, 11

Simmel's analysis takes on a new light when seen as not a cause for, or even a result of, gender imbalance, but rather as a *means* of reinforcing patriarchy.

1.3 Argument

I contend that not all forms of ornamentation and jewelry rely on the construction of to-be-looked-at-ness, that there are rather several overlapping motivations that function to situate the wearer in society, alternately broadening and limiting the social options available. Jewelry is not only a symbol, but often the means of determining the possibilities of an individual's course through life and through a specific society. I would argue that while many cultures have indeed constructed gender to function in an active/passive dichotomy as delineated by Simmel, it is fully a construction, a performance of acceptable gendered characteristics rather than a reflection of men or women's essential nature. Additionally, the passive connotations of to-be-looked-at-ness can be fought and overcome through traditions that privilege the wearer over the viewer of jewelry, the erstwhile tool of oppression transformed into a method of resistance. I aim to show how these shared motivations can be understood as distinct frames for understanding the social function of jewelry across different cultures and time periods. More than one frame may be applicable in a given locus of tradition. I propose that jewelry can function as a means and symbol of physical incapacitation and ownership, a representation of wealth or honor, and a means of physical and conceptual emancipation.

Feminist theory, queer theory, and intersectionality each offer useful tools for this analysis. Feminist theory is, of course, interested in the construction of women and power. Indeed, the understanding of the personal experiences of individuals as the components of larger

political forces has been crucial to the development of feminist thinking.

> *Feminist theory has sought to understand the way in which systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices, and how the analysis of ostensibly personal situations is clarified through situating the issues in a broader and shared cultural context... For feminist theory, then, the personal becomes an expansive category, one which accommodates, if only implicitly, political structures usually viewed as public. Indeed, the very meaning of the political expands as well.*[11]

Meanwhile, queer theory is focused on the ways that individuals, and sometimes groups, are able to subvert paradigms that are constrictive and destructive through redefining the terms on which they operate. It is particularly relevant in the utilization of jewelry, so often a medium of oppression, as a means to alternative end, the meaning and the purpose renegotiated by the wearer. This applies both in terms of conceptual, intellectual reimagining and concrete use of the materials to achieve an unanticipated end.

Finally, there is intersectionality, defined as "[an attempt] to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of discrimination or systems of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, and economic disadvantage and other discriminatory systems contribute to create layers of inequality that structures the relative positions of women and men, races and other groups."[12] Gender, age, caste, and wealth are just some of the structures intersecting at the locus of our attention, and must be understood as a shifting and interacting foundation. Additionally, it informs the development of my framework theory of gender and jewelry, which depends on the overlapping

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[11] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 522, 523

[12] United Nations. "Gender and racial discrimination." *Report of the Expert Group Meeting,* November 2000. Zagreb, Croatia: 21-24

of the posited frames with the extant status structures of the society, as well as often utilizing more than one lens in an intersectional manner to fully describe the observed traditions.

1.4 Scope and Format

In developing this framework, I will draw on several different types of resources. Each discrete cultural jewelry practice - a type of jewelry bearing recognizable characteristics and used for a specific social purpose (diamond engagement rings, for instance) - can be understood as a single usage, a term I've found useful throughout this paper. Catalogs of jewelry collections and exhibitions bring together a range of pieces around a given topic, while dissertations and books provide more in depth context. Anthropological studies involve a more thorough look at individual cultures, including early reports from explorers of the 18th and 19th century and more modern scholars. For older traditions, archaeological evidence provides clues to the duration and character of jewelry usages. Obviously, interviews with or texts by natives of a particular culture are an ideal source and can allow more intimate access to the interplay between practices and society. “The diverse ways of studying jewelry – from metallurgical to philological – should not be viewed as alternatives, but as necessary combinations that help build up a complete picture of the past.”[13] Indeed, it is crucial to understand both the society and the specifics of the jewelry in order to develop a theory of their relationship. Its value is dependent, for instance, not only on its materials, but on the scarcity or abundance of those materials in its place of origin, the skill required to make it, and the circumstances surrounding its use.

This paper cannot and will not address every usage of jewelry, or even every type of

[13] Ogden, Jack. *Ancient jewellery*. Berkeley: University of California, British Museum, 1992: 8

usage. In order to have some chance of meaningfully mapping the interactions between jewelry, culture, and gender, it will be crucial to eliminate some types of well understood interactions entirely, to eliminate background noise, as it were. Essentially, any jewelry that doesn't interact directly with gender must be left for another time. In practice that includes ritual and amuletic jewelry, when not linked specifically to gender, as well as jewelry that deals with status and wealth in a straightforward manner. For instance, jewelry styles that are restricted to royalty, that confer status linked solely with wealth or lineage, or that are religious or protective in nature, will be ignored. There are cases where usages deal with wealth in a way that is of interest to feminist theorists, for instance, in the context of dowry payments, linking wealth in a very specific manner to sexuality and gender and rendering it valuable for my purposes.

Additionally, and obviously, I cannot and will not attempt to address every relevant culture. I have made an effort to develop representative examples that, in broad strokes, help illuminate the picture. However, the emphasis is on developing the framework, the set of lenses that permit access to the meat of the material, not on exploring every extant jewelry tradition. The hope is that the frames, once articulated, could then be usefully applied to any tradition of interest. Furthermore, to the best of my ability, I have avoided assessing the aesthetic value of jewelry usages.

> *When classifiers label a type of dress or some aspect of it as ornament, adornment, or decoration, they are clearly making a value judgment regarding its merits as an aesthetically pleasing creation. Similarly, their calling a type of dress a mutilation or deformation indicates they have judged it to be nonacceptable. What they omit is whose standards they are applying... Terms thus far discussed as value-laden (mutilation, deformation, ornament, and adornment) are also ambiguous terms... because they reveal relatively little about type of dress, but a great deal about functions. Like the term*

> *'cosmetic surgery,' they involve and emphasize the dual functions of dress: as a means of communication between human beings and as an alterant of body processes*[14]

Concepts of beauty are closely correlated with the culture's chosen forms of adornment, for obvious reasons. While, for instance, a society may stretch the earlobes and lips, changing the shape of the earlobe, even quite drastically, generally does not interfere with the ability to interact with the world. Drastically changing the shape of the lip, however, impedes basic functions like eating, drinking, and speaking – specifically as an alterant of body processes. Societies, and individuals, don't make those choices by accident. Where significant changes to the abilities and function of the individual are perpetrated through jewelry, those are sociologically relevant for feminist analysis beyond their aesthetic and communicative value.

In the course of expanding on each frame, I will examine a broad range of jewelry usages across different cultures and time periods. For each frame, I will further develop two case studies that provide additional insight into the intricacies of the frame's feminist analysis. While there will inevitably be overlap between the frames (that is, indeed, their purpose), the chapters will each be devoted primarily to exploring a single frame. Once the foundations of all three have been explicated, I will present several intersectional case studies that develop the frames in context of extant jewelry traditions, and provide an example of how this framework might usefully be applied in the course of other analyses.

1.5 Frames Overview

The first proposed frame is that of ownership and physical incapacitation. As Simone de

[14] Barnes, Ruth, and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Oxford: Berg, 1992: 14

Beauvoir writes,

> *Costumes and styles are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from any possible transcendence: Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity... paralyzed by inconvenient clothing and by the rules of propriety – then woman's body seems to man to be his property, his thing... The function of ornamental attire is very complex, [but] often its purpose is to accomplish the metamorphosis of woman into idol.*[15]

Jewelry usages have frequently developed to effect this metamorphosis, functioning as a means of incapacitation or a symbol of ownership, often simultaneously. This can take place through external ornaments like headdresses or rings that can be removed, ornaments that permanently change the body, like stretched piercings, or those that span the ambiguous space between, like iron anklets hammered onto the body for life.

In many, if not most, societies where these usages exist, they are vigorously defended and frequently perpetuated by women. Cultural hegemony, developed as a concept by the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, is defined as a dominant ideology that privileges and benefits certain groups above others while being perceived, due to its dominance and pervasiveness, as natural and inevitable. It is reproduced across all levels of society, including those most oppressed by it.[16] This makes sense in the context of investment, where those who have sacrificed much in the face of societal expectations become invested emotionally in the correctness of that system; if the system is illegitimate, their lives have been constricted for nothing. Therefore, psychologically,

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[15] De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. New York: Vintage, 1989: 158

[16] Martin, James. *Antonio Gramsci*. Taylor & Francis, 2002.

the reproduction of cultural hegemony and patriarchy becomes an imperative for the oppressed as well as the oppressors. Usages of jewelry illuminate fascinating social structures involving the oppression and ownership of women and women's bodies.

The second frame of analysis is that of jewelry as a representation of wealth or honor, specifically as it is linked to gender. For instance, usages of jewelry that involve owners of wealth displaying said wealth to enhance their social status are well understood and irrelevant to this discussion, regardless of the gender of the wearer. However, usages that involve women as a proxy for display, in which women do not have ownership of or power over the wealth but rather become an additional asset to display, are texts rich in possibilities for feminist analysis. Jewelry that displays honor (outside of wealth) for an individual is similarly fascinating, as the merits represented differ widely in ways that speak to the expectations and valued characteristics for women and men. “Dress is... linked to gender, and further distinctions are made depending on definitions of gender. The result may give a revealing image of the qualities associated with 'feminine' or 'masculine.' What is crucial here is that the message is understood by both wearer and viewer.”[17] Jewelry usages, like those of other forms of dress, develop in large part to construct appropriate gender expression in each generation, and jewelry denoting honor and status represents society's positive reinforcement for conforming. Examination of the tools a society has developed yields a more thorough understanding of the desired outcome.

The final analytical frame examines forms and usages of jewelry that represent and serve as a source of independence. Again, to be considered within the bounds of feminist analysis, the usage must interact directly with gender. For instance, it is insufficient that wealthier women will

[17] Barnes, Ruth, and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Oxford: Berg, 1992: 3

have more options than poorer women, as class is understood from an intersectional perspective to be a constant factor. I am instead interested in ways that jewelry represents expanded possibilities for women across class lines, through inheritance law, increased physical security, or through the more ephemeral but theoretically and psychologically crucial modes of subverting dominant paradigms around the body, including to-be-looked-at-ness, perceived passivity, and projections of ideal femininity.

Chapter 2

Jewelry as Means and Symbol of Ownership, Incapacitation

Feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies have shown how cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end. [18]

2.1 Ownership and Incapacitation Introduction

Shackles. Handcuffs. Slave collars. Leashes. Ball and chain. Their purpose is to reduce or eliminate capability for movement, and thereby gain control over the body in question. In the context of slaves or prisoners, these usages are understood to be enforced upon the body, and considered outside the realm of jewelry. In contrast, bracelets, necklaces, anklets, earrings, pins, are easily recognized as ornament. The dividing line, however, is far from clear cut. What do we understand from traditions that express ownership of personhood, sexuality, fertility, through beautiful, desirable objects? What do we make of usages that, like bound feet in China, make a virtue of disability?

Struggle for control is a hallmark of human civilization, patriarchy and the effort to control of women's bodies, sexuality and production an almost universal constant. Jewelry, as an art form defined by interaction with the body, is deeply bound up with the social structures vying for control of those very bodies. Ruth Barnes and Elizabeth Bubolz Eicher, eminent theorists

[18] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 524

focusing on dress and gender, elaborate on the different ways that dress, including jewelry, can mediate social interactions and bodily processes. "Dress may be a direct alterant of body processes in the case of some body modifications, such as... cutting body tissues to introduce lip plugs. It can also be an alterant as it serves... as a microenvironment and an interface between body and the macroenvironment."[19] Control is manifested through both these forms of modification, through the physical incapacitation of the wearer and through symbols that define and constrict the range of options available to the wearer in the context of a society, often through communication of a subordinate role.

2.2 Incapacitation Case Study: Niger Anklets

A number of jewelry usages involving heavy anklets have evolved in Niger that, to varying degrees, incapacitate and disable the wearer. Two especially compelling traditions have arisen among the Igbo and Hausa people, involving ivory and metal anklets. I will let the words of early colonial observers speak for themselves.

> *In the manner of anklets, [there are] curious varieties worn by the women of different tribes of the Niger delta. The wealthier of the [Igbo] trading women wear massive anklets of ivory, formed from a hollow tusk, through which the foot has to be passed before it has stopped growing. The weight of the ivory is, of course, very considerable; but it is nothing in comparison with the weight of the anklets worn by the girls and women of the [Hausa people]; those of the [girls] consist of brass rods formed into a huge spiral spring from ankle to knee; while those of the [adult women] are even more cumbersome, being cymbal-like plates of brass, often more than a foot in diameter. These are welded round the women's ankles on her marriage, and are never removed, causing*

[19] Barnes, Ruth, and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Oxford: Berg, 1992: 26

> *her to walk with a most awkward gait, and allowing her but little comfort in life*.[20]

> *Young [Hausa] women in Niger wear heavy bronze anklets that smiths forge from metal ingots and incise with Islamic designs. These shackle-like rings, which also serve as currency, make it difficult for the women to walk, but a cumbersome gait is considered highly attractive.*[21]

These passages illuminate the two most compelling facets of these usages: First, that these ornaments caused considerable pain and physical incapacitation, and second that the anklets were a sign of wealth, prestige, and adult status, and therefore socially desirable for the wearers. This linkage is far from accidental and will reappear throughout this chapter in geographically and culturally distant locations.

These ornaments, of both varieties, undoubtedly caused not only situational discomfort from the awkwardness induced into the gait, but also irreversible damage to the body. In the medical history of the expedition to the Niger in 1841-2, the group's doctor wrote that "the women of better class were in general encumbered by heavy ivory anklets, weighing [as much as 30 pounds]. I have seen them on mere children, and am sure that their enormous weight must have distorted the limbs, and retarded their proper development."[22] This type of ornament ensures permanent physical disability of the entire female population of a society.

Jewelry is frequently used to emphasize the differences between the male and female body for the purpose of social interaction. This becomes clear when one looks at the adornment

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[20] Ferryman, Augustus. *British Nigeria: A Geographical and Historical Description of the British Possessions Adjacent to the Niger River, West Africa*. London: Cassell and Co, Ltd., 1902: 228, 229

[21] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 40

[22] McWilliam, James Ormiston. *Medical history of the expedition to the Niger during the years 1841-2*. London: Churchill, 1843: 62

of even young children, for instance, ear piercing of babies, before their secondary sexual characteristics are developed, in order to make their gender obvious and encourage interaction with the child to follow a gender-specific norm. In an analysis of the incomparable Ghysels collection of ethnic jewelry, Colette Ghysels and Frances Taylor write, "Certain kinds of objects are worn only by men, others by women. Unisex adornment is little valued... among its other purposes, self-decoration is designed to underscore or even flaunt differences between the sexes, to restate the anatomically obvious."[23] This becomes crucial when females are marked through physically incapacitating jewelry usages, as femininity itself becomes intertwined with the fact of disability. This manifests in the understanding of females, regardless of the abilities of individuals, as *inherently* inferior, disabled by their gender rather than the ornaments themselves.

Why do the women themselves not object? Because this linkage of femininity with disability also leads to an understanding of able-bodied females as not only unfeminine, but unable to be considered female within the context of the society. One might consider the disgust with which a society used to foot-binding viewed the large, "masculine" feet of Western women. When the male body is considered normative, and indeed in these cases is left unmolested, it becomes impossible to women to function in society without the very ornaments that leave them crippled.

> *It is to be observed... that the large ivory anklets which the wealthy [women] of [the Igbo in] Niger wear... serve as a sort of oath of fidelity. It is the equivalent of the wedding ring in Europe, but with this difference, that while the ring may be easily lost the [Niger women's] anklet is fixed for life on her legs... Burdensome as this adornment is, a woman who should give it away, sell it, or break it by accident, would have been considered to be*

[23] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 23

> *faithless to her duties; she would be repudiated, driven away with contempt, and it is likely enough that a mere misadventure might be interpreted as a crime that would cost her her life.*[24]

When punishment for violation of such social codes is so stringent, it is unsurprising that women would tend to psychologically adopt the source of their disability. Women are taught that these anklets are an honor, the heavier or wider the better, a privilege reserved for the wealthiest and those of highest status. A "burdensome gait" is a source of sexually bestowed power, the only kind available. It is out of the realm of social possibility to reject the usage – in Judith Butler's terms, the crippling jewelry becomes the sole socially acceptable means of performing gender.

There is a tendency to ascribe usages like this to the particular cultural mores of the societies involved, rather than understanding them as a reflection of human behavior. One good argument against this is the wealth of usages utilizing the same motivations for the same ends across the world and different eras, which will be the topic of the rest of this chapter. The other main argument against assigning this type of usage to a particular locus comes from examination of the traditions of nearby societies. In this case, the Tuareg cultural group provides an instructive counterpoint.

The Tuareg originated in West Africa and are located in close proximity to the Igbo and Hausa people, and are Muslims like the Hausa (most Igbo are Christian, although all three groups mix ancient traditions with modern religion). Their jewelry culture is incredibly varied and deeply entrenched, certainly capable of developing similar usages to their neighbors.[25] They are often referred to as "the people of the veil," a reference not to veiled women, as one might

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[24] Burdo, Adolphe. *The Niger and the Benueh: travels in Central Africa*. London: R. Bentley & Son, 1880: 173

[25] Loughran, Kristyne. "Jewelry, Fashion, and Identity: The Tuareg Example." African Arts 36.1 (2003): 52-65. JSTOR. 13 July 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3337992>.

assume, but to the fact that in Tuareg culture, the men veil instead. Additionally, wealth was inherited matrilineally, and women retained a drastically greater degree of independence, physically and socially. "Especially in comparison with Arab women, who were only thought beautiful if they had 'such a degree of obesity as will render [them] unable to walk without two assistants'... Tuareg women were considered extremely independent, even overbearing, and would leave their husbands and return to their parents on the slightest pretexts. Tuareg women were proud because they were powerful."[26] They are generally considered to have enjoyed a much greater degree of sexual freedom, as well.

These drastic cultural differences cannot be attributed to religion or physical environment, as those were very similar to their neighbors. What differs is the sexual power dynamics, especially in marriage. Where Hausa and Igbo women are literally crippled for life on their wedding days, physically as well as socially unable to run away, Tuareg women could and frequently did divorce their husbands and return to their natal families or remarry without repercussions.[27] The evolution of such radically different social systems in comparable physical and religious situations underscores the limited explanatory power of race or location to the relationship between gender, sexuality, and power. As quoted from the work of the great feminist scholar and cultural anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and her colleagues, "I would suggest that anything so general as the universal asymmetry of sex roles is likely to be the result of a constellation of different factors, factors that are deeply involved in the foundations of

[26] Porch, Douglas. *The Conquest of the Sahara*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005: 79
[27] Prasse, Karl-G. Tuaregs: The Blue People. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, University of Copenhagen, 1995: 37

human societies."[28] That is, fundamentally, the purpose of this work; to draw connections between and across cultural, geographic, ethnic, and temporal lines, that help illuminate some of the underlying impetus that forms converging forms of jewelry in reflection of those deep factors constructing human societies.

2.3 Ownership and Incapacitation Survey

2.3.1 Physical Incapacitation

Similar traditions have arisen around the world, from the Ivory Coast to the Pacific Northwest. Anklets predominate in most of Africa, including fifteen pound konga anklets in Zaire and eighteen pound anklets among the Kru of Liberia.[29] The Dan people of the Ivory Coast have evolved a slightly different usage, adding bells to make women's presence constantly monitored. "A Dan woman's status can be determined by the size and number of bells on her ankles... it is hard to believe that anyone could have worn [such pairs of] nine kilogram (twenty pound) anklets."[30] These strip away privacy as well as mobility. The N'Gombe people of Zaire's jewelry legacy includes heavy torques as well as the konga anklets described above: "Only in the name of prestige would a woman wear a torque [neck ring] as heavy and uncomfortable as this one [from the N'gombe people of Zaire, weighing 5 kg]."[31] What is fascinating about this usage is its focus on the head/neck and the feet as sites that need to be defused and disabled in order to

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[28] Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist., Louise Lamphere, and Joan Bamberger. *Woman, Culture, and Society.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1974

[29] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 69, 87

[30] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 82

[31] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 69

keep women in their social place.

This emerges again among the Padaung sub-group of the Karen people of Myanmar, formerly Burma. They are perhaps one of the best known exemplars of the physical transformation and incapacitation of women through jewelry. From a young age, the legs and necks of Paduang females are systematically altered. "[G]irls of the Padaung tribe in Myanmar (formerly Burma) traditionally had large golden rings placed around their necks and their calves from about five years old. Over the years, more rings are added, until an adult Padaung woman's neck carries over 20 pounds of rings and is extended by 10-15 inches."[32] According to anthropologists and ethnographers, as adults, Padaung women can only sleep with their necks resting on bamboo pillow structures.[33]

Again, the neck/head and the legs are targeted from girlhood as sites to be controlled. The limbs and head, the locuses of motion, sight, and thought, are colonized and disabled. Women not only cannot run, they cannot turn their heads or control their own senses of sight, smell, taste. I must again emphasize, *there is nothing accidental about this*. How much easier to control the social role and conceptual personhood of someone whose body has never been beyond the reach of control, whose understanding of their existence as gendered beings is filtered through imposed disability.

Some writers, in examining a range of jewelry traditions, have gotten this completely backwards. Borel and Ghysels betray this confusion in their writing. "Wearers of ethnic jewelry set absolutely no store by the practicality that dominates the thinking of efficiency minded

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[32] DeMello, Margo. *Encyclopedia of body adornment*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2007: 171

[33] Marshall, Harry Ignatius. *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology*. Ohio: Ohio State University, 1922: 44

westerners. How heavy or fragile or uncomfortable jewelry may be is of no immediate concern."[34] This is to completely miss the point. The weight and discomfort of pieces could not be more intimately linked to their social function. Indeed, where does the fantasy of efficiency minded westerners come from? One needs only glance at the contortions of the body into corsets, high heels, tight jeans, chokers, even the augmentation of body parts to extreme proportions, to see that efficiency and practicality in dress is a privilege reserved for the powerful, in the west as everywhere else. To be even more specific, hobble skirts of the late 1800s required hobble garters, which fastened a short length of elastic between the upper legs, prohibiting further movement so as to produce a "ladylike," which is to say an inefficient, even "burdensome" gait. The only real difference is that many western traditions that effect disability utilize garments that are not traditionally considered jewelry – although some, like hobble skirts and chokers, at least blur the line.

The use of lip plugs or plates to demarcate marriageable women evolved independently among the Surma people of Ethiopia, the Djinja of Chad, and the Tlingit people of the Pacific Northwest, along with a few others. In these usages, mouths are targeted as the site of incapacitation in order to reach sexual and societal maturity. In these societies, almost all women wear plates ranging from several centimeters to almost a foot in diameter, increased size denoting higher status. The plugs render the wearer dependent for life, unable to easily feed themselves or communicate – indeed, one linguist posits that the female lip plate creates two dialects within the society, literally rendering women and men unable to speak the same

[34] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 18

language.[35] These usages fuse the concepts of womanhood, dependence, pain, and silence.

Each tradition has its own flavor, emphasizing different traits as associated with successful transformation to womanhood. The Djinja of Chad insert plates that will eventually stretch up to 24 centimeters in both lips, as opposed to just the lower lip among the Surma and Tlingit. In this case, the act is performed by the fiancée, not the family. "The plug of wood in the lips, which became little by little a disk, and then a real plaque, was in some manner a sign of possession of the husband of the Djinja woman. It is the man who is to marry her, and very often him alone who operates, transfixing the lips of the young girl with a blade of straw forms the first sign of the deformation to which she will be subject as an adult."[36] The act of submitting to pain at the hands of the husband sets up a clear gender dynamic that dictates much of the rest of the marriage, and indeed societal relations as a whole. Among the Surma of Ethiopia, the practice involves piercing the lower lips of young women in their early twenties, approximately six months before they are to be married.

> *As soon as they can bear to do so, the young women remove the small plate and replace it with a slightly larger one, then a larger one still... When the women are alone, or eating, sleeping or in the company of other women, they are allowed to take the labrets out... When men are present, however, the plates must always be worn, and act as a badge of status, the size of the plate denoting the worth of the woman. The dimensions of the largest plate that a particular young woman can tolerate will be used as a measure of her beauty and also to determine how may cattle she is worth when her hand is offered in marriage.*[37]

In other words, the capacity to endure pain, in this case through rapid stretching, is seen as a

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[35] Moges, Yigezu. *The Status of Women and the Effect of the Custom of Lip-plate among the Suri of Southwestern Ethiopia: a Research Report to the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern Africa (OSSREA)*. Addis Ababa: S.n., 1996.

[36] Hiler, Hilaire. *From Nudity to Raiment: [an Introduction to the Study of Costume*. New York: F. Weyhe, 1930

[37] Morris, Desmond. *The Naked Woman: a Study of the Female Body*. New York: Thomas Dunne, 2005: 85.

valuable and beautiful asset in a woman, especially a wife. The transition is similar among the Tlingit, who undergo an additional period of total isolation after their menses. Aldona Jonaitis, an anthropologist and expert on the arts and culture of indigenous peoples, describes the process in her authoritative text on Tlingit lip discs.

> *The isolation of the Tlingit adolescent girl at the onset of menses was an act of separation. For a period that ranged from four months to a year, the girl sat, as still as possible, in a darkened hut or isolated room [and barely ate]... at the beginning of this seclusion a female member [of the girl's family] cut a small slit in her lower lip and inserted a small pin to prevent it from closing... Because the strict chaperoning necessary to ensure a bride's chastity was burdensome for Tlingit families, young women were married off as quickly as possible after their coming out. At marriage, the newlywed received a slightly larger labret that indicated her new status; then, over the years, [female family members] inserted larger and larger labrets, with the largest reserved for the highest-ranking women in the community.*[38]

Again the largest and most burdensome ornaments are reserved to honor those of high status, who have fit the society's mold of appropriate femininity. The isolation factor makes clear the dependent status of the burgeoning young woman, and the burden her very existence places on the family and society. Each of these usages speaks powerfully about the respective cultures' attitudes towards and expectations of women and construction of femininity, enacted and perpetrated on the body of each girl in turn.

Chinese fingernail guards approached the same goal of incapacitation from a different direction. Manchu Chinese women of means cultivated the growth of one or several fingernails

[38] Jonaitis, Aldona. "Women, Marriage, Mouths and Feasting: the symbolism of Tlingit labrets." *Marks of Civilization*. Ed. Arnold Rubin. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1988. 191-205: 196.

to extreme lengths, during the Qing Dynasty as long as 8-10 inches.[39] Women alone wore long, elaborately decorated metal nail guards, visually similar to claws, to show that they did not participate in manual labor.[40] The ability to grow and protect such long nails was a sign of wealth and status, but the practice itself, the way of demonstrating that 'power,' was to physically incapacitate the society's women. Women in their ideal state, the usage implies, have no need for their hands. Again, femininity is inextricably bound to passivity and inaction, indeed inability to act. The fact that such a broad range of cultures perpetrate similar, often fundamentally identical traditions utilizing jewelry and ornament as a means of physical incapacitation illustrates the degree to which these usages are an outgrowth of patriarchal and oppressive sexual power dynamics.

2.3.2 Ownership of Sexuality

Jewelry is also used as a means and symbol of ownership of sexuality. Through physical incapacitation, control and ownership is exerted over the body as a whole. The usages to be discussed in this section grew out of that foundation, with jewelry utilized to exert power specifically over sexuality and reproduction. This is effected through pieces that physically restrict use of the sexual organs, as well as pieces that, within the context of a specific society, are created to communicate fertility and/or availability status. The most obvious of these usages would be wedding and engagement jewelry, which, as we shall see, exist in some form in almost every society, and have evolved in fascinating ways that speak to the power dynamics between women and men.

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[39] Sherrow, Victoria. *For Appearance' Sake: The Historical Encyclopedia of Good Looks, Beauty, and Grooming*. Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx, 2001: 151

[40] Garrett, Valery. *Chinese Dress From the Qing Dynasty to the Present*. New York: Charles E Tuttle Co, 2008: 54

Jewelry as a means of control over the body and sexuality is most directly effected through usages that physically restrict sexual activity. This is not limited to women: jewelry serves as a means of asserting power over any bodies that are deemed inferior. In ancient Rome, this manifested itself in the usage of jewelry as a means of controlling the sexuality and function of gladiators, who were drawn from the ranks of slaves, prisoners of war and condemned criminals. Gladiators, among others, were infibulated, meaning that their foreskin was pierced and jewelry inserted by the slave's owner, who had the sole ability to remove it. In the case of slaves, especially gladiators, the infibulation was used to control sexuality to the degree that they were used in selective breeding as studs. One expert on sex in the ancient world describes the usage thus: "A metal fibula (like a modern safety pin) would prevent a full erection. Male singers, theatrical entertainers, and gladiators and athletes were often infibulated to maintain abstinence; the fibula was also used to keep slaves chaste."[41] It is theorized that these groups were singled out as men who lacked control over their own bodies, and were therefore inferior.[42] While the details vary, using jewelry as a means of owning another's sexuality has a long history; however, it is important to note that this was applied specifically to men who were considered somehow less than men. Meanwhile, the female body has been repeatedly considered a passive object to be laid claim to across class lines, with no such justification required.

Jewelry is one of the most common ways that societies recognize and communicate stages of life. This is especially true when it comes to marking fertility and availability status. Almost every culture has some form of jewelry that separates those who are fertile and/or available from those who are not. Segmented bracelets are worn by young women in Sudan to

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41 Younger, John. *Sex in the Ancient World from A - Z*. Routledge, 2004: 24

42 Edwards, Catharine. *Death in Ancient Rome*. New York: Yale UP, 2007: 49

communicate eligibility for marriage. Basketwork hats are worn by unmarried men of Nepal.[43] Young Turkoman girls wear a different headdress before and after puberty, and a third when they are married.[44] Married women in Sumatra wear a heavy and complicated ornament over their chest and back. Indian culture reserves several types of ornament for married women alone, including the thali or marriage pendant. And throughout history, rings have figured prominently and variously in wedding and engagement rituals. Niyi Awofeso is a feminist scholar who has written extensively on the history of wedding rings. She writes,

> *Prior to the 20th century, wedding rings were used in a variety of contexts: as adornments, to signify the capture of a bride, to denote a promise of fidelity, to signify classification of women as men's property, as signposts for discouraging potential mating partners of a married woman, and as cultural icons. As a form of decorative art, the significance of wedding rings may be traced from the center of the earliest known civilization, Mesopotamia (Iraq), to its universality in modern times.*[45]

Unsurprisingly, in the majority of cultures, women seem to be the one requiring identification, presumably for the male gaze, who are then the consumers both of the message and, potentially, of the available woman. Else, the women are marked as claimed, off limits.

One particularly interesting example of this dynamic can be found in the use of puzzle rings as wedding bands. These rings, constructed of anywhere from three to eight or more interlocking bands, are very difficult to reassemble once removed. They appear to have originated in the Middle East and are particularly associated with ancient Turkey.[46] Awofeso writes, "Ancient Turks used a puzzle ring for their wedding ring... The groom would place the

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[43] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 56, 101, 148, 192

[44] Fitz Gibbon, Kate. "Turkoman Jewelry: Beautiful Ornamentation." *Ornament* 22.3 (1999): 50-55.

[45] Awofeso, Niyi. "Wedding Rings And The Feminist Movement." *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 3.2 (2002).

[46] Awofeso, Niyi. "Wedding Rings And The Feminist Movement." *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 3.2 (2002).

closed ring on the bride's finger. The bride was not shown how to put the ring back together if it were taken off. If the wife ever came home with it undone, the husband would know she had been unfaithful."[47] Puzzle rings later became common in 16th and 17th century Europe as wedding bands. The power dynamic is clear – like the anklets of some African tribes, this was a mark of ownership that could not easily be removed. Essentially, the puzzle component produced a more socially acceptable version of a tattoo or permanent body modification, ensuring that the woman could not, even for a moment, escape her role as wife and property of the husband.

In the Western world, rings have long stood as the preeminent symbol of availability, engagement, and marriage. Different parts of modern rituals seem to have developed at different times. The Talmud contains prescriptions as to the use of rings to purchase a bride. The symbolism of the ring finger appears to stem from belief prevalent at least through Greco-Roman times in an artery or nerve running from that finger to the heart.[48] While the tradition is usually conceived of in terms of romance, a gendered examination of the use of wedding and engagement rings throughout Judeo-Christian history illuminates consistent and instructive undertones to the usage.

While in America today it is fairly well accepted that women wear engagement rings and both husbands and wives wear wedding rings, the required accoutrements for a valid marriage and allocation thereof has shifted drastically in different eras and locations, often repeatedly. The Talmud, the Jewish book of law assembled in between 200 and 500 CE, makes explicit the requirement that a man purchase his bride with silver. "The [Jewish wedding rings] echo the ancient custom of purchasing a bride current in the Middle East in the 7th and 8th centuries and

[47] Handfasting, NEED TO CITE, 68.
[48] Chambers, Robert. *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Chambers, 1883: 220

thereafter in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. The metal symbolized the coin [kesef = silver, money] offered by the bridegroom, and stones were not permitted."[49] The first recorded use of a ring in a marriage transaction is found in the story of Tamar and Judah[50], in which Judah gives Tamar his signet ring as a symbol of his intent to marry her. Rings were a symbol of ownership of the bride - the double ring ceremony did not become prevalent in Judaism until the advent of the Reform (and later, Conservative) movements in the early 19th century. To this day, Orthodox rabbis argue that allowing the bride to give a ring to the bridegroom negates the exchange inherent in the purchase format laid out by the Talmud, and consider double ring ceremonies invalid.[51]

Early Christian usages of wedding rings grew out of both Judaic traditions and Greco-Roman practices. Among the Greeks, rings as tokens of love were common, although they were not integrated into the marriage ritual. Despite this, the messages imparted were clear. Diana Scarisbrick, an expert on the history and symbolism of rings, describes one early usage. "Some bear in relief the symbol of the Hercules knot which alludes to the untying of the bride's garment by the bridegroom on marriage... those in which Penelope patiently awaits the return of her husband Odysseus from his travels pay tribute to a faithful wife."[52] They were a symbol of ownership and a glorification of ideal femininity, in this case as sexual object (upon marriage, of course) and as a being incomplete without her husband, patient and loyal. (Rings were, however, given by and to both women and men, and later, the Greeks were perhaps the earliest to develop a dual ring ceremony.) To this the Romans added a legal layer, solidifying marriage as a business

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[49] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 113
[50] *Genesis* 38
[51] Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh. *Made in Heaven*. Moznaim Publishers, 1983.
[52] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 59

as well as social contract. Their engagement ring grew out of the use of an 'annulus pronubis' ring as the mark of a finished business deal.[53] "Both the elder Pliny and Tertullian mention that women received engagement rings from their fiancés... the emphasis on the word omonoia [used on wedding rings] reveals quite a bit about the Roman conception of marriage... this word was adopted from the military to the marital sphere during the first century. This conflation... not only emphasizes the contractual nature of Roman marriage, but also the masculine design of the Roman marital institution."[54] Thus, rings were used as a symbol of the business transaction of engaging a wife, while retaining many of the social implications of earlier Greek traditions.

In Christian Europe throughout the medieval period, most weddings took place with a single ring, from the groom to the bride, based on the Roman tradition. During the Middle Ages, more sentimentality began to be attached to jewelry in general. The epidemics of the time led to a drastic increase in memento mori jewelry, often bearing the name or hair of a deceased loved one, or even a living loved one who was out of reach. Reminders of mortality began to be mixed with all life cycle jewelry, including wedding rings. Increased social and religious emphasis on the family, especially in the face of widespread misery, led to the increased importance of wedding and engagement jewelry as a symbol. Scarisbrick writes, "[Wedding rings of the 15th century] bear the names of the couple concerned and an inscription which is often a quotation from the Bible reminding them of the indissolubility of a Christian marriage... The rarest and most valuable also [bear]... hidden within cavities underneath the stone, figures of a baby and a

[53] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 61
[54] Gallery, Yale University Art. I Claudia II Women in Roman Art and Society. New York: University of Texas, 2000: 150

skeleton, symbolic of the beginning and end of life.[55]" The invocation of life and death in wedding jewelry, combined with increased religious significance, reflects the shift in attitudes away from a simple commercial transaction and towards a more nuanced, culturally and religiously relevant usage.

Out of this increased sentimentality, custom shifted temporarily towards use of wedding rings for both parties. "[Through the first half of the 19th century in Europe, wedding rings] continued to be worn not only by the wife but also by the husband, who was equally attached to this symbol... Most Englishmen eventually gave up the custom."[56] In America, the break from Europe religiously led to an attempt at an accompanying break in tradition. "During the Commonwealth the Puritans tried to abolish the wedding ring[for both partners] because of its association with bishops and the ritual laid down in the Prayer Book, but so strong was the feeling for it that they failed to convince public opinion. For many women it was their most treasured possession, the loss of which was a disaster to be avoided at all costs."[57] This underscores both the emotional and romantic attachment to the usage, as well as the perceived religious centrality to the marriage ritual. By the 1850s, however, most of Western Europe and the United States had reverted to a single ring ritual. "Among Catholics and others prior to World War Two, most marriage vows took place with one wedding band. The Roman Ritual called only for the blessing of the bride's ring. The Catholic journal concluded that as the groom's ring was a matter of custom and not legislation, 'it is custom which will govern the manner in which it is to

[55] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 72
[56] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 100, 101
[57] Scarisbrick, Diana. *Rings Jewelry of Power, Love, and Loyalty*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007: 72

be carried out.'"[58] The customs changed rapidly, but perhaps the most constant feature was in fact the attachment to what was understood as an ancient tradition but, in fact, has shifted back and forth repeatedly. In "A 'Real Man's Ring: Gender and the Invention of Tradition," feminist scholar Vicki Howard summarizes it thus:

> *No one tradition existed changeless throughout the Western world or descended in a linear fashion from a single national origin. Wedding bands for men had a complex liturgical history that changed over time and varied in different cultures. From late nineteenth-century German Jewish brides who lobbied their rabbis to adopt the groom's ring in order to bring a sense of equality to the ritual, to brides in World War I-era England who debated the question of whether men should have to wear rings as was custom in many "continental countries," male wedding bands made brief appearances in the Western world at different times.*[59]

Perhaps all that this period really emphasizes is the degree to which traditions and usages perceived as monolithic have fluctuated wildly over time.

However, despite the shifting motivations underlying shifting traditions throughout history, there is at least one discrete and well understood example that illustrates the way that gender roles underlie these usages - the adoption of the (now ubiquitous) double ring ceremony around World War II in America. During this period, jewelers and society converged on the adoption of the wedding ring for grooms as well as brides. Howard writes, "It was in this context of surging numbers of marriages and World War Two that American jewelers were able to make the groom's wedding band seem 'natural' or 'traditional'... Jewelers' efforts to popularize the

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[58] Howard, Vicki. "A 'Real Man's Ring': Gender and the Invention of Tradition." *Journal of Social History* 36.4. 2003, 837-856: 837.

[59] Howard, Vicki. "A 'Real Man's Ring': Gender and the Invention of Tradition." *Journal of Social History* 36.4. 2003, 837-856: 845.

double ring ceremony succeeded in part because wedding consumption became a patriotic act. The industry understood that a wedding band could be presented as a manly object in harmony with war aims."[60] The male wedding band, cast as a rite of passage, implied support of the country also through its status as a marker of adulthood. Other scholars echo this gendered analysis. "For young men, agreeing to marry and wear a wedding ring could be a way to assert a mature male identity and allay cultural anxieties over homosexuality. Unlike the woman's ring, the groom's wedding band expressed his ability to support a wife, to enter the adult world."[61] Society's understanding of marriage was on shaky ground due to the huge increase in marriages, especially young marriages, prior to and during the war, as well as the strain the war put on gender roles for the women left at home. Images of Rosie the Riveter urged women to work at home as hard as their husbands and boyfriends did overseas.

Meanwhile, the backlash of the 1950s relied heavily on the pressure men returning from war could put on their wives. The nuclear family was the ultimate tool of political and social hegemony. "The groom's ring only became 'tradition' in the United States when weddings, marriage, and 'masculine domesticity' became synonymous with prosperity, capitalism, and national stability."[62] Since wedding rings reserved exclusively for the bride have been long understood to mark the woman as man's property, one might initially imagine that a shift towards a dual wedding ring ceremony would be linked to an increase in spousal equality. Indeed, in the long term many feminists, including Awofeso, do see the adoption of the double ring ceremony as indicative of the overall gains of the women's movement.

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[60] Howard, Vicki. "A 'Real Man's Ring': Gender and the Invention of Tradition." *Journal of Social History* 36.4. 2003, 837-856: 847.

[61] Griswold, Robert L. *Fatherhood in America: A History.* New York: BasicBooks, 1993: 188-189

[62] Howard, Vicki. "A 'Real Man's Ring': Gender and the Invention of Tradition." *Journal of Social History* 36.4. 2003, 837-856: 837.

> *The functions served by wedding rings in the pre-feminist era (i.e. adornment, capture, fidelity, property, signposts to discourage adulterous men, and cultural icons) were primarily designed to satisfy men's needs... Although the feminist movement did not specifically address issues related to the wearing of wedding rings highlighted above, the changes in the male adoption, and significance, of wedding rings may be linked to the gains made by the feminist movement in minimizing spousal inequality.*[63]

However, in the specific context of World War II, many scholars, including Howard, argue that the immediate impetus was rather the need to reinforce traditional gender roles and bind together the patriarchal family. This occurred even as men were unable to assert direct authority, and especially upon returning back home, when they did. Indeed, the briefly increased freedom of women during the war is well understood to be part of the reason the backlash of the 1950s was so intense.

2.4 Ownership Case Study: Indian Wife/Widow Jewelry

Strictly regulated jewelry usages sharply delineate the stages of Indian women's lives, based on their marital and sexual availability. The wearing of jewelry is not considered a simple personal choice, but rather a matter of respect for tradition and family, especially towards and regulated by a woman's in-laws. Although there is regional variation, Indian women's lives are almost universally carved into the same categories with accompanying compulsory ornamentation (or lack thereof): that appropriate for a sexually immature young girl, an unmarried girl past puberty, a bride, a wife, and finally a widow. Jewelry is generally not invoked to signal changes in the marital status of Indian men.[64]

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[63] Awofeso, Niyi. "Wedding Rings And The Feminist Movement." *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 3.2 (2002).

[64] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and*

Jewelry is so thoroughly and deeply intertwined with marriage that it is almost never considered as a neutral category, something a woman might wear for her own pleasure. It is always understood in the context of presentation for a man. Pravina Shukla and colleagues describe the connections between body art and marriage in their seminal work on dress and adornment in modern India. "Marriage is integral to the study of body art in India; it sets the standard for a woman's appearance in all the stages of her life."[65] Young girls prior to puberty do not generally own or wear significant jewelry, and are culturally considered non-sexual and therefore without the need to ornament themselves. However, some flexibility is allowed, essentially experimenting with their later roles. "Young girls, up to age 12, are allowed some innocent ornamentation and even the henna of married women at celebrations. At puberty, they lose this option and undergo either strict Muslim purdah or an adapted Hindu or Jain version of it."[66] Until they marry, they are forbidden to wear jewelry or ornament themselves at all without provoking accusations of promiscuity. Young Indian women are meant to be passive participants in the courting process, consenting to engagement without actively attempting to attract men – indeed, any active pursuit or even unseemly enthusiasm might well arouse suspicion of the girl's virtue or even virginity.

Brides on their wedding day are heavily, heavily ornamented, generally with items from their own family. It is the day that they make the switch from being forbidden jewelry to it being compulsory, to please her future husband and respect her in laws. "[The] wedding day... marks the beginning of a woman's life as a decorated being. Ornament is the right and responsibility of

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the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture). New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 306.

[65] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 347

[66] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 328

a wife while her husband is alive... Once [single women] have married, acts of self-adornment are linked inextricably with the husband. For many women... it becomes impossible to separate the desire to be ornamented with the desire to please one's spouse,"[67] according to Shukla et al. Again, jewelry is conceived purely in terms of presentation for the gaze. Married women in India have a variety of markers to symbolize their status, and the degree to which different elements are required or optional varies from region to region. Instead of a single wedding band, an Indian wife might wear a bindi on her forehead, a piercing in her nose, a gold chain with or without a thali or marriage pendant around her neck, glass and metal wrist bangles, anklets with or without bells, and rings.[68]

After the wedding, brides move into their husbands' houses and begin their life as wives. As a sign of respect, they generally arrive at their new homes dressed in the jewelry presented to them by their husband's family as part of the dowry. Several of the items of jewelry serve practical purpose. Anklets and bracelets covered in bells help enforce taboos against wives coming in contact with their brothers- or fathers-in-law. The mother-in-law, matriarch within the walls of the house although denied significant power outside of it, is tasked with regulating the new wife's jewelry as a message to the world about the state of the marriage and, by extension, the family's status.

> *Mothers-in-law enforce the wearing of jewelry by their daughters-in-law to avoid bad luck upon the family, especially their son, as well as to avoid gossip... Women feel the social pressure to wear less and less jewelry as they get older. Their old interest in fashion is partially filled vicariously by having beautiful young women around the house,*

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[67] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 223, 320

[68] Pendergast, Sara. *Fashion, Costume, and Culture Clothing, Headwear, Body Decorations, and Footwear Through the Ages*. Detroit: UXL, 2004: 104

> *dressed up appealingly. Since daughters must remain plain until they are married, at which point they immediately go live with their in-laws, this desire is logically relocated to the body of the daughter in law... who becomes the recipient of the family heirlooms, insuring the wealth stays in the family.*[69]

As they pass out of their fertile years, older women are considered less and less valuable and are expected to steadily reduce the amount of jewelry they wear, as an extension of regulating and reducing their sexuality. To cease wearing jewelry entirely, especially bangles thought to lengthen the life of the husband, would be unthinkable – however, it becomes an increasingly fine line between required ornamentation and perceived vulgarity or even jealousy of their daughters-in-law.

The final, dreaded stage of many Indian women's lives is that of a widow. It is considered extremely bad luck to be widowed, and treatment extends partly from this premise.

> *Hindu Tradition in Bengal holds that the widow must strive for purity through deprivation. In contrast with the bride, who is dressed in red and, if her family's means permit it, decked out in gold jewelry, the widow, regardless of her wealth and status, is drained of color. Immediately after her husband's death, other women wash the sindur, the vermilion powder announcing married status, from the parting in the widow's hair. All jewelry is removed, and she exchanges her colored or patterned sari for the permanent, unvarying uniform of the thaan, borderless yards of blank white cotton. Thus transformed, she remains, for the rest of her life, the pallid symbol of misfortune.*[70]

A woman's life as a sexual being is considered inescapably over upon the death of the husband, and, since widows have no need to be seen as attractive by men, they are forbidden to ornament themselves. Again, women are only seen as valid participants in ornamental traditions via their

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[69] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 312-313.

[70] Bach, Lisa. *Her Fork in the Road: Women Celebrate Food and Travel*. San Francisco: Travelers' Tales, 2005: 174

need to attract men. Beyond that, they are essentially punished for the temerity to outlive their husbands (and, by extension, their usefulness) – this perhaps an outgrowth of older traditions that would often burn the widow on the funeral pyre with her husband's body.

Jewelry clearly functions in these contexts to assert ownership over women's sexuality. It serves as both a symbol and a means, again, representing the expected role and socially (if not physically) enforcing it. Young girls before puberty seem to be the only ones with a choice about whether or not to wear jewelry; once they become sexual beings, once they enter society's mechanism for constructing gendered sexuality, they begin a cycle of prohibition and obligation. Within the life of an Indian wife, shifting circumstances tightly circumscribe appropriate behavior, enforced through gossip, shame, and superstition. As unmarried young women and widows they are forbidden the same items that become compulsory when they are married. The culture simply doesn't acknowledge the possibility of women ornamenting themselves *for* themselves. Their performance of gender through sexuality eliminates this possibility as it marries the symbol of jewelry with the act of sexual activity. As their value as sexual beings decreases, their jewelry must follow the same path if they are not to seem openly defiant to their husbands and husbands' families who, let it be clear, the society views as their rightful owners.

2.5 Ownership and Incapacitation Conclusions

The common thread running through these usages is the concept of ownership, embodied in varying ways across cultural boundaries. Physical incapacitation serves not only to communicate, and indeed enforce, ownership, but when it is bound up with conceptions of femininity, it additionally naturalizes femininity itself as a social disability commensurate with or

even exceeding the physical. The imposition of restrictions by the powerful (in this case men) onto the restricted (in this case women) is erased by the narrative that replaces femininity itself as the cause of (socially naturalized) disability. This becomes even clearer in the examination of the Padaung and N'Gombe tribes' focus on the legs and neck as locuses of imposed disability. Perceived and idealized intellectual and experiential inferiority of women becomes a self fulfilling prophecy, achieved through the physical restriction of ambulation, sight, smell, and speech. The ideal of the passive, dependent woman becomes virtually inescapable and, since the incapacitating objects are sources of cultural pride, indeed the very markers of 'successful' femininity, women are co-opted into perpetuating the very traditions that keep them subordinate.

How then is it possible to address oppression that is scaffolded and reinscribed by the actions and beliefs of the oppressed? Does feminism's commitment to individual choice require a moral and cultural relativism and preclude judgment or action? Butler addresses the issue of responsibility thus in her work.

> *Although individual acts do work to maintain and reproduce systems of oppression, and, indeed, any theory of personal political responsibility presupposes such a view, it doesn't follow that oppression is a sole consequence of such acts. One might argue that without human beings whose various acts, largely construed, produce and maintain oppressive conditions, those conditions would fall away, but note that the relation between acts and conditions is neither unilateral nor unmediated... The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions.*[71]

The choice to don anklets or lengthen the neck is not inherently problematic in the presence of other options, but the limitation of acceptable gender performance to acts that reduce the ability

[71] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 525

of the female body most certainly is. When gender, and specifically the transition to successful adulthood, is constructed solely in terms of disability, incapacity and femininity become synonymous.

The same dynamic applies when analyzing makers of sexual ownership and availability. Marriage and the exchange that takes place at weddings have long been subjects of interest for scholars. Historian and feminist scholar Gerda Lerner observes that "[t]he exchange of women [through marriage] is the first form of trade, in which women are turned into a commodity... The exchange of women, according to Levi-Strauss, marks the beginning of women's subordination. It in turn reinforces a sexual division of labor which institutes male dominance."[72] However, feminism posits that monogamous commitment or marriage need not be a surrender to predetermined balances of power based on gender. When seen as one of a range of options, including successful independence, there are few rational arguments to make against it. Again, the problem arises when submission to a particular form of highly socially regulated relationship serves as the only legitimate path to adulthood. Additionally, forms of the ritual which make it clear that the power imbalance is a crucial part of the tradition and usage rather than an individual fluke appeal to the same logic as above: Acts of collaboration in a hegemonic context are to be understood as reflections of the social structure rather than reflections of uncoerced, 'natural' order. This can be exemplified by the use of Turkish puzzle rings, for instance, to ensure that women and women alone are unable to present themselves outside of the context of their marriage. Similarly, traditions that use rings as the barter token with which to, quite explicitly, buy their bride – especially without a similar marker on the opposite side – begin the relationship

[72] Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford UP, USA, 1987; 24.

within an inextricable framework of gendered imbalance and ownership.

The strictly regulated system of jewelry usages advanced in Indian marriage provides an in depth look at the ways that sexual availability and ownership intersect with notions of value, specifically what makes a woman valuable. From the age of twelve, the acceptable amount and type of jewelry to be worn is delineated through social stigma - as required or forbidden, with little range for personal choice. As a fertile woman, she is honored through adornment, never as a virgin or widow. The amount of jewelry a woman wears peaks on her wedding day, when her value to society is perceived as highest. The narrow range of options and the elements of coercion separate these usages from the merely culturally idiosyncratic. They are part of a closely structured hegemony, coded external markers of societal value. While individuals of course accept and, indeed, desire elevation through this route, that does not equate to true freedom of choice. Again, successful femininity is constructed only in terms of relation to men, as a wife and mother. Jewelry resoundingly echoes this fundamental social reality.

Given the understanding that individuals within a hegemonic structure cannot be held directly accountable for their conditioned actions that prop up said social order, what might a feminist response to the usages described here be? The only effective weapon against hegemony is freedom of choice. Femininity must be redescribed in terms of the broad range of possibilities for *women*, success defined on individual rather than biological terms. There is an interesting paradox in terms of choice that becomes apparent here. For instance, imagine a conversation with a girl of the Hausa of Niger. Exposed to a single model of femininity, it might appear unthinkable to be a fully adult female without heavy anklets restraining the body. Should, then, some external, paternalistic, Western force of feminism come in and deny individuals the right to

modify their own bodies? How is it possible to transition towards a range of acceptable gender roles when each generation models themselves on the one before? One hopes that exposure to alternative models of femininity would lead to an awareness of the divide between biological sex and socially constructed gender, but thus far no human society has been able to fully take that step.

Chapter 3
Jewelry as Gendered Honor or Status Symbol

Archeology has revealed, so far, that man has always ornamented his body, which suggests the desire for self adornment is profound... Special importance has been placed on jewelry, for it is associated with all the things with which man is most concerned: money, power, religion, and love... the reasons for which individuals bedeck themselves vary in the extent to which these factors are involved [73]

3. 1 Gendered Honor and Status Introduction

What do headhunter pendants and Victoria's Secret diamond bras have in common? Each communicates in a gendered way what societies prize as ideally masculine or feminine, through the lens of ornament. In this second frame, jewelry is used as a marker for that which makes an individual worthy of honor or status. This is a difficult frame to limit, given its proximity to the status accorded by wealth and religion. In order to look most closely at the functions of this type of jewelry as it relates to women, gender, and sexuality, I will restrict analysis to traditions and usages that are dependent in their significance upon the gender of the wearer or giver (buyer, owner) of the jewelry. There are situations in which the financial value of the jewelry becomes significant, primarily in the context of traditions that involve a transfer of jewelry between men and women, or between men over women. In these cases, the monetary value of the jewelry often makes explicit the power differential present in the negotiation. The previous frame has

[73] Ross, Heather Colyer. *The Art of Bedouin Jewelry: A Saudi Arabian Profile*. New York: EPS/Players, 1994: 10,11

established a precedent for the conceptualization of gendered worth through ornamentation. This frame extends that analysis to examine constructions of gender through the use of marks of honor, used to communicate successful performance of masculinity and femininity. This includes honor accorded over violence, domesticity, wealth, class, and status through marriage.

3.2 Gendered Honor Case Study: Headhunter Jewelry

The practice of headhunting, in all its myriad forms and locations, is frequently accompanied by socially significant ornamentation of those who have successfully taken heads. In many societies, participating in a headhunting expedition is a crucial step in the process of transformation from youth to adulthood, and thus in preparation for marriage. The social and sexual messages transferred through the gendered practice of headhunting, the jewelry that marks a headhunter's state, and the accompanying status transformation provide a fascinating case study for this frame of analysis.

Both the practice of ritual killing and the ornamentation of those who have been on successful expeditions have evolved with a measure of independence in various locuses around the world. Headhunting jewelry is tangentially connected to, and may have grown out of, jewelry reserved for warriors as well as jewelry actively used in battle. In Africa, the Masaii wear a particular type of arm band called an “errap,” which can only be worn above the elbow by those men who have killed an enemy in combat.[74] In India, the Naga ethnic group has developed several versions of ornamentation around ritual headhunting. “The right to wear certain ornament is subject to rigid constraints and taboos... Only [those of the Sema subtribe of the Naga] who are

[74] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 62

headhunters may wear boar's tusk necklaces. Hornbill feathers in an animal fur headband identify warriors... For Konyak [Naga] warriors, monkey skulls suspended from the neck have the same value as the number of human heads taken. They also make brass rings edged with round, head-shaped protrusions believed to represent shrunken-head trophies.[75]" These monkey skull trophies were sometimes carved of wood and used to decorate successful headhunters' baskets, clothes, and body. Among the Nias of Indonesia, headhunting was required to complete many of the most important cultural rituals, including rising through ranks and the life cycle events of the chief.[76] The kalabubu neck ring was a mark of status for the headhunter who had successfully brought heads as trophies back to the village, attracting protective forces.

Perhaps one of the best studied traditions is that of the Ilongot people of the Luzon island in the Philippines. Their culture has been studied over many decades by several anthropologists, including feminist scholar Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and her husband Renato Rosaldo, who have both written extensively on the practice of headhunting. In this culture, headhunting was a crucial rite of passage for young men transitioning to adulthood, and few prospective in-laws would accept a suitor who didn't wear the red hornbill earrings indicative of the successful taking of a head. Thus, marriage and sexual maturity were closely linked with the violence of headhunting. "Traditional tales and songs connect beheadings with the competitive desires of young bachelors to 'sit' and settle with a wife. Killing as an aspect of, and commentary upon, the relationship between young men and elders is culturally bound to competition among youthful peers and hopes to 'sit' in marriage, because all concern the [violence] that young men must

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[75] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 107

[76] Scarduelli, Pietro. "Accumulation of Heads, Distribution of Food; The Image of Power in Nias." *KITLV* 146.4 (1990): 448-62: 456

demonstrate in order to enter into and enjoy the... authority of adults."[77] The red hornbill earrings served as keenly felt divisions among the community's young men, inspiring envy and even tears in those without them. The earrings and attendant status were glorified in myth and song as sexually vital, indeed almost irresistible. "Killers, proud with earrings, ornaments, and strength, are recognized, in recollection and in song, as well-equipped to tempt unmarried teenage girls: Here, here they are/these men who have taken heads/wearing earrings, they have taken heads.../Ah, like a twisting vine, the thighs of killers and the girls."[78]

In this case the earrings symbolize the capacity for violence and institutionalize it as the epitome of manhood and a prerequisite for marriage. The earrings don't *physically* impose violence on the body as disability is imposed on the wearers of anklets in the last chapter; rather, they are symbols of the violence *socially* imposed on the transition to adulthood. Additionally, there are disturbing implications of the acquisition of adult status through the two-part process of acquisition – first of heads, to become marriageable, and then of a wife. "Because the young men experience themselves as socially limited, inexperienced, and incomplete, they seek a wife and [the heads of victims] – in each case, desiring a companion who will complement and transform their social selves."[79] Thus, not only is the violence of the act institutionalized as indicative of masculinity, but the hierarchy of men over women is reinforced via wives' association with victims. In a sense, the women themselves serve as the ornament signifying ascension to the second stage of adulthood, as the earrings signify ascension to the first.

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[77] Rosaldo, Michelle Z. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life.* Vol. 4. Cambridge UP, 1980. Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems: 173

[78] Rosaldo, Michelle Z. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life.* Vol. 4. Cambridge UP, 1980. Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems: 149

[79] Rosaldo, Michelle Z. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life.* Vol. 4. Cambridge UP, 1980. Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems: 175

Headhunting also serves as an example of a second trend that will recur in this survey to do with the temporary adoption of female traits to emphasize masculinity. In the Ilongot society, the taking of heads and the spilling of blood is seen as a direct parallel, or rather opposition, to menstruation. Anthropologist Janet Hoskins writes,

> *The elaborate taboos that apply to headhunting oppose men's exclusive prerogative to shed blood to women's bleeding at menstruation. The husband of a woman menstruating or giving birth is considered sufficiently polluted to be disqualified from any ritual activity, including headhunting. Valeri hypothesizes that 'contact with bleeding women stunts the power of warriors by turning them from bleeders of humans into humans bleeding (just like menstruating women).' Women are not allowed to touch any of the weapons used in hunting or headhunting, since the active repression of points of similarity between the two terms (both involve bleeding) is necessary to sustain the contrast (between voluntary and involuntary loss of blood).*[80]

As part of this contrast, young men could only be initiated into adulthood through a headhunting expedition led by older men with experience. This again distances the genders and emphasizes the dominance of the community's version of masculinity as the only route to social and sexual maturity. “Headhunting for the acquisition of male fertility is in many parts of the world based on a very old assumption regarding puberty that masculinity is a commodity that must be obtained from other males... women can make babies, but only men can make a boy into a man.”[81] This ritualized performance of some portion of femaleness in order to counteract its power and underscore the fundamental masculinity of the performer appears repeatedly in the use of jewelry by powerful men. Indeed, in many instances that seems to be the best predictor of which men do wear jewelry – those who are so hyper-masculinized through their status as rulers,

[80] Hoskins, Janet. *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia.* Stanford UP, 1996: 19
[81] La Barre, Weston. *Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition About Sexuality*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984: 34

military affiliation or wealth that the wearing of jewelry no longer presents a threat to their social- or self- image.

3.3 Gendered Honor and Status Survey

3.3.1 Jewelry Worn by Men

Jewelry is used as a symbol of honor and status in many ways outside of the standard declaration of wealth, and indeed the societal regulations surrounding the use of jewelry have been explicitly developed to extreme degrees by some cultures. First, it is worth extending the examination of male jewelry as a paradoxical symbol of power, as a declaration of being beyond the risk of feminization – as a symbol of specifically male honor. Dowry jewelry has functioned for millennia as a symbol of family honor, functioning in strictly prescribed ways to mediate relationships and specify hierarchies between potential relatives. Finally, jewelry can be marketed and understood as a way for male honor to be mapped onto female bodies. Each of these usages extend the honor and status implicit in the relevant jewelry beyond that conferred by the sum of its parts.

The restriction of the wearing of jewelry to certain classes is most clearly seen in medieval sumptuary laws. These laws addressed what types of dress, fabrics and metals, and types of ornament were acceptable based on social standing. Historian of dress Daniel Roche writes of the period, “Consumptions should not be 'by each according to their means' but by each according to their rank. The sumptuary laws were one form of expression of a Christian political economy, where consumption should accord to a hierarchy of orders and conditions, and social

mobility was limited and denounced."[82] In addition to the widespread use of jewelry as gender signifier, these laws made explicit the link between jewelry and a host of other attributes. "Status, gender, moral conduct, and education were conferred by clothing, particularly for religious, government, and high status individuals who authored historical accounts and for whom these distinctions mattered most. Sumptuary laws were an attempt by the nobility to safeguard what had been one of their prerequisites (the ability to dress well) from the advances of a rampant merchant class."[83] Sumptuary laws often set far higher thresholds for male status, allowing only the most powerful men to wear truly luxurious clothing and ornament. In fact, almost all of the finest jewelry remaining from this period comes either from royal collections or sacramental vestments worn by the Pope and other dominant male religious figures.

Sumptuary legislation came to a particularly interesting head in the court of Louis XIV. One historian of French fashion writes, "Sumptuary law was one of the most contested areas in which the interests of the state and individuals, the king and producers, and absolutism and appearance collided... Like other European countries, sumptuary restrictions dated to the Middle Ages... But under Louis XIV they also existed due to mercantilist motives to increase the amount of bullion in France by discouraging the import of luxury goods."[84] This is particularly ironic as Louis XIV has been cited again and again as a prime example of high status men using traditionally feminine affects in order to emphasize their hyper-masculinity, that is, their immunity to denigration by feminization. "Louis XIV realized that the diamond could be more

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[82] Roche, Daniel. *The Culture of Clothing Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime (Past and Present Publications)*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997: 28.

[83] Loren, Diana. *In Contact Bodies and Spaces in the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Eastern Woodlands (Issues in Eastern Woodlands Archaeology)*. New York: AltaMira, 2007: 95.

[84] Jones, Jennifer M. *Sexing la mode: gender, fashion and commercial culture in old regime France*. Berg, 2004: 31.

effective than any other stone in demonstrating to the world the extent of his power, rank and influence... And no man has ever dared to show off more diamonds on his person than the Sun King: he was the original male peacock, the trailblazer on the path most recently followed by rock stars and rappers."[85] While the laws gradually declined in the face of widespread defiance, it is interesting to postulate how conscious Louis XIV was of the link between his personal style and attendant legacy and the laws enacted to codify such matters for his subjects.

This trope has recurred throughout the centuries in ways too varied and nuanced to list here – from bedecked tribal leaders to Henry VIII to the Indian aristocracy under English colonial rule. The most recent transformation of expectations around male jewelry can be usefully examined as an iteration of this paradigm. John Johnson, writing in Ebony in 1976, describes the process of transformation that took place around male jewelry. Up until the 1960s and 1970s,

> *Western [society] developed a peculiar set of social and moral taboos against the idea of men wearing jewelry. Of course, as with all things human, there were exceptions, and most had to do with men who for one reason or another needed or wanted to display their wealth in tangible ways – that is, with diamonds or other precious stones. Exceptions aside, the prevailing rule for most men during recent centuries has been that they should not wear jewelry – that is was just not the masculine thing to do.*[86]

This concept was in the midst of transformation during the 1970s, and perhaps the most fascinating feature of the change is the areas of society in which it first took hold. Entertainers, athletes, and celebrities were early adopters, which is unsurprising as they tend to be trendsetters in most areas. "Today, it seems, anything goes: modern gladiators like defensive tackle Wally

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[85] DeJean, Joan. *The Essence of Style How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour*. New York: Free, 2006: 162.

[86] Johnson, John H., ed. "Should Men Wear Jewelry?" *Ebony* Sept. 1976: 74-84: 74.

Chambers of the Chicago Bears wear rings in their pierced ears; karate-chopping,... super-macho movies stars like Jim Kelley... have been instrumental in destroying the myth than men who wear jewelry are effeminate."[87] Again, these men are protected against jewelry's feminine connotations by their "gladiator" status, their violence and hyper-masculinity having carved out a space for experimentation. There is nothing unique about that. However, during this period, men's jewelry gained acceptance far earlier within the African-American culture than in mainstream white society. "Most observers agree that the following explanations have had something to do with it: the rise of a new and more promiscuous set of sexual standards, including the impact of the feminist movement, and a marked diminution of traditional sex roles... and the black power movement, which emphasized pride in the African past,"[88] a past which included rich traditions of ornamentation. However, although Johnson cites the feminist movement's influence, the article still reiterates the need to defend against charges of effeminacy with the hyper-masculinity of their chosen examples of jewelry-wearing black men. It is also possible that experiencing the oppression of racism opened the door to the challenging of other hegemonic ideals.

Since then, jewelry for men has unequivocally spread into the American mainstream, regardless of race, in a way that would have been unthinkable sixty years ago. A jeweler writing on the shift in 2004 observes, "Male celebrities have helped to enhance the trend's appeal, appearing impeccably groomed in looks accented by eye-catching jewelry. Music stars P. Diddy and Justin Timberlake, and athletes such as Kevin Garnett and David Beckham proudly sport

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87 Johnson, John H., ed. "Should Men Wear Jewelry?" *Ebony* Sept. 1976: 74-84: 75.
88 Johnson, John H., ed. "Should Men Wear Jewelry?" *Ebony* Sept. 1976: 74-84: 74.

jewelry in ways that are distinctly masculine."[89] Some of these masculine idols are capitalizing on the trend to launch their own lines, still repeating the masculine signifiers at every step to avoid any chance of appearing feminine. "Male film actors and popular sports stars, such as David Beckham, promote the idea of 'male diamonds.'...The hip-hop artist Russell Simmons introduced in 2005 a new collection of 'urban diamond jewelry' with 'masculine materials,' such as stainless steel and rubber in the shape of a scorpion or bulldog, and aimed his collection at 'urban-minded men who appreciate the hip-hop lifestyle."[90] While progress has perhaps been made, it seems there is still a long way to go before ornamentation can be presented to men without being heavily gendered to contrast the unacceptable taint of femininity.

Not all scholars agree on the subversive value of male jewelry. In particular, scholar Annette Saddik writes about the performance of black, hip hop identity as being suffused with the same problematic markers of patriarchal success as mainstream capitalist society.

> *Gold... and women as objects of sexual conquest and pleasure have always been central to the patriarchal, capitalist American Dream. Mainstream America's hypocrisy resides in masking these signifiers in favor of a more muted Puritanical performance which sees display as gaudy... Disenfranchised black men, however, excluded both from the wealth and the knowledge of the signifiers employed by white America's most entitled groups, have no patience for these hypocrisies. These black men perform wealth in hip hop culture in ways that highlight their having "made it" in mainstream America. Their performances of success "ostentatiously" oppose the elitist cultural display codes, patently resisting the hegemonic dictates of the mainstream.*[91]

The performance of ostentation mirrors the resistance encountered to sumptuary laws throughout

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[89] Diamond, Lynn, ed. "Cultural shifts help move men's jewelry." *National Jeweler* 16 Nov. 2004: 18-18

[90] Seigel, Dina. *The Mazzel Ritual: Culture, Customs and Crime in the Diamond Trade*. Springer, 2009: 55.

[91] Saddik, Annette J. "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity On the American Stage." *TDR: The Drama Review (MIT Press)* 47.4 (2003): 110-27

history. However, while some level of hypocrisy may be mitigated by open performance, there is still the problematic issue of leveraging one form of oppression in order to ameliorate another. Saddik writes, "[One scholar] reads the hypocrisy of the American Dream in terms of hip hop culture, reminding us that 'the values that underpin so much hip hop- materialism, brand consciousness, gun iconography, anti-intellectualism' – and to this I would add misogyny – 'are very much byproducts of the larger American culture.'"[92] In other words, it is possible that the use of jewelry by hip-hop culture may simply be another iteration of the same tired trope, imitating rebellion but still relying on misogyny and the opposition to femininity as "the other" in order to accomplish it, to prove their worth through alliance with hegemony.

3.3.2 Jewelry Worn by Women

In other cases, women wear the jewelry, but are understood as primarily or exclusively vehicles to transfer and make visible the wealth of the patriarchal family. While there are many forms of dowry practiced worldwide, one particularly common form involves the transfer of wealth, primarily in the form of jewelry, from the bride's family to the groom's. Brides sometimes retain a nominal degree of control over her dower, but in most cases the dowry is seen as payment to the groom's family for taking on the burden of the wife. These transfers usually involve a high degree of visibility, and serve to cement status and hierarchy among family groups in a society. Among Jewish families in the Talmudic period, brides were adorned with twenty four different types of jewelry, corresponding to twenty four adornments mentioned in Isaiah as

[92] Saddik, Annette J. "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity On the American Stage." *TDR: The Drama Review (MIT Press)* 47.4 (2003): 110-27.

appropriate for a bride.[93] Family honor was so dependent on the bride having all twenty four pieces that, in poorer areas, there was often a pool of bridal jewelry shared between families and re-used. For wealthier families, however, this was a chance to shine. "Makeup is applied, she is dressed specially, adorned with jewelry and carried in a palanquin along the bridal procession. All these are not for her own sake, since they symbolize her father's lineage standing that uses the bride as an icon."[94] Additionally, this was a culture in which women were understood as primarily valuable for their ability to carry on the patriarchal lineage. "Her family did not transfer her to the groom's family as a conscious individual, but as a precious family resource, due to the merits accruing from her fertility. The magnificently bedecked bride represents the family's power and wealth, and not necessarily herself."[95] The women ostensibly at the center of this tradition thus truly serves primarily as a proxy for familial (male) honor and status.

This is a common paradigm in dowry jewelry. In ancient Rome, brides were carried through the streets in their finery, demonstrating their families' wealth and status. The dress of Roman matrons was required to be extremely plain to emphasize chastity, but "ornamenta uxoria," or the jewelry of wives, was used as a primary way to distinguish hierarchical lineages. Despite this critical function, jewelry itself was derided as evidence of male intellectual superiority. "Care for the body (munditia) was considered to be the domain par excellence of female behavior. Women's supposed obsession with their own bodies served as evidence for their inferiority to men... In other words, by turning women's [socially enforced] occupation with their

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[93] Rubin, Nissan. *Time and life cycle in Talmud and midrash socio-anthropological perspectives*. Boston: Academic Studies, 2008: 24.

[94] Rubin, Nissan. *Time and life cycle in Talmud and midrash: Socio-anthropological perspectives*. Boston: Academic Studies, 2008: viii

[95] Rubin, Nissan. *Time and life cycle in Talmud and midrash: Socio-anthropological perspectives*. Boston: Academic Studies, 2008: 114

jewelry into female obsession, it became possible to highlight male superiority, despite the fact that men had a vital interest in their wives' demonstration of wealth and power."[96] As we've seen, in these cases jewelry serves as evidence of inferiority and as demonstration of the family's rank and wealth. The third purpose, of emphasizing the value of women as means of reproduction, also came into play. The link between jewelry and fertility was made explicit during the Imperial period:

> *Caesar had, by 46 B.C., legally prohibited the use of litters, purple cloth and pearls for unmarried as well as childless women under 45 years of age. Caesar's political intention was to increase population growth... Jewelry reflected the wealth and importance of her husband and family on the one hand, and kept the woman in a physically inferior sphere at the same time. Therefore, in a twofold sense, the female body supplied the surface of projection for (male) status in society. A new function of ornamenta was added... when women were allowed to highlight their personal status acquired through individual merit - that is, having done their civic duty of giving birth.*[97]

Even when women theoretically were demonstrating their own merits, it was only as producers of children. Otherwise, their ornaments were strictly there for the purpose of demonstrating both personal hierarchy (between males and females) and societal hierarchy (between families).

Perhaps the most extreme common version of this type of dowry comes from modern India. There is much debate over how and when the meaning and allocation of dowry shifted within Indian society. For much of Indian history, it appears that the dowry (or stridhan) was considered women's exclusive property within the marriage, and was used both to strengthen her position in relation to her new in-laws, as well as insuring her against potential divorce.

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[96] Kunst, Christiane. "Ornamenta Uxoria. Badges of Rank or Jewelry of Roman Wives?" *The Medieval History Journal* 8.1 (2005): 127-42.

[97] Kunst, Christiane. "Ornamenta Uxoria. Badges of Rank or Jewelry of Roman Wives?" *The Medieval History Journal* 8.1 (2005): 127-42.

However, according to experts on the connections between violence and Indian dowry, "[o]ver time, it shifted from being a gift to the bride to being considered a groom's entitlement. Currently, dowry is seen as the property a woman brings to her husband at the time of and during the marriage to compensate for the 'financial burden' that is her very existence."[98] This is far from all it represents, as dowry gifts extend far beyond the wedding day and sometimes even beyond the lifetime of the couple, making the issues of relative status between families extremely important. Gifts are expected to continue from the engagement, through the wedding, and into the second and even third generation.[99]

A crucial distinction must be made between gifts of goods, which generally go directly to the groom's family, and two types of gifts of jewelry, the smaller portion of which belongs to the bride and, in theory at least, retains its original function, while the larger portion goes either to specific members of the groom's immediate family or into the extended family's pool of circulating goods. This presents a dilemma for the bride's family. Shukla explains, "Expensive [non jewelry] dowry items will please the new in-laws and provide a secure position for the new wife, but they tax the financial capacity of the bride's family: the more the household items cost, the less money there is to buy jewelry for her. Although the bride may receive immediate gratification by arriving with many coveted gadgets, these are not hers exclusively, as is her jewelry, and more importantly, they may not be sold for immediate cash."[100] The balance is an important one to strike correctly, as the consequences can be, and disturbingly often are, dire

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[98] Rastogi, Mudita, and Paul Therly. "Dowry and its Link to Violence Against Women." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 7.1 (2006): 66-77: 68.

[99] Randeria, Shalini, and Leela Visaria. "Sociology of Bride-Price and Dowry." *Economic and Political Weekly* 19.15 (1984): 648-52.

[100] Shukla, Pravina. The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture). New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 355.

when a groom's family feels disrespected by insufficient dowry. “A large dowry is a status symbol. In addition to cash and jewelry, the groom's family demands cars, scooters, TVs, and refrigerators. Brides who fail to bring in an adequate dowry face intense verbal and physical abuse, sometimes leading to death. Dowry deaths are often referred to as bride burning because the favorite form of murder is to pour kerosene over the victim and set her on fire, thereby allowing the culprits to later claim that it was a kitchen accident.”[101] In 1993, one source reports over 5,500 dowry-related deaths across the country, with over ninety percent registered as accidents, five percent as homicides and another five as suicides. One estimate puts the number of women who die because of dowry-related violence higher than the total number of female deaths due to all other forms of violence and accidents. Despite the fact that dowry was officially outlawed in 1961, at least eighty five percent of respondents in 1996 were unaware of its illegality, and marriages eschewing the tradition of dowry remain rare.[102]

Through this system, women are kept subordinate in multiple ways, both through threats on their person but also through the constant threat of blemishing their family's honor. It begins at birth, with a marked social preference for male children, daughters often being seen as little more than financial liabilities. At the time of marriage, the jewelry that was once a source of independence and strength now serves primarily as the beginning of the bride's family's seemingly endless transmission of wealth, most of which the daughter will never see. Brides are trapped by the intense stigma of divorce and the risk of shame not only to themselves but to their kin.

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[101] Purkayastha, Bandana, Mangala Subramaniam, Manisha Desai, and Sunita Bose. "The Study of Gender in India: A Partial Review." Gender and Society 17.4 (2003): 503-24: 518

[102] Rastogi, Mudita, and Paul Therly. "Dowry and its link to violence against women." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 7.1 (2006): 66-77: 69.

Meanwhile, the females in the groom's family are often the primary perpetrators of violence. “In the Indian context... women have the 'illusion of power' because their power is gained through their relationship to men. Furthermore, they said that women can and do abuse this power, sacrificing those of their own gender, and thus legitimatizing and perpetuating the social norms that define and maintain women’s subordinate condition.”[103] Jewelry specifically is a double-edged sword in this situation. The little bit that remains under the bride's control often represents her only truly independent property. The portion given to the groom's family both serves as a central marker of respective status, and reinforces the power of the groom's female relatives over the bride. However, its quantity might mean the difference between life and death for the bride. Meanwhile, that same jewelry will likely be passed on as dowry to the next generation of the groom's kin, perpetuating the cycle.

Adorned women can and do additionally represent the status specifically of their male partner. This can be seen in many situations simply as a reflection of wealth, but sometimes it is more explicit than that. Victoria's Secret diamond bras and the average American engagement ring provide two examples at seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum, but which incorporate many of the same correlations between status, wealth, and sex, played out on the bodies of women. These cases also begin to explore the concept of to-be-looked-at-ness, the understanding and subversion of which will be crucial to the third frame, that of jewelry as a symbol and means of psychological and physical independence.

Since 1996, Victoria's Secret has displayed a “Fantasy Bra” every year, worn by supermodels, covered in gems and worth several million dollars. Like the Victoria's Secret

[103] Rastogi, Mudita, and Paul Therly. "Dowry and its link to violence against women." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 7.1 (2006): 66-77: 72.

fashion shows, these bras are presented not to appeal directly to their consumers, but to construct a fantasy world for heterosexual men in which women in lingerie display themselves for eager consumption. This vision is actively claimed by the company, who view the bras as "an extension of our brand – we're all about fantasy," according to Victoria's Secret spokeswoman Monica Mitro.[104] Marketing experts continue:

> *Improbable and outrageous, these gifts were really proffered not as purchases, but as a new imaginary realm that would bring the Victoria's Secret fantasy world to dizzying heights... The Fantasy Bras, jewel-studded and worn by supermodels, helped buoy the buzz between Fashion Shows. Tyra Banks graced a Harry Winston Bra worth $3 million. Daniela Pestova was supported by a $5 million number with 77 carats of rubies and 330 of diamonds... Giselle Bundchen breasted $15 million worth of diamonds and rubies to the opening of a new Victoria's Secret store in Manhattan.*[105]

As in Mulvey's analysis, to-be-looked-at-ness "continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. At the extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from [scopophilia, defined as] watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other."[106] The Fantasy Bras link two of the ultimate symbols of heterosexual male power – ownership of female sexuality and wealth, especially as expressed through diamonds on women, as we will see in the upcoming case study of engagement rings. In other cases developed in this analytical frame, gendered status and power were conferred by the wearing of jewelry. In this case and the next,

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[104] Miller, Paul. "Those Quirky Dream Merchants." *Catalog Age* 14.1 (1997): 7

[105] Schmitt, Bernd, David L. Rogers, and Karen Vrotsos. *There's No Business That's Not Show Business: Marketing in an Experience Culture*. New York: FT, 2003: 82.

[106] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18, 9.

power is conferred through the projected or actual ownership of jewelry, in this case in the form of lingerie, worn by women specifically for the benefit of men. This female performance of gender and male scopophilia are both heavily socially reinforced through the consumption of media and branding, both explicitly as with Victoria's Secret, and in more subtle ways as will be seen in the analysis of diamond engagement rings, De Beers, and the evolution of modern diamond jewelry usages.

3.4 Gendered Status Case Study: Diamond Engagement Rings

Perhaps the most extreme, and successful, form of branding incorporating the female body as a projection of male honor is one that has become so heavily ingrained into modern American culture that it is almost invisible, that is the ritual of the diamond engagement ring. Diamond producers and advertisers combined to invent a ritual that has been so successfully integrated into American life, most young people have no idea how recent the trend actually is.

> *The history of wedding-related marketing includes a well known but dramatic example of how advertising can spur pervasive and powerful change in the way such events are celebrated. The custom of giving diamond engagement rings in the United States began in the late 1800s, but the economic effects of World War I and the Depression caused it to decline. A campaign created by N.W. Ayers for De Beers, the largest diamond cartel in the world, is credited not only with reversing that trend, but also with making the engagement ring an inseparable part of courtship and married life.*[107]

It is not just the success of the engagement ring that is relevant here – as we have seen, engagement rings have a long and varied history. What is unique about De Beers' success is that

[107] Otnes, Cele, and Linda Scott. "Something Old, Something New: Exploring the Interaction between Ritual and Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* 25.1 (1996): 33-50: 36.

they have created a narrative whereby wealth and sexual potency are linked in a very specific way, via their "rules" on engagement rings, which have been incorporated from advertising directly into the gospel of wedding etiquette. The two crucial successes of this campaign have been to to link diamonds inextricably with eliciting sex, an association that has carried over into non-engagement advertising of diamonds as well, and to create a proscriptive narrative on the proper way to purchase an engagement ring, complete with invented but inflexible rules for determining appropriate price and quality. Between them, these paradigms prey on the ultimate weaknesses of heterosexual masculinity as constructed in American culture, sexual and financial impotency.

The partnership between De Beers and the Ayers advertising firm began in 1938, with De Beers pressed to expand its market share in the United States in light of impending war in Europe. By 1941, aggressive marketing had reversed the downward trend of sales in America, and in 1947 the top slogan of the century[108] was born as the "A Diamond is Forever" campaign was launched. The link with sexuality was quick to materialize, with Marilyn Monroe "singing 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend,' embod[ying] the stereotype of a woman willing to be possessed but only in exchange for possessions."[109] Ayers utilized all forms of media to effect this transformation.

> *The De Beers magazine ads, meanwhile, grew more and more explicit with their appeals to greed and sex. The language of sensuality may have been deeply encoded in the World War II-era messages, but the ads grew bolder and hotter as the nation's morals loosened during the sexual revolution of the 1960s... The sexual bargain around the stone emerged*

[108] Cone, Steve. "Help Taglines Regain Lost Glory: Why Creating Strong Slogans Is a Marketer's Most Important Job." *Advertising Age*. Crain Communications, 18 Apr. 2008

[109] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 44.

> *almost completely from its subtext in a 1987 ad that featured an exhilarated young couple frolicking atop a floating pool toy. They are dripping with water and he is lying between her legs in an unmistakably copulatory position. "Once she said 'yes,' I wanted her to have a diamond that would make her say 'wow,'" said the ad. In other words, she has agreed to sleep with him, but now his potency is on the line. Her bliss – and his worth as a man – are dependent on his ability to whip out the stone.*[110]

The association between diamonds and sexuality was so successfully cemented in the American psyche that it spawned countless campaigns across the diamond industry. From "Every Kiss Begins with Kay" to "He Went to Jared!" to "Rock her World," the media consumer is inundated with portrayals of males presenting diamonds to women in exchange for sex, or as a requirement for love. In one particularly ridiculous example airing as of this writing, a female-voiced GPS system refuses to take the driver home until he drapes "her" with diamond jewelry. And indeed, the marketing has been unambiguously successful. Tom Zoellner, historian focusing on diamonds, elaborates that "[e]ighty five percent of American women own at least one piece of diamond jewelry. In the case of married women, 80 percent of the diamond owners received their diamond as a gift, usually from a man. With single women, 64 percent received their diamond as a gift, and again, usually from a man. A decades-long campaign of advertising has made sure the numbers fit the assumptions, so that it now seems like an inescapable archetype that men give diamonds to women... The ingeniousness of De Beers's marketers lies in having forged a link between something people do not need, diamonds, and something they do need, love."[111] The efficacy of this strategy is evident in the diamond engagement ring's unchallenged status in

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[110] Zoellner, Tom. *Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire*. New York: St. Martins, 2006: 79-80.

[111] Zoellner, Tom. *Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire*. New York: St. Martins, 2006: 144.

modern culture.

The second feat of the diamond industry's marketing machine was to create an elaborate financial script around the purchase of the wedding ring. The cultural and social value had been well established by the thorough fusion of diamonds to sex, love, and marriage. Now, that paradigm could be exploited for maximum profit. De Beers and Ayers did this first by developing the "4 Cs" as an ostensibly objective method of assessing diamond worth – cut, clarity, color, and carat-weight – and assigned favorable values to each, varying their projection of the "ideal size" based primarily on their own supply over time.

> *Men had to be helped past confusion about how to buy this polished rock--for men, the industry's voodoo about carat weight, color, clarity, etc., was created to provide logic where there was none. Men wanted to know what it was worth. Since it was arguably worth nothing, a "logic" had to be invented to assign worth to it. But in the cleverest of all gambits, a simpler shortcut for buying decisions was also created, stating the price in the frame of the buyer's own wages: "How can you make two months' salary last forever?"Today, the two-months-salary-rule is widely accepted by the public.*[112]

The salary rules were a stroke of marketing genius, and part of their appeal is that they could be customized to maximize profits based on what the market would bear. Two months prevailed in the US, those in the UK got off easier with a single month's salary, while the Japanese were told that no less than three month's salary would do.[113]

A massive campaign in Japan constructed by De Beer's international advertising agency, J Walter Thompson, took a country with no history of engagement rings at all – and indeed, up until 1959, banned diamond imports – and transformed it into the world's second largest diamond

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[112] Kennedy, Dan. "A Great Ad Campaign Can Last Forever." *Entrepeneur.com*. Entrepeneur Media, Inc, 11 Feb. 2009

[113] Zoellner, Tom. *Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire*. New York: St. Martins, 2006: 81.

market in only fourteen years. Both appeals to modernity in the guise of Western values and invocation of traditional Japanese concepts of honor were utilized to effect this transformation. Romantic Western ideas of marriage were grafted onto the existing tradition of yuino, or the gifts given by the groom's parents to the bride's family. Once the narrative was established, the importance of honor in Japanese culture could be exploited to extort a higher investment than existed elsewhere. "'A diamond engagement ring: Worth three month's salary' was a tagline of most of the print advertisements distributed in the 1970s... For Japanese readers, the subtle message was clear. If you don't spend at least three month's salary on her ring, not only have you failed to live up to the expectations of the national family, you are also effeminate and will be unhappy."[114] Their masculine pride depended on the jewelry worn on the bodies of "their" women.

Once engagement rings had been made ubiquitous in their target markets, De Beers expanded its aims to integrate diamonds into the celebration of other life cycle events. Advertisers introduced four stone"'journey" pendants, tenth anniversary rings, and a ring specially bought for the millennium. Diamond historian Matthew Hart writes, "'Show her you'll love her for the next thousand years,' the millennium campaign exhorted, displaying with perfect economy two of the assumptions that drive the marketing of diamonds: that men buy them, and that they buy them for women."[115] These strategies worked because Ayers and De Beers had so successfully positioned the diamond as not just an expression of romance, but as interchangeable with it – that is, diamonds had transformed from a symbol into an inextricable component of

[114] Zoellner, Tom. *Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire*. New York: St. Martins, 2006: 82.
[115] Hart, Matthew. *Diamond: The History of a Cold-Blooded Love Affair*. Plume, 2002: 144.

love. According to Ayers' psychological profile,

> *The first time that a man spoke to a woman of his love, devotion, and expressed the wish never to be parted from her ... the symbol of the first milestone was a diamond. The engagement diamond. This diamond ring ... was a badge for the outside world to see. It gave the woman her status as a woman, the prestige of a woman. Nothing else could take the place of the diamond.' However, as the years go by, the woman needs further reassurance that her husband still loves her, according to this psychological profile. 'Candies come, flowers come, furs come," the study continues, but such ephemeral gifts fail to satisfy the woman's psychological craving for 'a renewal of the romance.' A diamond, however, which originally symbolized the commitment of love, could serve to fill this emotional 'later-in-life' need.*[116]

Ayers and De Beers weren't content with their effective monopoly on expression of romantic love, either. They launched another successful campaign around the slogan, “Raise your Right Hand,” targeting both married and unmarried women, exhorting them to buy themselves diamond “right hand rings” to express self-confidence and independence. That is, the ultimate symbol of materialistic heteronormative love was meant to be mimicked in order to defy materialism and heteronormative dependence. Needless to say, the campaign was and is a roaring success. None of this psychology was passively observed and utilized by the companies – it was intentionally and thoroughly instated and then exploited through decades of branding that irreversibly shaped America's, and the world's, understanding of wealth, gender, and love.

Crucially for this analysis, diamonds engagement rings are constructed as symbols of male status, displayed on the body of “their” women. Thus, the ostensibly romantic ritual becomes a stage for the performance of a sexually charged version of masculinity. De Beers and

[116] Epstein, Edward Jay. *The Diamond Invention*. New York: Arrow (A Division of Random House Group), 1982: Chapter 13

Ayers were extremely conscious of this. “To exploit this psychological need of Americans to conspicuously display symbols of their wealth, N. W. Ayer specifically recommended: 'Promote the diamond as one material object which can reflect, in a very personal way, a man's ... success in life.'”[117] Women are not truly the recipients of these gifts; rather they serve as exhibitions, proof of achievement, primarily to other men. The message was made explicit in one De Beers ad, reading “You can't look at Jane and tell me she's not worth two month's salary. Just look at her. So I wanted to get her the biggest diamond I could afford. One that other men could see without getting too close.”[118] Thus 'Jane' is dually marked as sexual property and as a symbol of wealth, of her fiancé’s sexual and financial status. The woman who wears the ring ends up serving as an embodied projection of the status symbolism in the ring itself.

3.5 Gendered Honor and Status Conclusions

The common thread within these cases involves jewelry as a symbol of success in terms of embodying gendered expectations. Many forms of masculine jewelry presents a fascinating paradox whereby the attributes of femininity are taken on specifically to emphasize the contrasting masculinity of the wearer – that their masculinity is so obvious and entrenched that they are unable to be tainted by connotations of femininity. Sometimes, as among the Ilongot headhunters of the Philippines, the opposition between the genders, between the takers and shedders of blood, is ritualized through the association of bloodshed and jewelry. The men must go through the process of actively shedding blood, in opposition to women's passive

[117] Epstein, Edward Jay. *The Diamond Invention*. New York: Arrow (A Division of Random House Group), 1982: Chapter 13.
[118] Kingston, Anne. *The Meaning of Wife*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005: 55.

menstruation, to distinguish themselves as masculine enough to sport the headhunter's embellishments and thereby be eligible to take a wife, in the parallel narrative of victim and spouse. In an analogous evolution, men's jewelry was popularized in the 1970s through a narrative, primarily within black America, that simultaneously rejected mainstream aesthetics and emphasized a new paradigm of manhood based on the juxtaposition of jewelry and gladiator style masculinity. Jewelry was a tool used to communicate both the intentional othering and independence of the black body as well as the incorruptible nature of their masculinity. Similarly, sumptuary law restricted jewelry to men already of high standing, whose status and power insulated them from insinuations of femininity – indeed, again, the juxtaposition served to underscore their invulnerability.

In the prior cases, the feminine is evoked for contrast in absentia through the use of jewelry. In others, the female body is the canvas on which striving for status is projected within a patriarchal system. Diamond jewelry exemplifies this custom, especially in its careful crafting of social attitudes through advertising. The degree to which the actual woman becomes unimportant is seen in the highly successful series of silhouette ads, in which the recipient is reduced to a sensual dark silhouette against which the diamonds shine. “Ideally, the male reader should be enabled to project himself into the situation and... play the role of the giver and anticipate the rewards associated with a gift of diamonds... No matter how uninterested men might be in diamonds themselves, these advertisements should convey 'the extraordinary reaction that can be expected from the gift.'”[119] The cultural script reinforces the active/passive roles of giver and receiver, and also allows, indeed requires, men to use women's bodies as the proving grounds for

[119] Epstein, Edward Jay. *The Diamond Invention*. New York: Arrow (A Division of Random House Group), 1982: Chapter 13.

performance of financial and sexual potency.

Chapter 4
Jewelry as Means and Symbol of Physical and Conceptual Empowerment

Wearing jewelry brings to the fore how bodily adornments are employed in the processes of identity formation and in negotiations of status. Gold jewelry then connects what is otherwise often seen as separate: the monetary systems and notions of personhood, economy and emotions, investments and adornments. [120]

4.1 Physical and Conceptual Empowerment Introduction

So must jewelry always be problematic from a feminist perspective? Is jewelry inextricably linked with passivity, with to-be-looked-at-ness, with submission? Thankfully, no. There are a range of traditions, ancient and modern, that utilize jewelry as a means and symbol of independence, physical and psychological. Some of these practices have an inherently empowering basis or effect in terms of day-to-day life, while others provide independence that is more conceptual, although no less real. Most directly, jewelry has frequently functioned as the primary or sole source of wealth under direct control of women, and its historical effect on their ability to function as independent entities, in family and marriages and in society as a whole, can hardly be overstated. In times of turmoil, jewelry has repeatedly proven to be an invaluable resource as portable wealth, allowing women to lead independent lives or provide for their families, as the case may be. Varying degrees of control over dowry and engagement goods and inheritance have led to significant shifts in the balance of power across different societies. Other

[120] Spyer, Patricia. *Border Fetishisms Material Objects in Unstable Spaces (Zones of Religion)*. New York: Routledge, 1997: 209

traditions emphasize psychological independence. Victorian lover's pendants and mina jewelry worn by Indian women are just two types of jewelry that subvert traditional conceptions of the gaze, and privilege the wearer's interaction with the piece over an outsider's view.

4.2 Physical Empowerment Case Study: Holocaust Jewelry

Jewelry has served as a repository of wealth throughout the ages. Precious metals and stones have the advantages of portability and relative liquidity – indeed, in rural India, women buy and sell their gold jewelry on a yearly basis to pay for crop seeds. We live in the age of bank accounts and the stock market, but when access to traditional financial channels fails (or is blocked), jewelry's ambiguous locus between sentimental property and financial asset comes into play. During the Holocaust, progressively stricter acts limited and eventually eliminated Jews' ownership of luxury items, businesses, and property. The Nazis were aware that they needed to preemptively close potential channels of escape if they were to be successful in exterminating the Jewish population. Businesses and bank accounts, where the majority of men's wealth resided, could be far more easily regulated and enforced. The personal nature of jewelry combined with its importance as a financial asset meant that this women's wealth now became crucial to the survival of the family. For many, the amount of jewelry they were able to hold onto literally meant the difference between life and death.

In 1939, the “Ordinance on the Use of Jewish Assets” was established, and jewelry was one of the first targets. “To prevent Jews from acquiring capital, the ordinance prohibited them from buying or selling jewelry, gold or silver items, and forced them to deliver any privately

owned pieces to the state."121 They were permitted to keep only wedding bands, silver watches, and false teeth. Families took extensive measures to try to retain some jewelry as a safety net, hiding pieces in false compartments, inside walls, and on their bodies. One survivor recalls, "my mother and brother had both had a small fortune sewn into their clothing. Each one of us had some valuables hidden for emergencies... some women carried jewelry in their vaginas. Some people had dentists insert diamonds into their fillings."122 The sudden change of priorities in terms of means of storing wealth mirrored the destabilization of Jews' position in society and even in their own families. Since men both worked primarily outside the home and were expected to support the family, the ordinances denied not only their physical needs but also their constructed and imposed identity. Gender scholar Jonathan Frankel posits, "Gender roles in Jewish families shifted because of devastating economic, social and emotional realities- forcing families to embrace strategies that they would never have entertained in ordinary times. The Nazis essentially destroyed the patriarchal structure of the Jewish family, leaving the void to be filled by women."123 And since jewelry was many families' only remaining repository of wealth, women often became financially responsible for their families for the first time.

Jewelry seized from Jewish families was, ironically, a significant source of funds for the Nazi leadership. The SS held a special account, called the Melmer account for the officer who oversaw it, in which they deposited the personal effects of concentration camp victims, primarily jewelry and gold teeth, often shipped directly from Auschwitz or other camps. The US Justice Department estimates the total amount of the gold funneled just through that particular account

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121 Cesarani, David, and Sarah Kavanaugh. *Holocaust: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*. London: Routledge, 2004: 232.

122 Salinger, Mania Tenenbaum. *Looking Back*. Northville, MI: Ferne, 2006: 66.

123 Frankel, Jonathan. *Jews and Gender: The Challenge to Hierarchy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000: 71.

to be almost five million dollars in wartime value, about forty million dollars in today's gold market.124 This included all the jewelry and gold confiscated prior to transport to the camps, as well as that found upon arrival or after death. The practice of collecting valuables from the prisoners' belongings and bodies was called Project Reinhardt. "Jewish prisoners [in the Kaiserwald concentration camp] were forced to search painstakingly for hidden jewelry and gold coins and jewels that had been sewn into clothing. The Jews doing this work faced the death penalty if they did not hand over all the valuables they found."125

Despite the danger, many women did manage to smuggle jewelry either out of the country or into the camps or ghettos, where it was put to various uses. Those who escaped frequently did so with the help of a cache of jewelry. Historians of women in the Holocaust Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman write, "Women smuggled jewelry or money abroad for their relatives. Visiting her grandchild in Switzerland, one grandmother smuggled jewelry on each trip... Other elderly family members begged her to smuggle their jewelry too... None of them wanted to be dependent on their adult children once they arrived abroad."126 Jewelry was also frequently traded for forged passports, tickets, or as bribes for silence.127 "Life in a foreign country could only be managed if the emigrants helped themselves... the new situation meant a plunge into the abyss, unless they had some hidden jewels sewn into their clothing to help them over the initial penury."128 These were the lucky ones. More often, families ended up in the ghetto or the concentration camp. Here again jewelry served as currency, allowing for occasional

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124 *On the U.S. Government Supplementary Report on Nazi Assets* (June 4, 1998) (testimony of Stuart E. Eizenstat).
125 Press, Bernhard. *The Murder of the Jews in Latvia: 1941-1945*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 2000: 153.
126 Ofer, Dalia, and Lenore J. Weitzman. *Women in the Holocaust*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998: 135.
127 Salinger, Mania Tenenbaum. *Looking Back*. Northville, MI: Ferne, 2006
128 Bullivant, Keith, Geoffrey J. Giles, and Walter Pape. *Germany and Eastern Europe: Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999: 143.

extra food or medicine. It was so important that women swallowed stones and jewelry to smuggle them in. To this day, there are Holocaust survivors who carry significant jewelry on their person at all times because of the fear instilled by their experiences. One prisoner who escaped to America "was plagued by nightmares and flashbacks. Even today he shows signs of trauma. He always carries an expensive gold watch, so that 'if ever I find myself in a fix again, I've got something to fall back on.'"129 The shift in valuation of women's wealth thus has clearly remained with some survivors.

While the majority of these transactions involved food and immediate necessities, jewelry was also employed as a tool of organized resistance. Several escapees from concentration camps cited bribes of jewelry to guards.130 Moreover, jewelry was a significant source of funds for the partisans, both within and outside of the ghettos. A survivor of the Warsaw ghetto uprising recalls, as a child, collecting jewelry to smuggle out of the ghetto in exchange for weapons.131 A similar partnership arose in a Polish slave-labor camp between the local underground resistance and the Jewish workers, who smuggled ammunition and jewelry out in exchange for food and assistance for those who were able to escape.132

Throughout the war, whatever the circumstances, women and jewelry as their property became the centerpiece of stories of defiance and survival. Objects that had been created to adorn the body were called upon to save it. In this moment, when jewelry's effect upon the fate of the body becomes obvious, we can see more clearly how that same ornament and source of wealth

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129 Simmons, Jake. "The British PoW Who Broke into Auschwitz — and Survived." *Times Online* [London] 25 Feb. 2010

130 Rashke, Richard L. *Escape from Sobibor*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995

131 Tec, Nechama. *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003

132 Karay, Felicja. *Death Comes in Yellow: Skarżysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996: 118.

may have directed life paths in more subtle ways. Jewelry was explicitly and independently owned by women, who could dispose of it as they pleased, which in and of itself is a source of power. That potential was recognized and fulfilled in the horror of the Holocaust, but it speaks to the (generally) untapped financial independence inherent in the medium. The Nazis were all too aware of the power of jewelry, as evidenced by their ruthless collecting – both for the purposes of financing their own operations, and to further incapacitate their victims. They highlighted the crucial fact that the personal nature of jewelry excludes it from the standard avenues of disenfranchisement, that is the formal financial system. Only in a totalitarian regime can power be exercised over this most personal form of wealth, and even then, as we've seen, the process is imperfect.

4.3 Physical and Conceptual Empowerment Survey

4.3.1 Physical Empowerment

Jewelry functions as a portable and personal repository of wealth for women, and therefore is a threat to those who would oppress them. For much of history, political leaders have had no need to exercise power over women's wealth directly because men did it for them, through their power over their wives' person and belongings. Jewelry has often been an exception to this rule, and it provides a fascinating lens on the construction of ownership and power relations. Many societies either make explicit the husband's control of his wife's assets, including personal belongings, or develop systems whereby cultural norms overcome theoretical independence of ownership. When jewelry is under the control of women, it has varying justifications. In some cases jewelry is excluded from the husband's purview by its feminine and

therefore potentially polluting nature, while in others it is representative of recognition of women's independence, or even the first stage of a general shift towards equal inheritance and agency for women within society.

Many cultures that practice the giving and receiving of dowry justify it partially through the claim that it serves as an insurance policy of sorts for the bride. As seen in earlier dowry case studies, this is far from being universally true. As mentioned, in India the bride retains little control over even the small jewelry portion of the dowry that is ostensibly reserved for her. The situation is similar in Nepal, although the problem is exacerbated by a caste system that remains in strong effect. While they theoretically control their jewelry during marriage, they may not use it independently. "The practice of taking all forms of wealth back from a woman who decides to leave a husband is common... The claim that dowry is a form of female property is therefore not accurate... Among the women interviewed, high-caste women did not lose any of the gold jewelry that their [natal home] gave them, whereas lower-caste women lost on average nearly all."133 Meanwhile in Singapore, while women ostensibly have property rights over their jewelry, strong social taboos mandating the passing down of heirlooms prevent the brides from using it for their own benefit. "Unlike the cash and assets that mostly go to the bride's parents, the jewelry would normally go to the bride... which were passed down from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law. In other words, a woman did not have much control over the ownership of jewelry."134 The problem is not new, and has been legislated to various degrees throughout history. In ancient Rome, "[u]nder the Oppian Law the bulk of liquid assets (precious metals or

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133 Cameron, Mary M. *On the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998: 241.

134 Hirsch, Jennifer S., and Holly Wardlow. *Modern Loves: the Anthropology of Romantic Courtship & Companionate Marriage*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006: 38.

jewelry) was to be in the hands of men, the warriors and protectors; women were allowed neither to stand out and display themselves nor to be mobile."135 While different reasoning has been invoked – from the importance of heirlooms, to the loss of property in divorce, to the allocation of all liquid assets to men – jewelry has frequently failed to reach its potential as a source of women's wealth.

Thankfully, there are many other cultures, both modern and ancient, in which women's ownership of jewelry has contributed significantly to their independence and empowerment. In ancient Greece, dowry was practiced in a far less formalized manner than it would later be in Rome. "Dowry... was not a legal requirement for marriage in Mykenaen Greece, where the father of the bride voluntarily gave his daughter personal gifts, such as clothes and jewelry, at the time of her marriage. The bride took such gifts with her to her husband's house, but they remained her personal property."136 Indeed, documents attest that jewelry was not women's property in name only, but rather a significant movable asset that they disposed of at will. "Women owned and controlled slaves and a small amount of personal property... which consisted primarily of the clothing and jewelry they brought to the marriage. Women donated small objects of property, such as jewelry... to the gods."137 Their wealth in the form of jewelry was passed down independently through their wills, and actively solicited as donations in times of need. In the Medieval Islamic world, the Mamluks provide an example of a usage of dowry jewelry that actively benefited women and gave them a significant degree of agency and empowerment,

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135 Takács, Sarolta A. *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2008: 16.

136 Elisabeth M. Tetlow. *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Ancient Greece*. New York: Continuum, 2005: 8.

137 Elisabeth M. Tetlow. *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Ancient Greece*. New York: Continuum, 2005: 69.

despite their inability to control "male" forms of wealth. An expert on marriage in medieval Islamic society, Yossef Rapoport, explains,

> *Property was gendered: daughters received [textiles and jewelry] while being denied direct access to other types of property, especially land... The dowry was a major factor in determining the degree of Mamluk women's economic independence, especially among the elite... Once the dowry was donated by the bride's parents, it remained under the woman's exclusive ownership and control throughout marriage and then again through widowhood and divorce.138*

Direct ownership of wealth within the husband's house and the ability to take said wealth in the event of widowhood or divorce are the two crucial factors which indicate true financial and therefore physical independence.

One of the most liberal, long-running, and constantly evolving usages of jewelry in dowry and engagement is found in the traditional Jewish marriage contract, the ketubah. Each ketubah contract enumerates the dowry property (nedunya), often primarily jewelry, brought into the marriage by the bride and its value, delineating it as her separate property. It also set the amount of her ketubah payment, which is paid directly to her in the case of death or divorce, although the true feasibility of claiming the full amount varied over different historical periods based on the legal standing of women.

> *The nedunya, or dowry, of a Jewish wife, was entrusted to her husband, but its full value had to be restored to her in the case of a divorce or the husband's death. Unlike later in Europe, where the dowry consisted largely of money and, thus, was entirely at the disposal of the husband, in "classical" Geniza times, that is, from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries, it consisted exclusively of jewelry, clothing, and other items under the personal control of the wife. A husband could, and often did, give a piece of his wife's*

[138] Rapoport, Yossef. *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005: 13-14.

jewelry or real estate as collateral for a loan, but for this he needed her cooperation.139

Thus, in the cases and societies where jewelry was the standard form of dowry, women retained greater legal control through their physical possession of the pieces.

While dowry traditions were drawn directly from the Bible, the ketubah came into existence during the Rabbinic period, around the first century CE, primarily through the work of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah. "The need for a ketubah arose from a biblical law which grants a husband the right to divorce his wife without her consent. This left the wife in an insecure financial position. The ketubah was designed to remedy the situation in the event of the husband's death or divorce. In effect, the ketubah was presumed to act as a deterrent against hasty divorces."140 One apocryphal story holds that women had banded together to boycott the marital system, threatening the entire structure of Jewish society, which necessitated the Rabbis' involvement. The ketubah functioned to protect married women, and for many centuries was one of the most liberal systems of marriage in existence, and one on which many later traditions were predicated. However, as one feminist scholar points out, although the ketubah was a huge step forward, it still reflected the basis of a patriarchal society.

> *A married woman is dependent upon her husband and needs to have her rights protected. No ketubah is written for him, not because he had fewer rights, but because he had, in the past, all the rights and resources... So even though the ketubah guaranteed many rights that women would not have had otherwise, still, the married woman's need to have a ketubah drawn up for her indicated, very clearly, that she was under her husband's thumb; He controlled all the financial resources and doled them out as he saw*

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[139] S.D. Goitein, "Three Trousseaux of Jewish Brides from the Fatimid Period," *Association for Jewish Studies Review,* II, 1977, 77-110: 78.

[140] Bloch, Abraham P. *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*. New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1980: 35.

fit.141

As Judaism has evolved, so has the ketubah. While every Jewish wedding still employs some form of the document, most Conservative and Reform couples opt for more egalitarian phrasing than the traditional form. Indeed, many modern ketubot exclude financial considerations entirely, using the space instead to speak of ethical and emotional commitments to each other. However, for several millenia ketubot served as a crucial source of agency and protection for women who divorced or were widowed by their husbands.

A more in-depth understanding of the benefits and limits of this type of independence through jewelry in the modern era can be gained through looking at British inheritance law, and its treatment of jewelry as a specifically female form of wealth. Jewelry was included in the category of paraphernalia, or a woman's personal effects, which was treated differently from all other forms of property under the law. The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 forms a dividing line between two different legal systems, each of which had specific language addressing paraphernalia and, later, non-paraphernal jewelry. The laws surrounding these usages of jewelry illuminate both the special nature of jewelry as property, as well as the ways in which progressive changes in law can shift the feminist locus of a particular practice in relation to women's position in society.

Prior to the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, the vast majority of women had profoundly limited access to property or, indeed, individual agency. “The ancient customary law... merged the wife's existence in the husband, and her property became on marriage more or less completely his.”142 The one exception was among extremely wealthy families, who

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[141] Hauptman, Judith. *Rereading the Rabbis: a Woman's Voice*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998: 67.

[142] Thicknesse, Ralph. *The Married Women's Property Act, 1882; Together with the Acts of 1870 and 1874, and an*

circumvented their financial liability by creating trusts for their daughters which were overseen by male relatives and unavailable to the spouses. However, this was a complicated and costly procedure, and relatively rare even among those who could afford it. Even upon the husband's death, any property that the wife had brought into the marriage went to his creditors or was passed down through his will, often leaving the widow dependent on her children for support. The one exception to this rule was the special property category of paraphernalia, her clothing and, crucially, her jewelry. Legal scholar William Blackstone reports,

> *In one particular instance the wife may acquire a property in some of her husband's goods, which shall remain to her after his death, and not go to the executors. These are called her paraphernalia... the apparel and ornaments of the wife.... the jewels usually worn by her... These she becomes entitled to at the death of her husband, over and above her... dower, and preferably to all other representatives. Neither can the husband devise by his will such ornaments and jewels of his wife.143*

Thus jewelry provided a source of financial security for a widow as her sole protected asset, regardless of her husband's debts upon his death. This was the most control a woman could have over property prior to the Act, and even so it was irrelevant for the duration of her marriage. "The husband may pawn, sell, or give away, these paraphernalia during his lifetime, though he cannot leave them by will at his death; a woman has no claim on them, therefore, till she is a widow."144 Unless she was one of the rare elite with a separate trust, women had no hope of real property during their husband's lifetime. They also had no ability to claim property or support (outside of their paraphernalia) in the case of divorce, regardless of who initiated it or who had brought the property into the union. However, paraphernalia was still a critical source of agency,

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Introduction on the Law of Married Women's Property. London: W. Maxwell & Son; [etc.], 1882: 4.

143 Blackstone, William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979: 823.

144 Uttley, T.F. "A Wife's Paraphernalia." *South African Law Journal* (1885): 95-101: 100

and can be understood as the most progressive form of property available at the time.

After the passage of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, the relative status of paraphernalia changed drastically. Under the Act, women could not be prevented from owning separate property, either brought into marriage or given to or earned by the wife during the course of her married years. Paraphernalia still existed as a category, and in fact functioned exactly the same way – as conditional gifts from the husband essentially lent to her during his lifetime and became solely hers upon widowhood – meaning that despite women's ability to own separate property, much of her jewelry remained out of her personal control during her husband's lifetime. However, paraphernalia now referred strictly to jewelry provided by the husband.

> *Where a husband, either before or after marriage, gives to his wife articles of a paraphernal nature, they are not treated as absolute gifts... But if the like articles were bestowed upon her by a father, or by a relative, or even by a stranger, before or after marriage, they would be deemed absolute gifts to her separate use; and then, if received with the consent of the husband, he could not, nor could his creditors, dispose of them any more than he could of any other property received and held to her separate use.145*

Now that women could, and did, hold jewelry and other property independently, paraphernalia became an intermediate category in terms of independence. This emphasizes the degree to which the feminist value of a jewelry usage can shift over time, without the tradition itself changing – rather, that until and unless we live in a completely equal society, degrees of agency and empowerment must be judged in terms of the dominant hegemonic paradigm.

Moreover, the ability to hold separate estates greatly increased the agency of individuals who might previously have been economically trapped in an unhappy relationship. Women could

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[145] Schouler, James, and Arthur Blakemore. *A Treatise on the Law of Marriage, Divorce, Separation, and Domestic Relations*. 6th ed. M Bender, 1921: 1706

now take their own input and earnings in case of a marriage's dissolution, greatly increasing the viability of divorce as an option. Interestingly, paraphernalia now became a tug-of-war issue in court, due to its poorly defined status within the context of more equal property rights. One frequently cited precedent stated that the issue hinged on whether jewelry was given to be "worn as ornaments on her person only, they are to be considered paraphernalia... for if they were looked at as gifts to a separate use, she might dispose of them absolutely, which would be contrary to his intention."146 However, courts occasionally sided with the wives as well, deeming gifts absolute rather than paraphernal. Often property rights of thousands of pounds worth of jewelry were awarded on the basis of these cases, severely upsetting the prior gendered balance of power and serving as an example of jewelry's potential impact on the physical and legal emancipation of women.

Over time, the use of paraphernalia as a separate category in legal disputes declined, although its analogue surfaced in a somewhat unexpected way in heartbalm or breach-of-promise laws under dispute in America during the first half of the twentieth century. These laws provided protection in the case of broken engagements, legislating the return of gifts as well as imposing punitive or emotional damages on the party perceived as responsible. Bear in mind from earlier discussion that diamond rings had not yet emerged as the dominant, even crucial, component of the engagement ritual that they would become. Gifts were therefore one part of the equation, but early use of the breach-of-promise laws invoked broader concepts of value and loss.

Litigation over gifts was not uncommon, and often invoked, perhaps unintentionally, the age-old debate over paraphernalia and conditional vs. absolute gifts. Jilted women often sued

[146] Uttley, T.F. "A Wife's Paraphernalia." *South African Law Journal* (1885): 95-101: 97.

successfully for emotional as well as physical damages, which was not as mercenary as it might sound to jaded modern ears. A woman's value on the "marriage market" was a significant factor in her future options and agency. Heartbalm legal historian Margaret Brinig elaborates that "she might also recover for her embarrassment, humiliation, and loss of other marriage opportunities... An 'old maid' would not only be scorned because she was not attractive enough to snag a husband, but also would be disadvantaged because in later life she would not be secure financially."[147] Loss of virginity was also a crucial component of many suits. Especially in the period between the two world wars, it was common and quite accepted for engaged couples to become sexually active prior to the wedding – as high as fifty percent of couples by Kinsey study estimates. However, should the engagement fall through, women's "market value" still declined significantly. "While a man could pretend inexperience, a woman's virginity or lack of it was a verifiable physical fact. Because of the importance of premarital chastity, damages in breach of promise actions where seduction (intercourse) had occurred were far more substantial than in cases where no sexual intimacy was alleged."[148] While most breach-of-promise cases involved what most economists would consider credible loss in terms of opportunity cost and indirect financial value, a wave of reforms swept the country opposing so-called heartbalm laws as poor reflections of modern marriage. These had significant effects both on the institution of marriage and on the use of jewelry surrounding it.

Anti-heartbalm reforms had two driving motivations – a growing understanding of marriage as an emotional rather than mercenary bond, and the desire to prevent individuals from

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147 Brinig, Margaret. "Rings and Promises." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* Spring 6.1 (1990): 203-15: 204.

148 Brinig, Margaret. "Rings and Promises." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* Spring 6.1 (1990): 203-15: 205

opportunistically utilizing the breach-of-promise laws to gain unfairly. In practice, this almost always involved protecting men. "From the 1930s through the 1950s, a wave of anti-heartbalm proposals swept the United States. Responding to charges that heartbalm actions enabled designing women to blackmail worthy men, legislators in many states passed statutes eliminating breach-of-promise and related actions."[149] In consequence, women's rate of success in receiving restitution from the court in case of broken engagements drastically declined, even as their losses remained constant.

However, this change in legislation led to a fascinating process by which the need for some protection or insurance around the institution of engagement converged with the meteoric corporate- and advertising- fueled rise that we've addressed before; that of diamond engagement rings. Economist and law scholar Rebecca Tushnet writes,

> *Margaret Brinig has offered an economic explanation for current customs [regarding engagement rings]. She argues that the abolition of breach-of-promise actions led women to seek other signs of commitment from men before consenting to premarital intercourse. Brinig notes that the utility of the ring as collateral depends on whether the woman gets to keep it if the engagement ends... Perhaps a general intuition that women needed some security against men who promised, seduced, and then abandoned them led women to look for symbols such as rings. The expectation at the time of heartbalm reform seems to have been that a woman would keep the ring, at least when she did not break the engagement.*[150]

In other words, part of the reason De Beers was so successful in its invention of tradition was that the loss of protection from breach-of-promise laws opened a door to a more tangible form of

[149] Tushnet, Rebecca. "Rules of Engagement." *Yale Law Journal* 107 (1998): 2587.
[150] Tushnet, Rebecca. "Rules of Engagement." *Yale Law Journal* 107 (1998): 2601.

investment in the relationship.[151] And, as throughout history, when women require economic security, societies often turn to jewelry. DeBeers, meanwhile, was perfectly poised to capitalize on this potential market. "DeBeers attributed the changing market to the Ayers advertising campaign, but, in fact, the market for diamonds began its growth four years before national advertising when the breach of promise action was first abolished in a significant number of important states."[152] In other words, the convergence of breach-of-promise decline followed up by aggressive advertising fueled the incredible boom discussed earlier. While the marketing was sexist and developed a problematic gender dynamic in the giving of the gift, it appears that the origin of expensive gifts was in the best interests of women left vulnerable by lack of legal recourse. The situation is obviously complicated, and has grown more so over time, and emphasizes the compromise that often underlies gains in economic empowerment.

4.3.2 Conceptual Empowerment

The line between physical and conceptual empowerment is similarly murky, and feminist arguments can be made for and against many jewelry usages. This is highlighted in the case of 'right hand rings' currently a target of diamond advertising and mentioned briefly in an earlier

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[151] "The data show that four factors explain much of the increase in the number of diamonds demanded in the period 1935-1960. The most important explanatory variable is the abolition of the breach of promise action. The standardized B coefficient of the bonding hypothesis variable is the largest at 0.52, and it is statistically significant. The population of marriageable age was also significant, with the second largest (3 coefficient of 0.36. The World War II dummy was almost as important as marriageable population (3 = 0.33) and was also significant, although it is negatively related to diamond demand. This suggests that the hardships and absences of the war had a greater effect on demand than the desire to purchase diamonds as investment instruments. Although there is a fourth variable with a sizable 13 coefficient, price (p = 0.28), it is not statistically significant. These results support the hypothesis that abolition of the breach of promise action created a need for a bonding device, a need fulfilled by the diamond engagement ring." Brinig, Margaret. "Rings and Promises." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* Spring 6.1 (1990): 203-15: 206.

[152] Brinig, Margaret. "Rings and Promises." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* Spring 6.1 (1990): 203-15: 204.

chapter. These rings have been marketed by De Beers and its current advertising partner, J. Walter Thompson, primarily towards 30- to 54-year-old women with household incomes of $100,000-plus, who may or may not already be married. The campaign features a single primary slogan - “Women of the World, Raise your Right Hands!” - with a variety of taglines, including “Your left hand says we, your right hand says me,” “Your left hand rocks the cradle, your right hand rules the world,” and “Your left hand is your heart, your right hand is your voice.” These ads encourage women to buy jewelry for themselves, as a symbol of their success and emancipation. “The message is clear. Keep your left hand for the soppy, relationship stuff - the engagement and eternity rings bought by others - and for your right hand, treat yourself to something extravagant, independent and expressive. Very Sex and the City.”[153] Many would, and do, argue that this represents respect for women's individuality and agency. They see the campaign as an invitation to celebration of femininity regardless of marital status.

However, there are still deep problems with this usage from a feminist perspective. Firstly, as discussed when this trend was mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is the issue of using an extant materialistic heteronormative gauge of success to mark independence from a materialistic and heteronormative paradigm. As has been echoed (and argued) by feminists since Audre Lorde first uttered it, the master's tools cannot destroy the master's house[154] – that is, using the metrics and methods of hegemony undermines any attempt to defy it. For many more radical feminists, this applies not only to the use of diamonds as problematically constructing gender and marital expectations, but also to conspicuous consumption in general.

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[153] Greenway, Samantha M. "Diamonds for 'me'" *Financial Times* [London (UK)] 31 Jan. 2004: 11-11

[154] Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Second Sex Conference. "The Personal and the Political Panel", New York. 29 Sept. 1979

> *What we find troubling about this trend is that when discourses of consumption and women's independence intersect, they do so in a manner that equates independent womanhood with consumption...The implications for this changing terrain of feminism are exhibited in many third wave feminists' embrace of consumerism as both a choice and a source of women's empowerment. This is a fundamental problem for feminism, since consumerism, as the cultural logic of capitalism, is the ideological and practical means to reproducing hegemonic domination of the exploitative and oppressive system.*[155]

This jewelry usage thus is doubly problematic in its appeal to "American Dream" style spending, specifically aimed at the upper/middle class, and in its invocation of a medium already rich in contradictions and implications for feminist thinkers. However, it can still be classed as jewelry that makes an attempt to refer to and affirm women's conceptual independence.

Jewelry was also used in the early suffragette movement, both as a marker of affiliation and support, and as a commendation for those who made sacrifices to the cause. "In Great Britain in the early twentieth century, supporters of the suffragette movement wore medals or brooches in the shades of green, white and violet... the initial letters of the colors suggested an acronym, 'Give Women the Vote!'"[156] The colors were also meant to represent hope (green), purity (white), and dignity (purple or violet), and suffragettes were encouraged to coordinate their accessories to broadcast their affiliation. The sales of such pieces often served as a source of funds for the movement, through such venues as the Women's Social and Political Union's fund-raising bazaars. Moreover, jewelry was commissioned to honor the movements' leaders, including "a necklace and pendant wrought in gold with amethysts, pearls, and green agates to be

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[155] Cole, Nicki, and Alison Crossley. "On Feminism in the Age of Consumption." *Consumers, Commodities, and Consumption* December 11.1 (2009).

[156] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 49.

given to Mrs. Pankhurst on her release from prison,"[157] having been arrested while protesting. Other "...activists who were thrown in jail for picketing were given a distinctive Jailed for Freedom brooch, produced by the indomitable women's rights advocate Alice Paul."[158] These usages all show early feminists embracing the power of jewelry and of their femininity, not shying away from it, and co-opting it for their own ends.

Another approach to conceptually independent jewelry moves in the opposite direction – rather than broadcasting a single message, communication is mediated via the relationship between the piece and the wearer. This returns to the concept of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and the value of women's agency in controlling access to her body and its adornments. This type of jewelry acts in opposition to Georg Simmel's theories on the power of jewelry. "One adorns oneself for oneself, but can do so only by adornment for others. It is one of the strangest sociological combinations that an act, which exclusively serves the emphasis and increased significance of the actor, nevertheless attains this goal just as exclusively in the pleasure, in the visual delight it offers to others, and in their gratitude."[159] One way of creating independence via jewelry is to subvert this paradigm, to employ jewelry that explicitly reserves the full pleasure, experience, and control for the wearer. Thus the agency and power, the "increased significance of the actor," need not be mediated solely through the gratitude of others, implicitly supposed to be men.

One ancient usage of jewelry that employs controlled access is that of poison or Borgia rings, which generally refer to any rings with concealed compartments within them. They often

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[157] Crawford, Elizabeth. *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a Reference Guide, 1866-1928.* London: Routledge, 2001: 309

[158] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 49.

[159] Simmel, George, and Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free, 1964: 339.

feature a hollow bezel or space beneath the stone, which is used most traditionally to store poison, but was also utilized as a space for messages, perfume, or personal or religious relics. In this way the rings are analogous to lockets, with the difference that lockets are generally recognizable as such, while subtlety is crucial to the design of a poison ring. Perhaps the earliest reliable cited use is that of Hannibal, who used a poison ring to commit suicide after a defeat in 183 BCE. "Though poison rings date from ancient Roman times, as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they were not uncommon. It is presumed these rings were first designed as an easy means of escape from torture, humiliating slavery, or death... Later the same ring was designed as an instrument of murder."[160] The Borgia family, who gained immense power in Italy and Venice during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, are known to have employed poison against their enemies and are traditionally associated with the rings, although there is some debate over whether any existing pieces can actually be traced to them.

Regardless of Borgia connection, poison rings are interesting for several reasons. First and most obviously, if and when the rings actually were used to store poison, women were the most likely users, as those with access to food. Some rings are said to have sliding compartments that would allow powdered poison to be unobtrusively added to any meal. However, even supposing that poison was a significant use of some rings, the majority were likely more innocent. Still, the rings provided a hidden, personal space for keepsakes, messages, even strands of hair. Privacy of this sort was not often afforded women in medieval times.

This type of ring has experienced something of a popular resurgence lately. Some jewelers who specialize in modern "poison rings," that is rings with hidden compartments, cite

[160] Lester, Katherine Morris., Bess Viola. Oerke, and Helen Westermann. *Accessories of Dress: an Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004 : 332.

the emotional and psychological attractions over the practical. “Stephen Forward... cites four historic uses for secret compartments: romantic, political, memorial and hygienic. But their current appeal, he believes, is not so much about cloak-and-dagger as a desire for individuality. 'They add personality to a piece.' Jeweler Jeremy Hicks, who custom-makes secret compartment rings and bracelets, observes: 'People... appreciate their intimacy.'”[161] This analysis explains the form's longevity – this type of jewelry imparts agency and autonomy, while the historical uses reference the wearer's potential power.

While the practical possibilities are useful and interesting, adornment can integrate the principles defying passivity and mediating access to the piece and, by extension, the wearer, without the use of complicated mechanisms, much less poison. Another ancient medium, that of delicate and beautiful enamel work on the back of Indian women's pendants, called mina, illustrates a content-neutral use of the same principles. It is theorized that the term itself comes from the same root as the word for paradise, a private refuge from the everyday.[162] The mina enameling is rare and treasured, despite its inability to function as much Indian gold jewelry does, as a social display of wealth and status. According to Shukla,

> *The mina is there for the pleasure of the wearer, who sees the pretty painting when she is putting the jewelry on, and she knows the jewelry she is wearing is even more beautiful than it appears to the eyes of others, for only a small percentage of... jewelry has mina on it. This fact firmly contradicts the idea that women in India ornament themselves solely for the approval of others. Many women buy a piece of jewelry, for a substantially increased price, just to indulge themselves in the secret pleasure of the mina on the*

[161] Swengley, Nicole. "A Stylish Way to Keep a Secret" *Financial Times* [London (UK)] 14 May 2005: 9.
[162] Aga-Oglu, Mehmet. "The Origin of the Term Mīnā and Its Meanings." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5.4 (1946): 241-56.

back.[163]

In addition to defying the traditional understanding of adornment as solely for the pleasure of others, and thus empowering the wearer in terms of subverting the gaze, the mina also has a connection to heritage. "Mina increases the chances a piece will escape being melted down for scrap and be passed down as an heirloom – where gold is generally valued by the ounce and not by the craft, mina escapes that crude system of evaluation."[164] Thus women are more likely to be able to pass down specific pieces to their daughters and daughters-in-law, again defying a system whereby the sole purpose of jewelry exchange and display is to cement social status. These pieces exist in a different realm for the wearer than for the viewer.

One particular jewelry usage combines the hidden or incomplete visual form with a degree of privacy and emotional independence within a constrictive social environment. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in England, jewelry featuring portrait miniatures became extremely popular. Of special interest is a subset of these miniatures, which portrayed only the eye. Thus, most viewers would be unable to recognize the subject, while the wearer had an immediate connection. Queen Victoria wore a memento of her departed husband, "a miniature on ivory, a lover's token, as the eye is the mirror of the soul. Some of these eye brooches include a lock of hair on the back.[165]" While the Queen's was known to be of her husband and worn openly, these pieces were often filled with intrigue.

The earliest known and most famous eye miniature was *Mrs. Fitzherbert's Eye*, painted for George IV as a token of his secret lover. Other examples are difficult to identify, for obvious

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[163] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 125.

[164] Greenberg, Edward S., Benjamin I. Page, and Pravina Shukla. *The Grace of Four Moons Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India (Material Culture)*. New York: Indiana UP, 2008: 126.

[165] Browne, Ray. *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishism in Popular Culture*. Popular, 1982: 99.

reasons – the gifts were almost always intended to remain a secret, either from jealous spouses or from a disapproving society. "By using just one part of the body – the eye – to stand for the whole, these provocative fragments preserved their subjects' anonymity, and thus even the most secretive lovers could exchange tokens with relative impunity."[166] Interestingly, the majority of the eyes appear to be female, although men rarely wore the pieces themselves. This implies that miniatures were also being used as symbols of platonic, and likely romantic, love between women. These pieces also differ greatly from other portrait miniatures popular at the time, not just because of their anonymity. "With eye pictures... the confrontation with the viewer outweighs the representation. A gazing eye, or rather the return of the beholder's gaze, is the sole event of the painting. The eye miniature's subject, in fact, is intimate vision."[167] Thus wearers of eye miniatures not only subvert a paradigm that calls for primary pleasure in the wearing of jewelry to be mediated via the viewer to the wearer, it also creates an intimate connection between the wearer and the piece itself, to which the external observer has no access. The wearer controls access not only to the identity of the subject, but also experiences the "intimate vision" of gazing, eye to eye, with the lover. These pieces bestow agency and privacy upon the wearer, in direct opposition to many of the problematic jewelry usages discussed in earlier chapters – these pieces are a source of power.

4.4 Conceptual Empowerment Case Study: Madeleine Albright

Madeleine Albright can be justly claimed as a feminist icon on many fronts, from her

[166] Aronson, Julie, and Marjorie E. Wieseman. *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale UP, 2006: 168.

[167] Grootenboer, Hanneke. "Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision."*The Art Bulletin* 88.3 (2006): 496-507: 498.

insistence that "there is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women,"[168] to her tenure as the first female United States Secretary of State. She also developed a particularly innovative use of jewelry as a diplomatic tool, wearing the potential liability of her femaleness literally on her sleeve, and turning it clearly and decisively to her advantage. In a fascinating book entitled "Read My Pins: Notes from a Diplomat's Jewel Box," she traces the evolution of her connection to jewelry from an early paradigm in which women received jewelry only from men, through the development of her independence and personal aesthetic, to her groundbreaking use of pins as a means of communication and its international ramifications. In a way, much of her story is representative of the process of claiming self-awareness and agency that millions of women have undergone, played out on a world stage. Thus she serves as an ideal case study for both conceptual independence as discovered through jewelry, and for the cross-cultural communicative power of personal adornment – in emphatic defiance of its frequent dismissal as a purely passive, decorative medium.

As a young woman in the 1960s, Albright acquired jewelry primarily from others, without the opportunity to develop a true personal style. She writes, "[During the course of my marriage] I received an occasional gift but rarely shopped for jewelry myself. This was because women were expected to get their finery from men... I never thought of the family money as mine to spend."[169] During this period of fraternity pins and Monroe's "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," as discussed in an earlier chapter, it was unbecoming for women to buy their own jewelry. This adheres to Simmel's traditional view of jewelry as primarily a vehicle for the

[168] Quoted in Mechelle Voepel, "Albright empowers all-decade team at luncheon."
[169] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 41.

pleasure of the beholder, with the wearer receiving only reflected, passive benefit through the joy of pleasing others. The combination of the collapse of her marriage along with the new parameters of acceptable femininity within 1980s aesthetics acted in concert to shift this paradigm for Albright.

> *Though devastated when my marriage fell apart, I soon found my own spirit and voice. From that time on, when my mind turned to jewelry or clothes, I thought less about the expectations of others and more about my own sense of identity and pride... The idea [in the 1980s] was that a woman could show independence from stereotypes without eschewing ornamentation; it was no longer thought essential to dress plainly in order to be taken seriously or to imply that wearing earrings made one unable to think... Before long, I accepted that it was okay to shop with my own needs and desires in mind.*[170]

During the course of the 1980s, as she worked as a professor at Georgetown University and major Democratic party foreign policy adviser, she continued to develop a strong sense of self and express it through her ever-expanding collection of jewelry.

Her importance in the history of jewelry truly begins with international diplomatic career, with her tenure as the US Ambassador to the United Nations in 1993, followed by her ascendance to the position of Secretary of State in 1996. Her first publicly recognized use of jewelry to send a message occurred after she critiqued Saddam Hussein in 1994, and his poet laureate called her a "serpent" in a much-publicized poem. At her next meeting with Iraqi officials, she decided to wear a snake pin, a move noticed by the UN press corps. When asked, she "smiled and said that it was just [her] way of sending a message,[171]" that message being that she was not so easily intimidated. Pins soon became a frequent diplomatic gift. Unlike many

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[170] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 49-50.

[171] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 17.

such gifts, these could be later used to cement the relationship, through wearing them as a sign of respect at the next meeting with the giver.

Pins also became a clear indicator of her attitude and approach to any given situation.. She wore a bee to communicate her sharp message to Arafat, and a beautiful golden sun to represent hope and progress while speaking in disaster aftermath in Haiti. In a difficult meeting with Putin about the status of Chechnya, she wore a set of "See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil" monkey pins to express her frustration with Russia's inaction. Leah Rabin gave her a dove pin shortly after her husband's assassination, which she wore before the National Press Club while speaking on the Middle East. The dove became part of her diplomatic arsenal during the ensuing Middle East talks. "In the three years [of Middle East diplomacy talks], I often wore the dove, [although] I found cause – when displeased by the pace of negotiations – to substitute a turtle, a snail, or, when truly aggravated, a crab.[172]" As a diplomat, the pins allowed her to communicate nuanced and subtle messages while retaining her dignity and status.

Albright was always aware of her status as something of a trailblazer in this particular use of jewelry, but she sees herself as part of a long tradition. The use of jewelry in international relations is hardly new. "Jewelry has played a colorful part in the evolution of world affairs. Because precious stones tend to inspire both admiration and greed, leaders have found convenient excuses for seeking them and have used them to impress crowds, reward friends, deprive foes, forge alliances, and justify war.[173]" In utilizing a medium traditionally reserved in statesmanship for non-functional competitive gifts between men, she was able to adapt it to her

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[172] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 86.

[173] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 30.

own ends without compromising her power and stature as a diplomat or her femininity – indeed, enhancing both. She writes, "Styles have changed through the years, as has jewelry's role in relations between the genders and in affairs of state. I was fortunate to serve at a time and in a place that allowed me to experiment by using pins to communicate a diplomatic message.[174]" Her creative co-optation of the "liability" of femininity into one of her greatest strengths represents a true victory for empowerment through jewelry.

4.5 Physical and Conceptual Empowerment Conclusions

Throughout this chapter and exploration of this lens, it has become clear that jewelry need not be a passive medium. Indeed, it can and has been a means and symbol of emancipation and independence, both physical and conceptual. During the Holocaust, when access to traditional channels of wealth were systematically blocked, the "lesser" wealth of women became a vital lifeline for those trying to survive and escape the ghettos and camps. Despite the complex nature of the dowry system and the many deeply problematic forms it can take, in many cultures dowry has served its stated purpose of protecting women should they be left vulnerable. These traditions are distinguished in their actual benefit to women by the degree to which wives had access to wealth while their husbands lived, their protection against creditors should their husbands die, and their ability to take assets with them should they choose to leave the marriage. Jewelry is especially relevant in these distinctions because of its traditional locus under the physical control of women – existing solely in reference to the female body – thus the question is one of control over what might be termed extensions of their physical selves. This question of

[174] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Elaine Shocas, Vivienne Becker, William Woodward, and John Bigelow. Taylor. *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*. New York: Harper, 2009: 161.

ownership came up again in the early 20th century in reference to engagement rings and breach of promise acts, whereby jewelry, which had been replaced as commitment marker by legally binding language, was called in to reprise its role as a form of insurance. The specific form this took was simultaneously profoundly and irrevocably shaped by the marketing machine of the diamond industry.

More recently, since diamond engagement rings seem in no danger of losing their supremacy as the ultimate prerequisite for marriage, that same marketing machine has tried to appeal to more liberal and independent sentiment among women. While its value as a counter-hegemonic tool can be debated, the attempt at least speaks to the degree to which independence and emancipation have been entrenched as a value among American women, at least worth paying lip service to. Moving backwards in history, we see how jewelry was also used by the suffragettes to assert those same values, which were much more radical at the time. One wonders what they would make of the right-hand ring phenomenon.

Less outwardly assertive and more introspective are the varieties of jewelry that engage with the concept of the gaze. "The gaze is a theoretical concept which has been used... to think through the relationship between ways of seeing and ways of being. Theories of the gaze raise the question of how we look, and what the relation is between ways of looking and the (re)production of gender identity."[175] In other words, these pieces address the fundamental question raised at the beginning of this study, about whether jewelry is fundamentally a passive medium that reasserts women's essentialist desire to be looked at. Poison rings, mina enameling, and eye portraits each present a different approach to subverting that paradigm, by privileging

[175] Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York UP, 2003: 197.

the function and experience of the piece for the wearer over the visual pleasure of the viewer. Finally, Madeleine Albright serves as a fully realized and conscious example of one woman's utilization of jewelry for her own ends, in a world traditionally reserved for men. She used jewelry and femininity, not as a liability, but as an opportunity – and was ultimately praised for her unique approach.

All of these cases show the common thread of jewelry throwing off the shackles of passivity and facilitating independence, which is the point of this lens. In analytical work, this frame can be used to distinguish not when a jewelry tradition is perfect from a feminist point of view, but when it opens doors to opportunities and agency that women would not have had otherwise. Indeed, it is crucial to recognize that a specific jewelry usage can remain problematic (as with paraphernalia or right hand rings), and yet still benefit from analysis through this lens, as it does provide some degree of emancipation for the women involved. Moreover, I've left out jewelry that is created explicitly to deal with issues of the gaze and gendered oppression, in favor of a chapter devoted solely to intentionally created feminist jewelry. It is important especially for contemporary jewelers to recognize the impact of jewelry on the construction of expectations of the body, a concept that fits within this section but deserves its own explication. However, first it is important to put the whole of this framework to the test, to determine how it might function in the exploration of complex, multifaceted jewelry usages, which will be the object of the next chapter.

Chapter 5
Intersectional Case Studies

No culture fails to lavish time and energy on the making and wearing of body adornments. Every culture invests it with meaning, and turns it into an iridescent language that can be passed on from one generation to the next [176]

5.1 Introduction to Intersectional Case Studies

Throughout the course of my work thus far, I've attempted to assign each jewelry usage to a single analytic frame and examine it independently within the context of that frame. However, as reappearing traditions attest, most forms of jewelry don't fit neatly into a single category. Jewelry exists in messy reality, on the bodies of individuals who experience the world in a specific way shaped both by their own agency and by their position within various intersecting social systems. This chapter will try to provide a more thorough understanding of the ways that these varying frames might prove useful in analyzing complex, messy, nuanced, and real jewelry traditions. I've selected four case studies, each of which resides at the crux of two or more analytic frames, as laid out in the previous chapters.

5.2 Intersectional Case Study: Turkoman Jewelry

The jewelry traditions of the Turkoman or Turkmen people of central Asia serve as a fascinating case study for the intersecting lenses advocated in this paper. The ancestors of the

[176] Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531, 524

modern Turkoman people arrived in Central Asia around the fifth century AD, and have for centuries formed a distinct ethnic and cultural group within the panoply of tribes populating the steppes. Their traditions are rooted in a pastoral and nomadic lifestyle, which was maintained by many Turkoman into the twentieth century. Jewelry has always held a central place in Turkoman society, and they have developed recognizable and distinguished styles and techniques. Indeed, their silver and gilded pieces, often ornamented with carnelian or other stones, are highly sought after by collectors. Every stage of life, for men, women, and even their horses, calls for specific types of jewelry and ornamentation. While for men this generally was restricted to rings, ornamented belts, or simple amulets, women's lives were rigidly delineated by the types of jewelry they were expected to wear.

Children's jewelry was simple and amuletic, young boys and girls alike wearing little silver apart from talismans. "A child's talismans expressed the family's wishes for good fortune. If the boy child was to be a courageous warrior, a small silver saber was sewn to his clothes. A miniature adze and tiny axe symbolized hard work and industriousness.[177]" This implies not only the nature of gendered expectations, with the symbols used in each case delineating the group's appropriate range of gender construction, but also the importance of strong gender conformity within the society. Barnes and Eicher, in their typically nuanced manner, discuss this in their overarching work on dress and gender.

> *"At birth... adult caretakers... act as purveyors of culture by providing gender-symbolic dress that encourages others to attribute masculine or feminine gender and to act on the basis of these attributions when interacting with the child... Prescriptions for dress according to gender and age may become increasingly complex as individuals progress*

[177] FitzGibbon, Kate. "Turkoman Jewelry." *Ornament Magazine* 22.3 (Spring 1999).

> *through various life stages and participate in multiple societal systems, such as the religious, economic, and political. In each of these systems, differences in forms of dress for females and males can define, support and reinforce the relative power and influence of the sexes*[178].

As predicted by this model, when girls reached marriageable age, between nine and twelve years, they left the world of simple talismans behind. They rarely remained unmarried long, and soon transitioned to the next phase of their lives, that of a bride.

Turkoman bridal jewelry was both complex and, crucially, heavy. "The most elaborate jewelry is worn by a bride and includes a headdress, bracelets, rings, necklaces and silver bangles for her hair. A bride from a wealthy family might be wearing approximately 30 pounds of jewelry... Usually, a bejeweled woman wears pieces with dangling bangles that jingle as she moves.[179]" That level of ornamentation is physically incapacitating, and severely limited movement as it announced every motion with bells. Moreover, Turkoman women were considered brides not just on the day of their marriage, but for the entire period until their first child was born, and wore their full complement of bridal jewelry until then. This implies that the wedding was not truly over, and thus the marriage not truly legitimate, until and unless it resulted in children. The heavy ornamentation was a mark of status imbued by fertility, and the two (ornamentation and fertility) corresponded roughly throughout her life-cycle. "Her lavish [bridal] ensemble remains in place for an entire year, until the birth of her first child. She then gradually lightens her complement of everyday jewelry but continues to display objects of value on festive

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[178] Barnes, Ruth, and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Oxford: Berg, 1992: 17-20.

[179] Knowlton, MaryLee. *Turkmenistan*. New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006: 107, 108.

occasions. Once past childbearing age, she removes silver ornaments."[180] The fact that ornamentation is culturally forbidden to post-menopausal women underscores the "depreciation" of her value.

Another factor points towards jewelry being a sign of ownership and of fertility status, or usefulness to the society as a vehicle of production. The other primary use of ornament in the Turkoman society is not for men, but for their most prized possessions. "The horse is the primary status symbol among the Turkoman... Horses wore bridle and trappings heavily ornamented with silver and gold-washed plaques, made in the same manner and style as women's jewelry."[181] Jewelry is not an indicator of respect, but rather of ownership and usefulness to the maintenance of society. As the means of reproduction in a society that highly prizes large families, women are valued as a means to an end, not as subjects – and their use of jewelry emphasizes, and indeed constructs, this dynamic.

Women's reduced movement and physical restriction for the duration of their extended period as bride emphasizes the connection between incapacitation and status as a woman, incapacitation and female-ness, as discussed extensively in the first analytical frame presented in this paper. The linkage of fertility and value, bestowed and time-limited rather than earned power, echoes the jewelry usages seen in the second frame, that of gendered honor and status symbols. Each frame focuses a different lens on the social construct of Turkoman jewelry, and understanding of the other extant jewelry traditions that also fall within the same framework adds nuance and parallels to what might otherwise become a culturally relativist, insubstantial

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[180] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 105.

[181] FitzGibbon, Kate. "Turkoman Jewelry." *Ornament Magazine* 22.3 (Spring 1999).

conversation. The very purpose of developing this framework is to express the ways that none of these traditions exist in a vacuum, that they can and should be compared to their counterparts in other cultures in order to understand the forces that shape women's lives *across* cultures. As quoted earlier from Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo et al, and it is so important that it is worth quoting again, "...anything so general as the universal asymmetry of sex roles is likely to be the result of a constellation of different factors, factors that are deeply involved in the foundations of human societies."[182] From the universal asymmetry of sex roles, to the universal use of jewelry to reflect and construct hierarchical relationships, the stakes are too high to ignore the symmetries arising across cultural borders, or the commentary they present on the human condition.

5.3 Intersectional Case Study: Palestinian Inheritance

Palestinian dowry jewelry during the period from the British Mandate (1917 to 1948) to the present serves as an example of the varied uses of jewelry within a single culture for both displaying family prestige and securing women's economic status. Gold has long been a crucial component of Palestinian dowries, usually in the form of simple, heavy bracelets with little in the way of labor costs. These pieces served as a crucial economic asset for the new family and for the wife as a (moderately) independent actor. Patricia Spyer is one of the few modern writers who has written on the direct relationship between jewelry, women, and power.

> *Jewelry tends to be discussed as artifacts separated from their female owners. Whereas veiling is usually, at least in the more traditional Orientalist approaches, analyzed in*

[182] Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist., Louise Lamphere, and Joan Bamberger. *Woman, Culture, and Society.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1974

> *terms of relations of male dominance and female subordination, in descriptions of women wearing gold the issue of power relations tends to be absent... Whereas Western observers choose to neglect women's gold, to many [Palestinian] women... the gold jewelry they receive as part of their dower has been an important economic resource*[183]

The contrast with veiling is an instructive one, as a veil also serves as a mediator for social interaction. Indeed, many proponents of the veil claim that it liberates women through removing them from "public consumption" by the gaze, that indeed the veil defies the passivity invoked by Simmel of to-be-looked-at-ness. My tendency would be to look at it as a form of incapacitation, certainly in its most extreme forms, but the argument is a valid and interesting one. Gold jewelry, however, is expected to be worn, seen, bought, and sold, and serves different roles in each of those transactions.

Dower gold is, by definition, acquired by entering into marriage, which remains a transaction involving significant loss of independence and agency in the society. It is ironic but likely not entirely coincidental that women acquire potential power only through entering into a limiting contract. Spyer notes,

> *Women generally are less able to act in respect to arranging their marriages than men, and have more limited control over their own person after marriage. Yet, it is exactly through entering into such a relation that they gain considerable access to property (in particular in the form of gold), a potential source of economic power, with which they can act in whatever way they wish. The very same dower that in some senses may be seen as objectifying women also turns them into owners of, at times considerable, movable property.*[184]

This paradox is exacerbated by the fact that the gold received as dowry was often a considerable

[183] Spyer, Patricia. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 1998: 211.
[184] Spyer, Patricia. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 1998: 218.

share of a woman's natal inheritance. In both Islamic and local law, daughters are entitled to a share in their father's estate. However, across all social strata, women are likely to forgo claiming the portion of the inheritance that they are legally entitled to, sometimes under direct pressure from male claimants, and often simply through cultural expectation.[185] However, it is difficult, nearly impossible, for even the most persistent alternate claimant to disinherit daughters of their gold jewelry, due partly to the fact that they receive it earlier, at marriage, and partly from the chain of transmission from mother to daughter. Thus, gold jewelry serves as a crucial security for women during the course of her lifetime.

Prior to 1948, it was uncommon for women to actually sell their gold for productive use. However, since the dislocation of many families into refugee camps, gold has regained its use as a primary source of wealth, especially given the obstacles to traditional employment facing men. "In the camps, some women also used their dower gold to open a store near their house or to become involved in small trade, which was no option for women in the city, where trade and shopkeeping were virtually exclusive to men. Investing in children usually meant selling gold in order to pay for their education in order to secure a better future for them."[186] Interestingly, the most apt parallel to this pattern lies in the use of jewelry immediately prior to, during, and immediately following the Holocaust, when Jewish families lost access to traditional forms of wealth and became increasingly reliant on the more portable and liquid assets such as jewelry. In both of these cases, jewelry served as a means of independence and agency.

As mentioned earlier, dowry gold has traditionally been bought for weight rather than

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[185] Moors, Annelies. *Women, Property, and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920-1990*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995: 53.

[186] Moors, Annelies. *Women, Property, and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920-1990*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995: 121.

aesthetics, befitting a medium of significant economic importance. However, during the mandatory period especially, some wealthy women and families began to move towards more decorative, less financially liquid forms of jewelry, as an indicator of their social status.

> *Gold jewelry served both as a means to store wealth and as a form of security. Both gold coins (22 carat) and these heavy bracelets (21 carat) were an attractive investment; they required little labor, so when they were sold the losses associated with the costs of labor remained limited (usually less than 5 percent)... For the wealthy, gold jewelry has also previously been more an expression of status than a source of security... During the mandatory period, the better-off were already beginning to buy gold jewelry decorated with diamonds, in addition to the heavy gold bracelets. In the Jordanian period, diamonds became increasingly popular, and those who could afford it began to wear smaller, but more exclusive pieces of jewelry, often imported Italian pieces that required many hours of skilled labor for their manufacture.*[187]

Since the turbulent period leading up to the end of the British mandate, Palestinian brides have moved back towards heavier, more traditional coins or simple bracelets, a reflection of increased economic insecurity. Thus, now the wearing of complex, highly-worked gold is even more prestigious. This form of display echoes those seen through the second frame, that of jewelry as a gendered status symbol. It signals that the wearer (or her family) is wealthy enough that they will never need to fall back on their jewelry – indeed, that she will likely never need to provide for herself at all. The two uses – as a means and symbol of financial independence, and as a gendered family status symbol displayed on the body of the woman – exist simultaneously in the society, sometimes even within the same pieces.

[187] Moors, Annelies. *Women, Property, and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920-1990*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995: 117.

5.4 Intersectional Case Study: Western Body Piercing

Becoming visible on the global scene with the punk movement of the 1970s and gaining momentum ever since, body piercing and non-traditional body jewelry have become a significant force in the Western world. While nose and eyebrow piercings have become practically passé, they were intentionally shocking when they first became popular, and more extreme piercings and piercing modifications such as stretching remain primarily the province of a distinct sub-culture. Since its inception, the movement has focused on intentional and visible rejection of social norms, "manipulating the standard codes of adornment in socially objectionable ways, punks challenged the accepted categories of everyday dress and disrupted the codes and conventions of daily life."[188] This challenge constitutes an inherent claiming of agency, disputing the discourse around the entire hegemonic structure. Many saw and see such body modifications as empowering on an individual level. "A visible body mark is still symbolic of rejection of mainstream culture and its ethic of appropriate image and control of the body. In contrast to religious creeds that dictate reverence for God's finished work of the unmarred human body, body alteration glorifies the human body as unfinished, to be adorned and recreated."[189] This ethos and its claiming of individual agency in the face of proscriptive societal norms is a central tenet of many body modifiers.

Moreover, many individuals with complicated relationships to their bodies have championed body piercing as a means of conceptual emancipation. This includes a significant number of women who have survived rape or sexual abuse, or who are recovering from an eating

[188] Wojcik, Daniel. *Punk and Neo-tribal Body Art*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1995: 11.
[189] Hewitt, Kim. *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular, 1997: 84.

disorder.

> *Many individuals, especially women, come seeking resolution of past emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Although every individual chooses a piercing for a unique reason, some therapeutic piercings are more common than others. Many women who have suffered sexual abuse choose genital piercings... Rather than having [another] inflict marks of initiation, a self-marked person determines his or her own self construction.*[190]

This process of reclaiming the body extends to feelings of conceptual colonization, as well. Some women who have modified their bodies claim it is an act of resistance to patriarchal culture and restrictive beauty norms. In the underground body modification film *Stigmata,* body resistance is positioned as a protest to a patriarchy in which "men impose their will and their ideas about how women should look."[191] These women, and many feminist scholars, clearly believe that they are reclaiming their bodies as their own through these practices, seizing their conceptual independence through physical modification.

However, other feminist scholars debate the subversive value of this approach, and see piercing as another form of sado-ritual, as discussed by Mary Daly in "Gyn:Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism." In this pioneering work, she identifies several sado-ritual syndromes that she sees as being imposed on women, which laud cruelty and the torture of women and find it sexy – with patriarchy normalizing this approach to the point that women themselves often perform the acts.[192] Essentially, the question is one of the malleability of identity construction – can women overcome the hegemonic narrative that alienates them from their bodies, especially given the psychological damage inflicted by rape or abuse?

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[190] Hewitt, Kim. *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular, 1997: 88.
[191] Featherstone, Mike. *Body Modification*. London: Sage in Association with Theory, Culture & Society, 2000: 298.
[192] Daly, Mary. *Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon, 1978.

> *While body modifiers themselves suggest that the violated female body can be rewritten in personally and politically meaningful ways, radical feminists argue in contrast that modifying the body is a straightforward replay of that violence. A large part of what is at issue here is the possibility of women's agency, which radical feminists have long argued is hampered by the psychological effects of patriarchy... Women's body modification is situated in the larger context of feminism, the sex debates over sado-masochism, and feminist struggles over the political significance of the body and bodily roles.*[193]

By this rationalization, women are in fact merely reinscribing the pain that has been inculcated as a crucial component of feminine identity, the paid piercer substituting for the community smith hammering shackles onto women's ankles. This construction sees the woman choosing the piercing as having internalized the way that gendered power relations construct women's attitudes to their own bodies.[194]

The same practice can be interpreted radically differently, jewelry serving as a marker of fierce independence or of oppression, ownership, and hatred turned inwards. For the individual, the theory around it may not matter. That said, I hope by this point it is clear that the cumulative acts of individuals *do* matter, that they construct an incredibly important narrative around jewelry and the body that change the courses of lives. Borel and Ghysels, in surveying the broad sweep of ethnic jewelry, state that "[a]dornment expresses the irreducibles of life. It underscores the stages of a person's life history; it marks such milestones as marriage, birth, and death... Personal embellishment is an active participant in the great cycle of human existence."[195] I firmly believe that the cultural usages and ancient traditions that have evolved around jewelry speak deeply to

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[193] Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. *In the Flesh: the Cultural Politics of Body Modification*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 74.

[194] Jeffreys, Sheila. "'Body Art' and Social Status: Cutting, Tattooing and Piercing from a Feminist Perspective." *Feminism Psychology* 10 (2000): 409-31.

[195] Borel, Frances, and Colette Ghysels. *Splendor of Ethnic Jewelry: From the Colette and Jean Pierre Ghysels Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001: 23.

who we are as communities, and perhaps even as humans.

Chapter 6
Feminist Jewelry

Jewelry still has a relevance to our society. Its ultimate business is unchanged, concerned as it always was with its unique facility to express emotions and to communicate – not least to communicate ideas, which have changed. Traditionally, jewelers have frequently attempted to pacify society, pandering to our needs with pretty, decorative designs. Jewelers no longer have to do this. They can produce stronger, more relevant work which might address the dilemmas in society and by doing so, oppose them.[196]

6.1 Feminist Jewelry Introduction

My motivation for this project grew out of my experience as a jeweler and love for the medium. I've rarely felt as empowered as I do with a torch in my hand, bending metal and stones to my will, bringing forth beauty. However, as I began to do work that included political content and simultaneously became more immersed in feminist theory, I began to question the foundational assumptions that underlie the creation and wearing of jewelry. Thankfully, there is a small but significant contingent of jewelers actively creating work that engages with issues of gender and the gaze, whether or not they use feminist or queer theory explicitly. As defined by eminent queer theory scholar Nikki Sullivan, the act of "queering," used as a verb, represents "a movement between viewer, text and the world that reinscribes (or queers) each and the relations between them."[197] My own wrestling and reinscribing has taken the dual form of the research and analytical framework expounded in this paper, in conjunction with the creation of a body of

[196] Turner, Ralph. *Jewelry in Europe and America: New Times, New Thinking*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996: 88

[197] Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York UP, 2003: 192

work that explores jewelry's potential to serve as tool with which to critique and queer traditional thinking about the body. In this section, I will present several modes that jewelers utilized to create jewelry relevant to the central issues of feminist thinking, and which address the potential problems with the medium. Each section will contain the work of two contemporary jewelers as well as my own work on the topic.

Queer theory provides some extremely useful concepts for exploring the relationship between art and hegemonic imperatives surrounding gender. Since its inception in the 1990s, queer theory has been intimately involved with dominant culture and the ideologies therein. Sullivan writes, "Queering popular culture involves a range of reading/writing practices that are political insofar as they seek to expose and problematize the means by which sexuality is textually constituted in relation to dominant notions of gender."[198] This concept expands both the language and analytical possibilities available to scholars working at the intersection of feminist and/or gender issues and art. As I've stated before, I don't think that jewelry *can* be practically divorced from the politics of the body, and therefore is particularly fertile ground for application of queer theory.

The first group of pieces utilizes an explicit discussion of gender in a way that brings attention to the problematic nature of gender construction in society. Another path uses jewelry as a means of communicating an alternative narrative, in opposition to patriarchal interpretations of historical and mythological female figures. A third category of work references and problematizes specific historical or modern practices, taking experiences that have been normalized and exaggerating them in order to draw attention to the theoretical and political

[198] Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York UP, 2003: 189-190.

issues surrounding them, queering the discourse surrounding them. Finally, a fourth section includes work that has exploited the problems inherent in the gaze discussed at length earlier in this paper, and intentionally shifted the artistic focus of and control over the piece onto the wearer rather than the viewer. While most of the artists discussed herein have intentionally engaged the political in their work, there are also some artists whose work is intimately intertwined with these issues without it apparently being a conscious focus, which is in its way even more interesting.

6.2 Explicit Discussion of Gender

"Armor and Amor" is a stunning two-piece set of necklaces that presents a "camp" approach to traditional gender constructions (Fig 6.2.1). The artist, Sondra Sherman, speaks of her intellectual process thus in the stunning catalog for the "Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry" exhibition from the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art museum.[199]

> *"Armor and Amor" is about the ambivalent parley common to contemporary romantic relationships. The form references the socially reinforced images encouraged to attract romantic interest. The center of the feminine-form chandelier crystal is covered by a subtle wire construction supporting a mass of cotton-candy pink stones set in gold prongs. Hanging from a fine-link chain, it appears an innocent and fragile confection. The masculine form pendant is sheathed mostly by a tailored, pin-striped gray silver casing – the power suit of the successful corporate man.*
>
> *The ambivalence lies in the details. Instead of being set conventionally, most of the pink stones are set point side out, turning all that preciousness into something considerably*

[199] Cummins, Susan, and Jamie Bennett. *Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1999.

> *less vulnerable. The fine-link chain is interrupted by knots, often in gold, celebrating the complexity of the individual behind the image. The pinstriped suit finishes in a jester's collar, summing up the foolishness of that conceit. The beads of the jester's collar, which stray into the chain of strong stable bars and fine fragile links, are gold again, accepting and celebrating our human folly. The format of the piece as a 'his-n-her" set of pendants proposes a reconciliation of these paradoxical instincts.*[200]

The pieces speak eloquently about social expectations of acceptable femininity and masculinity, and reveal the ridiculous nature of some of our constructions, and the far more nuanced picture that underlays this invented dichotomy. It utilizes the principles of 'camp' its pointed social critique. Sullivan summarizes Susan Sontag's seminal work by writing that "Camp is most often associated with parody, exaggeration, theatricality, humor, and insofar as it foregrounds the performative character of gender, sexualitiy, race, class, and so on, it functions – at least potentially – to denaturalize, or queer, heteronormative notions of identity."[201] Sherman's beautifully nuanced pieces also serve to promote a critical, gender-sensitive and culturally located approach to jewelry-making, and defy any accusations of passivity in the medium.

"Building Self" by Keith Lewis (figure 6.2.2) speaks specifically to the construction of male sexuality in society, an under-explored and rich source of theoretical material. This piece comes from a series from the mid 1990s examining and problematizing the construction of gay male sexual identity in the midst of a community devastated by HIV and AIDS. The front of the piece features a silver mouse-headed man reading the gold instruction manual for his same-hued strap on cock, which is significantly larger than his own, small, endowment.

> *My work tries to leave clear traces of my diminished community. But even as I*

[200] Cummins, Susan, and Jamie Bennett. *Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1999: 44.

[201] Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York UP, 2003: 193.

> *demonstrate the ambiguities, the dangers, the pitfalls, and setbacks of the bodies that constituted that community, my pieces still assert their sexual identity – cocks rampant in the wind. In "Building Self," I scrutinize the instruction manual, hoping that the right appliance will make everything alright and that I might somehow measure up. The timid, mousy, zaftig figure is seized by passion even as he peruses the proof of his inadequacy.*
>
> *On the back – perhaps as a nod to the entrepreneurial spirit – I present more product options, from vibrating, to monstrous, to (ever hopeful) the classic double dong. Sex – even as I assert its primacy – is still enormously comical in its hold on us. In my work I try to insert that humor even as I advocate the insertion of much else.*[202]

This piece retains its playful lens in the service of pointing out the seemingly endless commodification of sex and the body in American society, and the ways that capitalist constructions of gender play out on, in this case, the gay male psyche.

My own piece "Atlas" (figure 6.2.3) is a sterling silver and amethyst pin with an ambiguously gendered figure attempting to juggle or hold up a series of large squares, on which are printed the chopped up text of the nursery rhyme "Sugar and Spice," as well as words around gender non-comformity like sissy, butch, weird, and queer. It addresses the weight of societal expectations around gender norms as they apply to males and females. The behavioral proscriptions, of sweetness and innocence for girls and toughness for boys, are restrictive enough, but the piece also looks at the deeply misogynistic and homophobic fear that is evoked when these expectations aren't met. "Such terms as 'pansy' (as well as 'sissy,' 'pussy,' and others), often synonymous with physical or emotional inadequacy, make all males potentially vulnerable

[202] Cummins, Susan, and Jamie Bennett. *Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1999: 32.

to the 'unmanliness' of failure in such misogynistic contexts.[203]" By removing external gender signifiers from the figure, I hope to open up the possibility of queering not only the figure, but the implications of the poem and terms being balanced. The name references the Greco-Roman myth of Atlas, the Titan who holds the sky up on his shoulders. The result is not only a testimony to the weight of societal expectations, but also an implied question about the worth of continuing to balance such heavy burdens.

Another piece, a pair of earrings entitled "Be Good," (figure 6.2.4) addresses the Eve/Mary or virgin/whore dichotomy as it relates to acceptable roles for women in society. The three foot long earrings alternate heavy pink stones and silver rose petals stamped with text. One side reads, "Be Good / Stand up straight / Be nice / Be sweet / Don't push / Be smart / Cover up / Stay pure / Be quiet / Trust me," while the second reads "Be Good / Arch your back / Get bigger / Get smaller / Don't eat / Eat more / Lay back / Open up / Shut up / Trust me." Neither represents an option for full humanity, both rely on tightly restrictive, externally imposed "rules" about what makes acceptable performances of femininity; innocent, perfectionist, and eternally infantilized, or hypersexual, irresponsible, and undeserving of respect. Queer theory, meanwhile, presents an alternative in the form of gender fluidity and sexuality that doesn't aim to fit into such narrow categories: By calling into question the larger notion of gender as a coherent construct, repressive formulations within genders are simultaneously indicted. "The queer theoretic require[s] the subordination of a social theory of gender hierarchy so that sexuality could be conceived as an array of acts, practices, and desires, bound for some other destination

[203] William Spurlin in *Sissies and Sisters: Gender, Sexuality and the Possibilities of Political Coalition* in "Coming Out of Feminism?" 50

than coherent identity and personhood."[204] The painful, nearly unbearable weight of the pieces reflect the emotional weight of the constrictive societal norms referenced and the pain of attempting to squeeze into those tight borders, while the almost comically large size draws attention to the performative aspect of the gender roles implicated.

6.3 Problematizing of Specific Practices

Pieces in this category refer and bring a critical eye to particular practices, both historical and modern, that have emerged around jewelry and the body with gendered implications. These pieces utilize form as well as content to convey their message. Teresa Milheiro takes modern beauty practices head on in her piece, "Be Botox, Be Fucking Beautiful" (figure 6.3.1).

> *Secured around the wearer's neck by a heavy ball and chain, a small portable botox kit designed to "kick out your wrinkles anywhere" draws attention to the pressure placed upon women to conform to unnatural aesthetic ideals. It hangs heavy from the body, cold and hard in appearance, basic in color, reminiscent of a tiny torture instrument. Inspired by the detritus of the medical world, the tools of plastic surgeons and those seeking to 'perfect' the human form, Milheiro combines unorthodox materials to form a collection rich in meaning, aggressive in form yet expertly crafted and surprisingly beautiful to behold.*[205]

Many of the pieces in this category utilize the aesthetic appeal of the jewelry medium to add context and nuance – in this case, referencing the undeniably attractive concept marketed (or forced) by the beauty industry. While the piece is strong and aggressive, it is undeniably a piece of jewelry, not merely a sculpture, using the interaction with the body to maximum effect through its ball-and-chain clasp.

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[204] Robyn Weigman, *The Desire for Gender* in "A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies," 222

[205] Cheung, Lin, Beccy Clarke, and Indigo Clarke. *New Directions in Jewellery II*. London: Black Dog Pub., 2006: 135.

Meanwhile, it serves as biting critique, emphasizing the unnaturalness of the painful measures imposed upon female bodies in order to participate in the dominant construction of attractive femininity. The text, reading (as it is titled) "Be Botox, Be Fucking Beautiful," sounds more like self-loathing and castigation than an external message. Indeed, the fact that this adornment would be worn by a woman, voluntarily locking herself into it, for the purpose of more easily injecting herself on-the-go, emphasizes the internalization of unattainable standards, within our own culture as in others. This type of practice would fall squarely into Mary Daly's[206] category of sado-ritualism, discussed earlier, whereby the otherwise horrific and abusive (e.g. regular self-injection of a neurotoxin) becomes normative. Moreover, it is common for sado-rituals to thrive through their use of members of the oppressed group as "token torturers," lending credence to the idea that the act was freely chosen while conveniently ignoring the rigid social constructions that enforce compliance.

Kelly Malec-Kosak created a set of "Urban Wear" rings (figure 6.3.2) in 1999 that reflect both a tradition of defense jewelry as well as the specific needs and challenges faced by a woman living in the city.

> *Confronted with the threatening conditions of contemporary civilian life - including overcrowding, rampant crime, gun proliferation, and terrorism - the need to protect both body and mind has only grown. Kelly Malec-Kosak created the "Urban Wear" series to aid her survival in New York City, where she moved from the Midwest. Her rings combine weapon-like protrusions - spikes, thorns, blades - with a graspable element that helps the wearer focus and avoid being frozen by fear. These adornments proved to be effective deterrents, and Malec-Kosak reports that people duly shunned her when she wore them on*

[206] Daly, Mary. *Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon, 1978.

the subway.[207]

While the execution and discussion are playful, these are rings that could do serious damage. They emphasize the potential danger of being a woman in public, while simultaneously providing physical (and mental) defense, forcing the viewer to confront the uncomfortable truth of women's disproportionate likelihood of needing that very defense. Additionally, they challenge the stereotype of jewelry as passive or "mere" ornament, continuing the path begun with poison rings, discussed earlier in the paper.

My own piece "Gilded Cage" (6.3.3) is a crocheted hollow gold noose filled with pink and white pearls, looking at the trade off involved in choosing the gilded cage of wealth and security over individual agency. Its simplicity of form and lack of text are utilized in order to shift focus to the undeniable beauty of the object, and the temptation the idea represented holds. Feminism and queer theory teach us that "we have to rethink the common understandings that presume that capitalism and sexuality/personhood are separate things that converge… people buy into how their life ought to be lived, who they live their lives with. These ideas and strategies have to be inculcated."[208] As members of a society, it is unsurprisingly difficult, if not impossible, to completely throw off the materialism and consumerism instilled through a lifetime of programming. This is especially true when looking at a choice as deeply personal as that of marriage – as feminists, we recognize the insidious links between patriarchy and the choice to marry rich, but it is fundamentally taboo to oversimplify and condemn another's choices. The piece looks, and feels, surprisingly natural on the neck, and it is the surprise of recognizing the noose in the necklace that is emphasized.

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[207] Ramljak, Suzanne. "Protective Ornament: Dressed for Defense." *Metalsmith Magazine* Spring 2005.

[208] Miranda Joseph and David Rubin, *Promising Complicities: On the Sex, Race, and Globalization Project* in "A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies," 443

My bracelet "Offering" (figure 6.3.4) comes at the same issue from the other side, looking at the ways that the intersection of consumerism and sexuality negatively impacts heterosexual males as well as those traditionally seen as victimized by patriarchy. The bracelet's figure is dwarfed by the huge stone he presents before him. Both the spiderweb knit cuff bracelet that the pieces are wrapped into, the spider nesting on the web, and the insect clasp are references to insect mating practices, whereby in most species males must present a "gift" of nutrients to the female prior to mating. Materialist culture presents a parallel model for women and men, in which they are taught from the very beginning about the roles of provider and consumer, active and passive, male and female. It becomes a vicious, tangled web of a system, trapping men and women alike in its constrictive, tightly wrapped bounds.

6.4 As Source of Alternative Narrative

Another approach utilizes jewelry as a narrative medium with which to privilege voices that have historically been suppressed, or to tell familiar stories from alternative angles. Feminism has always been conscious of the importance of ownership of the voice, and the privileging of certain voices in the retelling of history and construction of gendered discourse. Christine de Pizan is cited as creating the Western intellectual tradition's first women's history in 1405.

> *By focusing on the accomplishments of these admirable women, Christine de Pizan used women's history to demonstrate the grievous errors of those who lambasted the female sex as inherently weak and evil. She also turned to these historical women to inspire ordinary women in her own day... In the hands of Christine de Pizan, history was a feminist tool for celebrating women's past accomplishments, rebutting the accusations of*

those who maligned women, and urging women to greater goals.[209]

Although as a society we've come a long way in addressing the smearing and erasure of women from history, it took and takes conscious effort to create feminist historical narratives within a society that perceives patriarchy as normative. The pieces that follow take on that challenge, using jewelry as a medium for creating and disseminating alternative feminist narrative.

The piece "Miss Havisham" by Sondra Sherman (figure 6.4.1) uses Dickens' archetypal character to explore society's discomfort with women who don't fit into the traditional mold.

> *The "portrait" necklace "Miss Havisham" uses a character from the Dickens novel Great Expectations to reflect on the stereotype of the old maid in our society. Miss Havisham, a chagrined, wealthy old woman,, was left standing at the altar. The interior of her magnificent house remains as it was decorated to celebrate her wedding day. An atmosphere of bitter disappointment prevails.*
>
> *As in the other pieces from this body of work, the centerpiece of "Miss Havisham" is a chandelier crystal pendant used as a gender symbol. The feminine-form pendant hangs from a long, undulating chain encrusted with clear glass beads that glisten as they reflect light, but are irregularly discolored. Two circular structures, each framing a dried rose petal, interrupt the chain at two points slightly above the wearer's breasts.*
>
> *The sensual yet yellowed chain and dried rose petals are symbolic of the dusty and withered opulence of the life of Dickens' character. The necklace format and suggestive composition encourages the wearer/viewer to identify with Miss Havisham and her displacement within her society. The piece's uneasy beauty is intended to parallel the ambivalence one experiences in response to her bitterness.*[210]

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[209] Bennett, Judith M. *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006: 6.

[210] Cummins, Susan, and Jamie Bennett. *Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1999: 49.

In this piece, Sherman forces us to confront the traditional narratives around "old maids," and to challenge our own reactions to her character. It mixes symbols of decay with suppressed sexuality, and emphasizes the tragic situation of a woman spurned during the period – sensuality eternally withered behind glass. It also challenges the wearer and viewer to question how much that paradigm has truly shifted over time, and to examine the status of unmarried women both with appreciation for how far we've come, and critique for how far we have yet to go.

Keith Lewis has a group of pieces entitled "35 Dead Souls" (figure 6.4.2) that offer an alternative view of the AIDS epidemic from the inside, from the perspective of the victim's friends and lovers, representing each individual as worthy of remembrance beyond their statistical significance.

> *"35 Dead Souls," a series of 36 pendants hung on guitar strings, represents the 35 friends and acquaintances I had lost to AIDS in 1993. I'm there as a 36th – a small golden head wearing glasses and hanging from a black string – watching and waiting. The pendants can be worn either separately or as a clanking, burdensome group.*
>
> *Jewelry has always acknowledged loss, ceremony, and sentiment, and there is a beauty, humanity, and glory in such acts of devotion. I've tried to do the same – tried to fill gaping holes with tiny bits of metal fashioned into charms of sorts, portaits honoring those fallen in my community... Just as each of these dead souls was once an individual with a different character, taste, occupation, and way of dealing with disease, so each portrait is individualized by manipulation of form, materials, expression, and attributes... In this update of the mento mori to address a modern plague, I am memorializing and honoring these men while commemorating my own loss and grief and proclaiming my fear.*[211]

[211] Cummins, Susan, and Jamie Bennett. *Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1999: 26.

This collection speaks eloquently about life, love, death, and grief – and how narration of these feelings through jewelry can produce deeply evocative work that recasts a familiar narrative in a painfully sensitive and personal light. Lewis's narrative forces the reader to confront the reality that each of the hundreds of thousands lost to AIDS was a real person, an individual with family and friends and lovers who miss them. Meanwhile, the cumulative weight of 35 pieces, representing those lost to just the artist, serves to remind the viewer of the scale of the tragedy while acknowledging the individual humanity of the victims.

My piece "Eve/Mother Tongue" (6.4.3) takes a mythological and historical approach to narrative, as it looks at the story of Eve and theories of human evolution, specifically the evolution of language. The front shows a slightly abstracted apple in a tree, which when unhooked from the top wire falls down into four panels, bound together with thread. Access to the full piece is controlled entirely by the wearer, leading to a richer experience for the wearer than the viewer. This series shows the regression from a sewing machine, to a needle and thread, to a fig leaf, to a naked woman, looking at the progression of knowledge that has led to something taken for granted in our society, the production of clothing, and tracing it back to Eve, as the mother of all knowledge. The back features two quotes, the first on women's, specifically mothers', role in the evolution of language from evolutionary neurologist Harold Klawans.

> *Originally, men hunted while women nurtured. If a growing child did not learn enough to survive until he could throw a spear, he would never do much hunting. Children had to acquire language from their mothers, and the mothers had to have developed language beyond the simple noises needed to hunt. So though few defend the cavewoman, we all speak our mothers' tongue.*[212]

[212] Klawans, Harold L. *Strange Behavior: Tales of Evolutionary Neurology*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000: 36.

The second quote on the progression of knowledge leading to the idea of clothing.

> *At what age of man's development did some technician discover that the skin of an animal could be crudely tanned into a pliable shape adaptable to the human form? Where did they get the needles? The thread? And most important of all, the concept? Once a group of people had the intelligence to say "Let's sew our skins," ways would surely be found to do the sewing. But who had first proposed, "Let's sew?"*[213]

The back is entirely inaccessible without removing the necklace altogether, again defying the traditional conceptions of the gaze.

The two together are intended to look at the story of Adam and Eve in a more literal, positive light, with Eve as a representative of all early human mothers who, by developing symbolic language, began the process of knowledge accumulation that has led to modern society. Eve has been reviled from all sides for too long. Emily Apter writes, "the term gynophobia refers first and foremost to a kind of resistance to bearing femininity as a professional liability, performative history, and weight of existence."[214] This piece rejects the gynophobia that accepts the repressive narratives imposed on Eve - rather it reimagines the act on its own terms, as a heroic one. It defies the need to transcend femininity to achieve greatness, rather it remaps greatness onto the maligned source of femininity's perceived inferiority.

Another of my pieces, "Adam's Soul Echoed Lilith," (figure 6.4.4) looks at the mythological figure of Lilith, a mythological figure that appears in early Mespotamian culture, including early Judaism. Genesis retells the creation of humanity twice in succession, with some significant differences. It appears first as "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created

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[213] *Michener, James A. The Source. New York, 1967: 104.*

[214] Emily Apter, Reflections on Gynophobia in "Coming Out of Feminism?" 114

he him; male and female he created them."[215] This is followed shortly afterward by the more familiar story of Eve's creation, in which she is taken from Adam's rib. Several rabbinic midrashim, or commentary stories, grew up around this distinction. The tradition says that God first created a pair of humans of dust, Adam and Lilith, but Lilith's independence caused a rift between them. Subsequently, "the God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place. And God built the side that he had taken from man into a woman, and he brought her to man. And man said, 'This time, it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.'"[216] Lilith is then cast as a demoness, the incarnation of lust, leading men astray, a killer of newborns with her daughters, the lilim, and, in some versions, the goddess of the underworld.[217] Two narratives of interest to feminism are invoked here – firstly, the maternal imperative, and the association between unwillingness to submit to patriarchal norms with unnatural womanhood, a mother who kills children. It also recalls tropes within fairy tales: In these more modern myths, "those women who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed... they are jealous of any woman more beautiful than they."[218] Uncontrolled sexuality, female power, death, and destruction are deeply interwoven.

My piece, "Adam's Soul Echoed Lilith[219]" is a silhouette pin with a bas relief effect sculpted out of silver, showing a nude female figure reaching upwards while surrounded by leaves and branches. On the back, away from the eyes of the viewer, is inscribed the text "Adam and Lilith

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215 Genesis 1:27

216 Genesis 2:21-23

217 Patrick Skehan, "The Wisdom of Ben-Sirah"

218 Marcia Lieberman, "'Someday My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," 197

219 From a poem by Avetik Issahakian, "The muse of Sheerak: Selected Poems of Avetik Issahakian"

never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offense at the recumbent posture he demanded. 'Why must I lie beneath you?' she asked. 'I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.' Because Adam tried to compel her obedience by force, Lilith, in a rage, uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air and left him."[220] From the front, it serves as a beautiful, clearly proud illustration of the Eden narrative, defying the shame mapped onto female bodies in and out of the garden. The wearer holds the text close to their skin, aware of the subversion inherent in the narrative glorifying Lilith and able to share that secondary layer of meaning with those they allow full access to the piece.

A final piece in this category drawn from my own work is called "On Their Shoulders" (figure 6.4.5). This narrative piece is a sterling silver and gold cuff bracelet with the names of eighteen powerful women from the Bible etched in Hebrew and English above a row of eighteen red, orange and yellow sapphires, with one larger garnet. The piece focuses on reclaiming genealogies too frequently overwritten. "A dedicated enough act of feminist critical genealogy can trace a whole matriarchal history, putting together the history of 'a woman whom patriarchal poetics dismembered and whom we have tried to remember.' Remembering thus becomes a process dedicated to unity."[221] This piece combines the most familiar names like Esther, Miriam, Sarah, and Rachel with moderately well known characters like Dinah, the judge Devorah, and Yocheved, Moses's mother. It also includes those almost completely marginalized, like Bilhah and Zilpah, the concubine mothers of half of Jacob's twelve sons, and Shifre and Puah, Egyptian midwives who risked their lives to save Jewish infants. They are each represented by a blazing

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220 Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, "The Hebrew Myths," 65

221 Isobel Armstrong, "New Feminist Discourses," 54

sapphire, with the garnet intended to stand for the wearer, part of an unbroken chain of strong, powerful women throughout history, reclaiming and celebrating the narratives of those praised and those who remain in the shadows.

6.5 Jewelry for the Wearer/Subversion of the Gaze

The pieces in this category use various techniques to defy perceived passivity of jewelry as a medium, and to subvert conceptions of the gaze that give the viewer power over the wearer. They utilize various techniques, including hidden ornamentation, unexpected text, the incorporation of symbols decipherable only by the wearer, and different messages to different viewers, based on access permitted by the wearer. Lin Cheung brings several of these techniques together in her piece "Breath/e" (figure 6.5.1), a silver locket-shaped pendant.

> *Cheung's 'locked lockets' are an attempt to 'visualize the sentimental value of a piece of jewelry and the personal meanings placed onto it by the wearer that a viewer has no access to"; so the locket does not open, but has its meaning encrypted on the surface. Breath/e is one such piece; using a delicately engraved fragment of poetry by Paul Eluard, this sensuous work addresses the very concept of intimacy. The way that the pendant functions – the words become more vivid when breathed upon – is founded upon a typically concise conceptual framework... as the viewer would need to draw close to the neck of the wearer to read the words, the Breath/e of the titles is also that of Eluard's "Lover."*[222]

The piece tantalizes with its inaccessible locket form, while the text and breath connection reserve full access to the piece to a few chosen by the wearer, who retains total control. Its sensuality also challenges the notion that women are sexually passive and solely receptive.

Gerd Rothman is an interesting artist to study from this perspective. His work has always

[222] Cheung, Lin, Beccy Clarke, and Indigo Clarke. *New Directions in Jewellery II*. London: Black Dog Pub., 2006: 158

engaged in unconventional dialogue with the human body. He incorporates the uniqueness of each human body – often through the use of fingerprints and casts of other body parts. However, while many of his pieces fit perfectly into the category of jewelry with a richer experience for the wearer than for the viewer, others have problematic references to gender relations built into them. In the jewelery-for-the-wearer category falls most of his most emblematic work, fingerprint rings (and necklaces, bracelets, etc.) including "Family Ring," one of several similar pieces (figure 6.5.2). These rings incorporate prints from members of the family (or whoever the individual commissioning the piece chooses), and as such emphasize the boundary between private and public knowledge. Fingerprints are a fascinating medium to use, given that they cannot be disguised and are in many ways profoundly public – we leave them all over everything we touch. However, without a key, they are completely anonymous, and leave only the wearer with the knowledge of whose prints are important enough to remain on their body indefinitely. They echo hair jewelry from the Victorian period in that way, as symbols both universal and deeply individual.

That said, Gerd Rothmann also creates pieces, apparently unselfconsciously, that have deeply problematic implications from a feminist perspective. In the following passage, the purchaser of the piece "From him for her" (figure 6.5.3), a bangle consisting of a skin cast of a male wrist that closes to encase the (assumed) female wearer's wrist, reflects on her feelings about the piece after years of ownership.

> *The beauty of the bangle* From him for her *appealed to me immediately. Its loving gesture of surrounding wrist with wrist awoke a desire to make sure of this jewelry for myself... On the other hand, when transformed into gold the soft covering becomes a fetter. Was that what I wanted? I'll try to put it differently, with the metaphor of sacrifice. Even in the archaic times*

> *of Old China, a living human sacrifice would be replaced by hair and fingernail clippings. Who is the sacrifice? Who or what is the trophy?*[223]

Eloquently put, that is the crux of the feminist problem with this piece, and many others like it. While using body casts can be a beautiful way to subtly incorporate loyalties into your jewelry, it can also reproduce problematic gender relations. There is, of course, the heteronormative viewpoint already encompassed by the piece. Moreover, the large bangle encompasses thew wrist to the point that it is almost completely immobilized, while the visual effect has 'him' guiding and constricting the wearer's movements. The title of the piece makes it clear that the intention is for it to be a 'gift' from him, but a gift that echoes more of puzzle wedding rings than of a true present – a symbol of his dominion, which she is presumably expected to accept gratefully. Despite the clear social implications of his work, I have been unable to find any acknowledgment from Rothmann of any political opinions or even considerations in his creative process.

My own piece, “Shared Space,” (figure 6.5.4) also utilizes the fingerprint motif. It moves away from narrative completely and relies on form and structure to convey its message. This sterling silver pin plays with concepts of privacy and ownership of spaces around the body. The front features a blown up cutout of my fingerprint, rendering something personal and identifiable public. Beneath the dome, it is just possible to read the text, “If you can read this, you are too close,” negating the implicit permission often perceived to handle or get close to women's bodies on the pretext of examining jewelry. However, on the back, it reads, “If you can read this, you aren't close enough,” giving a different message to the observer privileged by the wearer to handle the piece, or alternatively, given the privilege of undressing the wearer. This

[223] Rothmann, Gerd. *Gerd Rothmann: Schmuck.* Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002: 132

piece demonstrates how messages can be encoded so as to signify different things to different viewers, and emphasizes one way in which the jewelry medium might escape the tyranny of the generic societal gaze.

Another piece, “Girl's Best Friend” (6.5.5) takes an even subtler approach. It plays with conceptions of the rough and smooth, the feminine and 'unfeminine.' The piece is made of 18k gold and diamonds, each incorporating both rough and smooth textures. The central lentil, blank with delicate granulation on one side, can alternatively easily be flipped to read “Steel toed boots are a girl's best friend.” The piece examines safe spaces for stepping outside of idealized femininity. The wearer could display the blank face, appearing to conform, while holding the more radical statement next to her skin, with the ability to flip and display the political statement in a 'safer' space or around the intended audience – the choice is hers. It is intended to disrupt the gender constructions that cast women as either rough or smooth, girly or tomboyish, tough or sweet, but never both. After all, what possible interest could a girl have in workboots if she's decked in diamonds and gold?

6.6 Conclusions

I hope by this point it is clear that jewelry can and has been used for drastically different purposes across cultures and time periods, and that jewelry is no more inherently passive than women are. Jewelry both symbolizes and contributes to the construction of gender identity, while preconceived gender norms limit the wearer to jewelry appropriate to their hierarchical position within society. Thus the two function in a feedback system, jewelry creating gender in each generation while societal gender constructs steer the evolution of jewelry. This is not inherently good or bad, simply a reflection of the intimate nature of the medium and its inescapable

connection to the politics of the body. In fact, as this last chapter has shown, these properties can be exploited to speak poignantly about the artists' critique of society, inspiration from the past, and vision for the future. My deepest hope is to see this potential fulfilled, and a growing consciousness of the politics of the body involved in buying, making, and wearing jewelry. Moreover, I hope to see others use this framework as a springboard for broader cross-cultural critique and exploration of the medium – which in many ways goes beyond art and becomes an extension of the body in question, suspended between two worlds.

Appendix I

Eve and Lilith: A Collection of Feminist Jewelry

I sometimes feel like I put on jewelry like armor, when I'm nervous, when I'm scared of how I'm going to be perceived. I slip on my bracelet gauntlets, my rings like brass knuckles, my necklaces like shields. They impose a distance, no one can stroke my wrists, nuzzle my neck, kiss my fingers. I am buffered by my work, and by the excuse to speak, to defend myself: Yes, I made it out of blowtorches and steel and metal dredged from the ground, adorned it with sharp stones, it is mine. A demonstration of my control over extreme elements (over myself, over you).[224]

Over the course of the past several years, I have been working on a collection of narrative jewelry that addresses issues of gender and sexuality entitled "Eve and Lilith: A Collection of Feminist Jewelry." The work itself is hand constructed of silver and gold with precious and semi-precious stones as well as nontraditional materials such as thread and leather. It employs a range of theorists' work in fields as diverse as cinema, religion and, especially, feminist and queer theory. Several pieces come directly out of the use of Eve and Lilith as female archetypes bound up with ideas about evil and knowledge and submission, archetypes that weigh heavily and begin to speak about societies' attitudes towards women, and women's attitudes towards themselves. Others employ gender paradigms implicated in the myths, like the virgin/whore dichotomy, as they are experienced in modern society. Another category of work utilizes narrative for dual purposes, to reclaim feminist genealogies and to impart subjectivity to traditionally disenfranchised subjects by actively telling their tales. A final group of pieces relies more heavily on structure, both to queer the narrative around socially normative experiences and to amplify the interaction between access to jewelry and access to the female body.

My body of work draws on and attempts to subvert feminist film critic Laura Mulvey's conception of to-be-looked-at-ness, or presenting oneself to the male or societal gaze. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is

[224] Rebecca Ross Russell

styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness."[225] Jewelry therefore presents both a challenge and an opportunity to feminists: As a medium, it is inherently and inextricably bound up with the body and social restrictions and conceptions thereof. In this collection, I develop the concept of jewelry for the wearer, intended to subvert this paradigm by giving the wearer both control over access to the piece and a richer experience than that of the viewer. By shifting the power to the wearer, the piece ceases to be a contributor to to-be-looked-at-ness and becomes part of a more layered narrative.

Lilith is a mythological figure that appears in early Mespotamian culture, including early Judaism. Genesis retells the creation of humanity twice in succession, with some significant differences. It appears first as "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female he created them."[226] This is followed shortly afterwards by the more familiar story of Eve's creation, in which she is taken from Adam's rib. Several rabbinic midrashim, or commentary stories, grew up around this distinction. The tradition says that God first created a pair of humans of dust, Adam and Lilith, but Lilith's independence caused a rift between them. Subsequently, "the God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place. And God built the side that he had taken from man into a woman, and he brought her to man. And man said, "This time, it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."[227] Lilith is then cast as a demoness, the incarnation of lust, leading men astray, a killer of newborns with her daughters, the lilim, and, in some versions, the goddess of the underworld.[228] Two narratives of interest to feminism are invoked here – firstly, the maternal imperative, and the association between unwillingness to submit to patriarchal norms with unnatural womanhood, a mother who kills children. It also recalls tropes within fairy tales: In these more modern myths, "those women who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed... they are jealous of any woman more

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225 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 19

226 Genesis 1:27

227 Genesis 2:21-23

228 Patrick Skehan, "The Wisdom of Ben-Sirah"

beautiful than they."[229] Uncontrolled sexuality, female power, death, and destruction are deeply interwoven.

My piece, "Adam's Soul Echoed Lilith"[230] (Figure 6.4.5) is a silhouette pin with a bas relief effect sculpted out of silver, showing a nude female figure reaching upwards while surrounded by leaves and branches. On the back, away from the eyes of the viewer, is inscribed the text "Adam and Lilith never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offense at the recumbent posture he demanded. 'Why must I lie beneath you?' she asked. 'I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.' Because Adam tried to compel her obedience by force, Lilith, in a rage, uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air and left him."[231] From the front, it serves as a beautiful, clearly proud illustration of the Eden narrative, defying the shame mapped onto female bodies in and out of the garden. The wearer holds the text close to their skin, aware of the subversion inherent in glorifying Lilith and able to share that secondary layer of meaning with those they allow full access to the piece.

Eve is a similarly complicated figure. On the one hand is her portrayal through traditional religion, the source of original sin, her role as mother of humanity eclipsed. She is not even permitted the agency of having made a wrong decision – instead, she is held up as an example of the weakness of women, their inability to resist temptation. In the Eve/Mary dichotomy, she represents what women are seen to be by default, sinful, weak, human, while Mary serves as the antithesis, a woman not representative of women, a woman who transcended her very sex. Eve doesn't escape criticism in feminist literature, either.

> *Lilith is referred to as the anti-Eve, as if Eve were the root of all negative images of women, as if Eve were the problem Lilith came to solve. As feminists everywhere rally to support and reclaim the besmirched name of Lilith, Eve is left abandoned, doomed forever to be attacked from both sides – condemned by the rabbis for her rebellion and by feminists for her submission – for being too bad and too good all at the same time... In a way, then, feminists have bought into the sexist interpretations of the story without questioning them as they did so articulately with the Lilith legend. They fail to see the similarities between Eve and Lilith, married to the same man, rebelling against the*

[229] Marcia Lieberman, "'Someday My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," 197
[230] From a poem by Avetik Issahakian, "The muse of Sheerak: Selected Poems of Avetik Issahakian"
[231] Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, "The Hebrew Myths," 65

same God/parent, destined for the same historical mistreatment.[232]

As Eve has been cast as the archetypal woman, it is too easy to cast her to the side in reworking the boundaries of femininity. I aim to draw on those similarities, to rewrite the implications of these characters, to use them to talk about gender, and sex, and history, and strength.

The piece "Eve/Mother Tongue" (Figure 6.4.3) looks at the story of Eve and theories of human evolution, specifically the evolution of language. The front shows a slightly abstracted apple in a tree, which when unhooked from the top wire falls down into four panels, bound together with thread. Access to the full piece is controlled entirely by the wearer, leading to a richer experience for the wearer than the viewer. This series shows the regression from a sewing machine, to a needle and thread, to a fig leaf, to a naked woman, looking at the progression of knowledge that has led to something taken for granted in our society, the production of clothing, and tracing it back to Eve. The back features two quotes, the first on women's, specifically mothers', role in the evolution of language, the second on the progression of knowledge leading to the idea of clothing. The back is entirely inaccessible without removing the necklace altogether, again defying the traditional conceptions of the gaze. The two together are intended to look at the story of Adam and Eve in a more literal, positive light, with Eve as a representative of all early human mothers who, by developing symbolic language, began the process of knowledge accumulation that has led to modern society. Eve has been reviled from all sides for too long. Emily Apter writes, "the term gynophobia refers first and foremost to a kind of resistance to bearing femininity as a professional liability, performative history, and weight of existence."[233] This piece rejects the gynophobia that accepts the repressive narratives imposed on Eve - rather it reimagines the act on its own terms, as a heroic one. It defies the need to transcend femininity to achieve greatness, rather it remaps greatness onto the maligned source of femininity's perceived inferiority.

Another piece, a pair of earrings entitled "Be Good," (Figure 6.2.4) addresses the Eve/Mary or virgin/whore dichotomy as it relates to acceptable roles for women in society. The three foot long earrings alternate heavy pink stones and silver rose petals stamped with text. One

[232] Yiskah (Jessica) Rosenfeld, *You Take Lilith, I'll Take Eve* in "Yentl's Revenge," 134
[233] Emily Apter, Reflections on Gynophobia in "Coming Out of Feminism?" 114

side reads, “Be Good / Stand up straight / Be nice / Be sweet / Don’t push / Be smart / Cover up / Stay pure / Be quiet / Trust me,” while the second reads “Be Good / Arch your back / Get bigger / Get smaller / Don’t eat / Eat more / Lay back / Open up / Shut up / Trust me.” Neither represents an option for full humanity, both rely on tightly restrictive, externally imposed 'rules' about what makes acceptable performances of femininity; innocent, perfectionist, and eternally infantilized, or hypersexual, irresponsible, and undeserving of respect. Queer theory, meanwhile, presents an alternative in the form of gender fluidity and sexuality that doesn't aim to fit into such narrow categories: By calling into question the larger notion of gender as a coherent construct, repressive formulations within genders are simultaneously indicted. “The queer theoretic require[s] the subordination of a social theory of gender hierarchy so that sexuality could be conceived as an array of acts, practices, and desires, bound for some other destination than coherent identity and personhood.”[234] The painful, nearly unbearable weight of the pieces reflect the emotional weight of the constrictive societal norms referenced and the pain of attempting to squeeze into those tight borders, while the almost comically large size draws attention to the performative aspect of the gender roles implicated.

“Atlas” (Figure 6.2.3) is a sterling silver and amethyst pin with an ambiguously gendered figure attempting to juggle or hold up a series of large squares, on which are printed the chopped up text of the nursery rhyme “Sugar and Spice,” as well as words around gender non-comformity like sissy, butch, weird, and queer. It addresses the weight of societal expectations around gender norms as they apply to males and females. The behavioral proscriptions, of sweetness and innocence for girls and toughness for boys, are restrictive enough, but the piece also looks at the deeply misogynistic and homophobic fear that is evoked when these expectations aren't met. “Such terms as 'pansy' (as well as
'sissy,' 'pussy,' and others), often synonymous with physical or emotional inadequacy, make all males potentially vulnerable to the "unmanliness" of failure in such misogynistic contexts.”[235] By removing external gender signifiers from the figure, I hope to open up the possibility of queering

[234] Robyn Weigman, *The Desire for Gender* in “A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies,” 222

[235] William Spurlin in *Sissies and Sisters: Gender, Sexuality and the Possibilities of Political Coalition* in “Coming Out of Feminism?” 50

not only the figure, but the implications of the poem and terms being balanced. The name references the Greco-Roman myth of Atlas, the Titan who holds the sky up on his shoulders. The result is not only a testimony to the weight of societal expectations, but also an implied question about the worth of continuing to balance such heavy burdens. Perhaps the answer is to allow them to fall and rebuild anew.

The necklace "Girl's Best Friend" (Figure 6.5.5) also plays with conceptions of the rough and the smooth, the feminine and "unfeminine." The piece is made of 18 karat gold and diamonds, all with alternating rough and smooth texture. The central lentil, blank with delicate granulation on one side, can be flipped to read "Steel toed boots are a girl's best friend." The piece examines safe spaces for stepping outside of idealized femininity. The wearer can display the blank face, appearing to conform, while holding the more radical statement next to her skin, with the ability to flip and display the political statement in a safer space. It is intended to disrupt the simplistic narratives that cast women as either rough or smooth, girly or tomboyish, tough or sweet. "Dowry Bracelets" (Figure 7.1), similarly, are a set of traditional style Indian dowry bracelets with the text of the poem "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou on the inside. "It's in the reach of my arms / The span of my hips / The stride of my step / The curl of my lips. / It's the fire in my eyes / And the flash of my teeth / The swing in my waist / And the joy in my feet. / It's in the arch of my back / The sun of my smile / The ride of my breasts / The grace of my style. / I'm a woman / Phenomenally / Phenomenal woman, that's me." Again, the radical and empowering message is on the inside, defying the idea that a piece must choose between being either political or traditional, conceptual or beautiful.

While most of my pieces have a narrative element, some focus directly on story to achieve their ends. One such piece is "On Their Shoulders," (Figure 6.4.4) a sterling silver and gold cuff bracelet with the names of eighteen powerful women from the Bible etched in Hebrew and English above a row of eighteen red, orange and yellow sapphires, with one larger garnet. The piece focuses on reclaiming genealogies too frequently overwritten. "A dedicated enough act of feminist critical genealogy can trace a whole matriarchal history, putting together the history of 'a woman whom patriarchal poetics dismembered and whom we have tried to remember.'

Remembering thus becomes a process dedicated to unity."[236] This piece combines the most familiar names like Esther, Miriam, Sarah, and Rachel with moderately well known characters like Dinah, the judge Devorah, and Yocheved, Moses's mother. It also includes those almost completely marginalized, like Bilhah and Zilpah, the concubine mothers of half of Jacob's twelve sons, and Shifre and Puah, Egyptian midwives who risked their lives to save Jewish infants. They are each represented by a blazing sapphire, with the garnet intended to stand for the wearer, part of an unbroken chain of strong, powerful women throughout history, both those praised and those who remain in the shadows.

The pin "Kotel Reliquary" (Figure 7.2) is about the Western Wall, one of the holiest sites in Jerusalem for Jews, where people have gone for centuries to pray and put notes and messages to God into the wall. It is constructed as a sterling silver sealed box, with an abstracted brick pattern of faces, silver, gold, and rough diamonds on the front. The back has an excerpt from a poem by David Ross Russell, my father, stamped into it, written after his first visit to the site. "As if at some point the weight of history froze memory into stone, which slowly, slowly, turns back to dust." One side has a slit into which the wearer would put their prayers, as if the piece were the wall itself. The intent is on one hand to personalize a shared Jewish experience, and simultaneously to make concrete deeply personal interactions. The notes, whether directed towards God or not, function as snapshots of particular moments in time, constellations of circumstances and desire, while the piece serves as a reliquary for those experiences and needs. The wearer alone knows what the piece contains.

The ring "Memento Mori" (Figure 7.3) brings together medieval jewelry tradition with matrilineage and degrees of access. One side of the ring has a large citrine, underneath which lies the image of a skeleton, echoing medieval invocations of death as a reminder of the preciousness of life. Under the other stone, a rutilated quartz, lies hair – not of dead loved ones, but of my grandmother, my mother, and myself. The piece references the continuity of matrilineage in the face of mortality, while also withholding its full message for those who examine it closely. Even then, as with Victorian eye portraits or Gerd Rothman fingerprints, the identity of the individuals is known only to the wearer and those she chooses to inform.

[236] Isobel Armstrong, "New Feminist Discourses," 54

The piece "Precious," (Figure 7.4) meanwhile, tells a story in a more straightforward way. It features a quote from Gerta Weissman Klein about her experiences during the Holocaust, and features images of those who were in the camps and numbers from the B series at Auschwitz, the first to include women. "My friend Ilse once found a raspberry in the camp and carried it all day to give to me. Imagine a world in which your sole possession is one raspberry and you give it to a friend."[237] Reclaiming this narrative and privileging it as being worthy of representation in a precious medium imparts subjectivity to the storyteller, not only as a woman but as a victim of religious and cultural persecution. Both the incorporation of the endless numbers and the physical heaviness of the piece around the neck are intended to honor the memory of the millions whose stories cannot be told. There are eighteen (the number for life in Hebrew) squares, eighteen barbed wire jump rings, and thirty six nuts and bolts, reflecting the continuation of life in the face of death. The six uncut diamonds are intended to represent the six million killed, and talk about the idea that during war the idea of value can become completely distorted. Even diamonds, when scuffed up and uncut, can look worthless while, from a different perspective, a simple raspberry or a small gesture of kindness can seem like the most valuable thing in the world. While the basic narrative is accessible to the casual viewer, the intricacies involved require both more time and full cooperation of the wearer to search out.

In several pieces I attempted to take the opposite tack, to generalize and formalize a subject in order to speak more broadly about shared experiences or expectations, including marriage and dowry traditions, and the wealth and class factors bound up in precious materials and jewelry. One piece, entitled "Hand in Marriage," (Figure 7.5) is made of an elbow length, constrictive Victorian style black leather ladies glove, all the fingers sewn together, with a piece shaped like a grossly oversized diamond sewn in where an engagement ring would lie. The 'stone' is made of silver reading "Property of..." with hand cut crystal melded to it. The piece looks at the deeply problematic compromises that have been involved in entering into a marriage contract, in many times and places amounting to essentially selling oneself. It utilizes the principles of camp and performativity in that it exaggerates the process and fleshes out the idioms, examining a system that goes too often unquestioned outside of feminist and queer

[237] Gerda Weissman Klein, "All But My Life,"

circles.

Similarly, "Gilded Cage" (Figure 6.3.3) is a crocheted hollow gold noose filled with pink and white pearls, looking at the trade off involved in choosing the gilded cage of wealth and security over individual agency. Its simplicity of form and lack of text is utilized in order to shift focus to the undeniable beauty of the object, and the temptation the idea represented holds. Feminism and queer theory teach us that "we have to rethink the common understandings that presume that capitalism and sexuality/personhood are separate things that converge… people buy into how their life ought to be lived, who they live their lives with. These ideas and strategies have to be inculcated."[238] As members of a society, it is unsurprisingly difficult, if not impossible, to completely throw off the materialism and consumerism instilled through a lifetime of programming. This is especially true when looking at a choice as deeply personal as that of marriage – as feminists, we recognize the insidious links between patriarchy and the choice to marry rich, but it is fundamentally taboo to oversimplify and condemn another's choices. The piece looks, and feels, surprisingly natural on the neck, and it is the surprise of recognizing the noose in the necklace that is emphasized.

My bracelet "Offering" (figure 6.3.4) comes at the same issue from the other side, looking at the ways that the intersection of consumerism and sexuality negatively impacts heterosexual males as well as those traditionally seen as victimized by patriarchy. The bracelet's figure is dwarfed by the huge stone he presents before him. Both the spiderweb knit cuff bracelet that the pieces are wrapped into, the spider nesting on the web, and the insect clasp are references to insect mating practices, whereby in most species males must present a "gift" of nutrients to the female prior to mating. Materialist culture presents a parallel model for women and men, in which they are taught from the very beginning about the roles of provider and consumer, active and passive, male and female. It becomes a vicious, tangled web of a system, trapping men and women alike in its constrictive, tightly wrapped bounds.

A group of four pieces are inspired by headhunting jewelry, especially those pieces, mostly brass neck rings, featuring metal heads to represent the number of human heads taken. Given the fascinating interplay between headhunting and sexuality, I became curious about what

[238] Miranda Joseph and David Rubin, *Promising Complicities: On the Sex, Race, and Globalization Project* in "A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies," 443

a modern headhunter necklace would look like. The urge to collect takes on different forms in different contexts, but reappears again and again in widely varying situations. These pieces feature small silver people, each unique, approximately half an inch tall. The most direct translation is found in "Collecting People Neck Wire" (Figure 7.6), which mimics the form of traditional Naga headhunter neck rings almost exactly. Instead of generic heads, however, the piece features seven different men. I wanted to draw the parallel between headhunting and one modern incarnation of "collecting" people, notches on the bedpost. "Collecting People Necklace" (Figure 7.7) is a more abstract cluster, more appropriate perhaps to the pride felt from "achieving" high numbers of Facebook friends or Twitter followers – the self-satisfaction of manufactured and impersonal popularity. "Collecting People Two Finger Ring" (Figure 7.8) turns the psychological defense of collection into physical defense, its form mirroring brass knuckles. Finally, "Collecting People Single Ring" (Figure 7.9) features a sole woman, sunbathing, exhibited on a simple band. It echoes the pride in ownership of another human that is the conceptual threat of wedding and engagement jewelry.

My "Hidden Ring I" (Figure 7.10) and "Hidden Ring II" (Figure 7.11) pair address wealth and privilege in a different way. One ring is rough cut silver on the outside with a large garnet hidden on the inside, while the other is a silver cubist interpretation of an engagement ring with a blue diamond set on the inside. The first looks at European and other inheritance laws, Palestinian dowry, and Holocaust jewelry, situations in which women were unable to inherit or hold most forms of wealth directly (due to their gender or religion), leaving jewelry and gemstones as their main method of banking value and ensure their own financial security. However, this situation presents a complicated balancing act, in which it is safer to keep jewelry on the body than off, but too dangerous to display it. This led to innovations like golden garters and stones sewn inside the hems of garments – in my interpretation, the inside of a rough, oxidized sterling ring. "Hidden Ring II" (Figure 7.11), meanwhile, addresses the gross consumerism prevalent in the wedding and engagement industry. One justification for spending huge amounts of money on engagement jewelry is the idea that a precious and important occasion (the beginning of a marriage) should be commemorated with a precious object. This piece raises the question of the gaze, again – if the piece is precious but the value is hidden, is

that good enough? Whose perception matters? Who is the piece for, really?

Taking this idea one step further, the piece "Shared Space" (Figure 6.5.4) moves away from narrative completely and relies on form and structure to convey its message. This sterling silver pin plays with concepts of privacy and ownership of spaces around the body. The front features a blown up cutout of my fingerprint, rendering something personal and identifiable public. Beneath the dome, it is just possible to read the text, "If you can read this, you are too close," negating the implicit permission often perceived to handle or get close to women's bodies on the pretext of examining jewelry. However, on the back, it reads, "If you can read this, you aren't close enough," giving a different message to the observer privileged by the wearer to handle the piece, or alternatively, given the privilege of undressing the wearer. This piece demonstrates how messages can be encoded so as to signify different things to different viewers, and emphasizes one way in which the jewelry medium might escape the tyranny of the generic societal gaze.

Throughout the course of this project, I've endeavored to exploit the endless interplay between form and function, content and structure, theory and practice. Jewelry has provided a canvas on which to explore the practical implications of a range of incredible thinkers' work on the body across disciplines, mapping the intersections of sexuality, gender, relationships, and class. Religious narratives are still foundational in our society. "As the central myth of the Judeo-Christian imagination and therefore of our immediate cultural heritage, it is well that we appraise and acknowledge the enormous power it still holds over us, even in a rationalist era which has long ago given up literal belief in it while maintaining its emotional assent intact. This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes, for it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition in the west.[239]" Jewelry as a method of creating to-be-looked-at-ness is similarly entrenched as a method rather than rationale of patriarchy. It may then be doubly radical to not only subvert the oppressive history of both the creation mythology and of jewelry, but actively utilize the weapons once used against us in order to reclaim agency, subjectivity and ownership of the body. Eve and Lilith are present everywhere, simultaneously embodying societal expectations and the

[239] Kate Millett, "Sexual Politics," 53.

defiance of those expectations, being at once ancient and traditional and deeply radical, the subverted paradigms I aspire to do justice to in my work.

Appendix II

Referenced Images of Feminist Jewelry

6.2 Explicit Discussion of Gender

6.2.1 "Armor and Amor" by Sondra Sherman

"Armor and Amor" 1995. Sterling, 18k gold, pink cubic zirconia, antique chandelier crystals. Courtesy of Susan Cummins Gallery, photographed by Jim Cummins in "Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry"

6.2.2 "Building Self" by Keith Lewis

"Building Self" 1994. Sterling silver, 24k gold vermeil, wood, lucite. Collection of Gail Amundson and Peter Rothe, photographed by Jim Cummins in "Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry"

6.2.3 "Atlas" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Atlas" 2008. Sterling silver, amethyst. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.2.4 "Be Good" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Be Good" 2009. Sterling Silver and rose quartz. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.3 Problematizing Specific Practices

6.3.1 "Be Botox, Be Fucking Beautiful" by Theresa Milhero

"Be Botox, Be Fucking Beautiful" 2005. Sterling silver, old syringe. Courtesy of the Artist.

6.3.2 "Urban Wear Series" by Kelly Malec-Kosak

Three Rings from "Urban Wear" series, 1999. Sterling silver, steel, cement. Photographed by Jeff Sabo, found in Metalsmith Magazine, Spring 2005.

6.3.3 "Gilded Cage" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Gilded Cage" 2009. Hand crocheted 24k gold-plated sterling silver, pink and white freshwater pearls. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.3.4 "Offering" by Rebecca Ross Russell

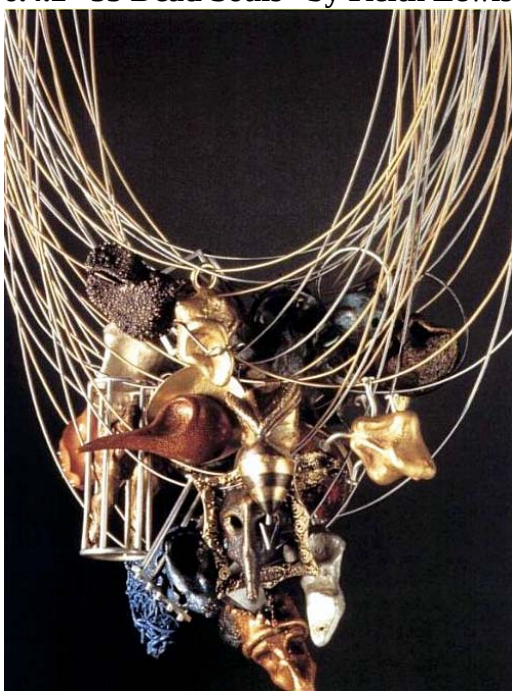
"Offering" 2009. Sterling silver, bi-color quartz. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.4 As Source of Alternative Narrative

6.4.1 "Miss Havisham" by Sondra Sherman

"Miss Havisham" 1992. Sterling silver, glass beads, antique chandelier crystal, topaz, glass, dried rose petals. Courtesy of Susan Cummins Gallery, photographed by Jim Cummins in "Beyond the Obvious: Rethinking Jewelry"

6.4.2 "35 Dead Souls" by Keith Lewis



"35 Dead Souls" 1992/3. 36 pendants of assorted materials. Photographed by Keith Lewis, courtesy of Don + Heide Endemann Collection.

6.4.3 "Eve/Mother Tongue" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Eve/Mother Tongue" 2007. Sterling silver, 24k gold, thread. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.4.4 "On Their Shoulders" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"On Their Shoulders" 2007. Sterling silver, 24k gold, 18 multi-colored sapphires, Mozambique garnet. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.4.5 "Adam's Soul Echoed Lilith" by Rebecca Ross Russell

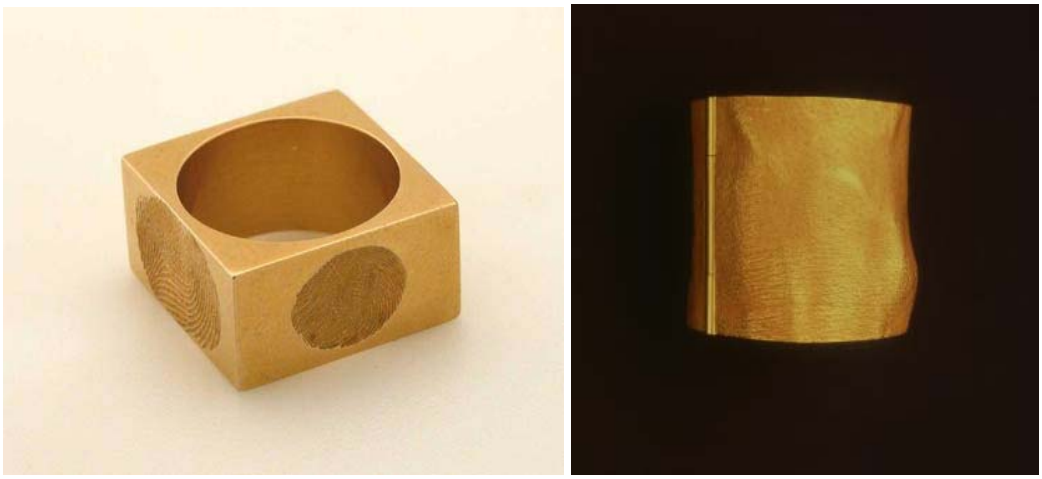
"Adam's Soul Echoed Lilith" 2009. Sterling Silver. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

6.5 Jewelry for the Wearer

6.5.1 "Breath/e" by Lin Cheung

"Breath/e" 2005. Sterling silver, featuring text from 'Lover' by Paul Éluard (1895 – 1952). Photograph courtesy of the artist, found in "New Directions in Jewelry II."

6.5.2 and 6.5.3 Gerd Rothman



"Family Ring" 1995 and "From him for her" 1990. 18k gold. Photographs from "Jewellery: Gerd Rothman" by Hatje Cantz.

6.5.4 "Shared Space" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Shared Space" 2008. Sterling Silver. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

6.5.5 "Girl's Best Friend" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Girl's Best Friend" 2008. 18k gold, rough and faceted diamond beads. Text reads, "Steel toed boots are a girl's best friend." Photographs courtesy of the artist.

7.1 "Dowry Bracelets" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Dowry Bracelets" 2009. 24k gold plated silver, features the text of the poem "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

7.2 "Kotel Reliquary" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Kotel Reliquary" 2007. Sterling silver, 24k gold, uncut diamonds, peridot. Features text from a poem by David Ross Russell. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

7.3 "Memento Mori" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Memento Mori" 2010. Sterling silver, citrine, rutilated quartz, hair. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

7.4 "Precious" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Precious" 2008. Sterling silver, 14k gold, 24k gold, red pearls, peridot, uncut diamonds. Features a quote from Gerta Weissman Klein. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

7.5 "Hand in Marriage" by Rebecca Ross Russell

"Hand in Marriage" 2009. Leather glove, thread, sterling silver, rutilated quartz. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

7.6 "Collecting People Neckwire," 7.7 "Collecting People Necklace,"

"Collecting People Neckwire" and "Collecting People Necklace," 2010. Sterling silver. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

7.8 "Collecting People Double Finger Ring," 7.9 "Collecting People Single Finger Ring"

"Collecting People Double Finger Ring" and "Collecting People Single Finger Ring" 2010. Sterling silver. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

7.10 "Hidden Ring I," 7.11 "Hidden Ring II"

"Hidden Ring I" and "Hidden Ring II," 2009. Sterling silver, garnet, blue diamond. Photographs courtesy of the artist.