

National College of Art and Design

Jewellery and Objects

School of Design

Material and Value, The Evolution of Jewellery from
Medieval to Modern day, and the consequences of mass
consumption

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Submitted to the School of Visual Culture in Candidacy for the Degree of Jewellery and
Object Design 2022.



National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: Grace Minnock

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Grace Minnock'.

Programme / department: Jewellery and Objects

Date: 30/01/2022

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my thesis tutor, Lisa Foley, for her guidance and feedback, as well as my year head, Bernie McCoy. I would also like to thank my boss and friend, Eamonn Cunningham, for giving me insight and experience in selling and buying jewellery. Finally, thank you to my father (Bryan Minnock), and friends (Erika Harris and Jonathan McCormack), for supporting me through the emotional journey of writing a long and thorough research essay.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	p.5-6
Introduction	p.7-8
Chapter One: European, Medieval-Renaissance Jewellery	p.9-17
Chapter Two: Evolution of materials in Jewellery	p.18-24
Chapter Three: Instagram Poll Research	p.25-29
Chapter Four: Corporate Values and Branding	p.30-36
Conclusion	p.37-38
Bibliography	p.39-41

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 p.10

Maker (Unknown), Breastplate, (1565) Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Available at: <https://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/products/berg-fashion-library/museum/victoria-albert-museum/breastplate-3> (Assessed: December 1, 2021)

Figure 2 p.13

George Gower (1585) The Ermine Portrait of Elizabeth I of England, [Painting], King James Drawing Room, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, AL9 5NF

Figure 3 p.15

Maker (Unknown), (1500), Renaissance signet ring, Hindman, S et al (2007) *Toward an art History of medieval rings: A private collection*, p.195, Paul Holberton publishing, 89 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL (Accessed November 22, 2021)

Figure 4 p.18

Reytan, D. J (2007) *Yellow Gold Broach*, Cast Silicone, in Manheim, J (2009) *Sustainable Jewellery*, London, A&C Black Publishers (Accessed November 10, 2021)

Figure 5 p.22

Manheim, J (1990) *Rough Staff*, Guardian newspaper, Wire, in Manheim, J (2009) *Sustainable Jewellery*, p.8., A&C Black Publishers Limited, 36 soho square. London W1D 3QY. (Accessed November 10, 2021)

Figure 6 p.26

Minnock. G (2021) *Thesis Research*, Instagram poll. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/grace_minnock/?hl=en (Accessed December 15, 2021)

Figure 7 p.33

Hey Harper (2022) About us, 'Anti-luxury' Video. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/613715044> (Accessed January 19, 2022)

Figure 8

p.36

Chupi (2022) Our Story, The Chupi experience, Photograph. Available at: <https://www.chupi.com/pages/about-us> (Accessed January 20, 2022)

Introduction

Where did the desire for precious materials in jewellery go? Today jewellery is mass produced and easily accessible to anyone. “Many designers are disillusioned by the drive to produce profitable designs quickly and cheaply.” (Marcketti, S. 2020).

Seemingly jewellery has become more about its looks and appearance rather than its materials, quality and meaning. This four-chapter research essay will begin, in chapter one with exploring the importance of jewellery in medieval and Renaissance Europe from the fourteenth to eighteenth century in order to understand the function, meaning and importance of these objects. In doing so, it aims to put into perspective the contrast that exists between modern relationships with jewellery and the relationship the modern world has with jewellery as a whole.

Chapter two will discuss the evolution of jewellery, looking particularly into the use of artificial materials and found objects. Which will lead us into chapter three, analysing a small sample of young adults of this generation in order to understand the meaning of jewellery to them. Using secondary research such as information from books and journal articles, as well as primary research such as Instagram polls, jewellery advertisement and companies, we will examine the human historical connection to jewellery and compare this with the modern day, looking at how accessible these wearables have become.

Finally in chapter four analysing two notable jewellery companies of different price points to understand the quality of materials, marketing tactics and sustainability or lack thereof that they practice. Is Jewellery following in the footsteps of fast fashion? Jewellery was once considered an item of status “of course a major role of jewelry is to establish that the wearer has wealth, power and influence.” (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019,

p.11). It was something to be desired, envied, and treasured. The relationship between modern society and jewellery can be seen in its use of materials such as plastics and alloys which have become more prevalent. This leads to the question; is jewellery still valuable? Not just in the sense of the material, but also sentimentally? We will explore how value relates to material. Is there intention with longevity? These questions form the basis of this research essay and will be considered throughout the subsequent chapters, eventually leading us to questions of change. How can the jewellery industry be improved? We will look at the effects that jewellery production makes on the environment. Concluding with proposing solutions for businesses, customers and designers can do to minimise jewellery's contribution environmental damages.

Chapter 1. European, Medieval-Renaissance Jewellery

Clare Phillips (1996, p.7) notes in her book *'Jewellery from Antiquity to present'* that the desire to wear jewellery has been a 'constant feature' in the history of mankind, evident from the 'earliest times' among various and scattered cultures. This information is very interesting as although there may be a natural human desire to decorate the body, this desire would not inherently explain why jewellery became valuable to those who wore it. Gänsicke, *et al* (2019, p.11) explains eloquently in their work that the status and value of material and substances developed from cultural understandings that the material may be rare, hard to obtain, or difficult to work with, requiring skilled craftsmen to create items of such beauty.

According to Susanne Gänsicke, *et al* (2019, p.10-11) Although jewellery may have been created as a human urge to decorate the body, it served functional additional roles within many historic cultures, believing to protect from illness, harm, evil and were often considered items of magic. An interesting hypothesis is that jewellery was born, not out of vanity but were merely useful objects that developed ornamental properties which enhanced the societal meaning and rarity of these items. An excellent example of functional jewellery in history can be seen in Buckles. "Shoe buckles and chatelaines were two of the most widely worn items of jewellery during the eighteenth century" (Phillips. C, 2008, p.56) worn by both men and women. They were considered as 'decorative indicators of wealth and taste' and "a large proportion had an explicit religious or heraldic significance" (Phillips. C, 1996, p.53) to the people who wore them.

To explore the importance of jewellery during this era we can look to the wealthy and the monarchy of this time. "Jewellery was worn by men, women and children throughout the Middle Ages" (Phillips. C, 2008, p.28). As we can see in Figure 1,

Queen Elizabeth I sits comfortably in lavishly decorated pieces of clothing and jewellery.



Figure: 1, George Gower (1585) The Ermine Portrait of Elizabeth I of England, [Painting] King James Drawing Room, Hatfield House, Hatfield Park, Hatfield, Welwyn Hatfield, Hertfordshire.

According to Clare Phillips (1996, p.92) her “Love of jewelry was legendary”. In addition, many pieces she owned were inherited from her father. This is very noteworthy as although the wealthy were fortunate enough to access an abundance of

jewellery it was not considered disposable. Phillips also explains that jewels of this time were often given names (Phillips. C, 1996, p.79) which identified them during their movement throughout Europe. One such piece can be seen on Figure 2, the ‘three brothers’ pendant which are the three rubies that Elizabeth wears on her bodice.

We will lightly examine medieval-Renaissance armour which we will use to connect and to compare the parallel worlds of fashion and jewellery. As this chapter continues, we will discuss a particularly popular piece of jewellery among the wealth of this time, Signet rings, which in turn will contribute to the comparisons that will be made further on. It is important to note the societal relationship with these pieces, as we will compare these relationships with the modern day in the following chapters. Armour fits nicely into all of these categories as it combines jewellery, fashion, function, culture, and status into a singular object. Focusing on the importance and function in jewellery within this time is where contrasts can be made with the modern ideas of jewellery and its function. What has changed in the minds of people who consume jewellery? How does that affect the quality of jewellery?

According to Patterson A, (2009) Jewellery and armour began as items that were associated with men. It was a display of the power and influence that they held on society and the world. It was undoubtedly a symbol of wealth, which also served a role in the structure of society. “Of all the riches of the Renaissance nobleman, none spoke more powerfully of his honour and standing than his armour and weapons.” (Patterson A, 2009). Due to this, armour was not only functional, but was also increasingly more ornate. Donald, J la Rocca (2017) explains that “European armour was always undergoing changes and improvements in its defensive capabilities”. Here we can recognise that medieval wearables were more than just commodities; they were items of use. What, then, do we use jewellery for in the modern day? What value in terms of

use does jewellery bring to society? These questions will be answered in the next chapter.

Jewellery and fashion are endlessly connected. They are two ends of a wearable spectrum. It can be difficult to distinguish where one begins and the other ends.

According to Donald, J la Rocca (2017, p.10-11) a complete chain mail shirt in the third century B.C. was expensive and considered a treasured possession. It was also a useful and a meaningful object to people of this time. Armour is interesting from the perspectives of both clothing and jewellery because it is functional yet also ornamental, which seemingly did not enhance the effectiveness of these pieces. Ralph Turner (1996, p.30-31) explains that there is a “tenuous and ambiguous relationship between clothing and jewellery.” Continuing on to explain that they both were eventually distinguished as one to fall under the term “wearables”: A term which explained the objects which “hovered on the brink of function” (Turner,1996). This definition of wearables will be valuable to us later on as we evaluate their eventual overconsumption.

Although armour wasn't always made with precious metals, it was primarily made of functionally strong materials such as steel. In his book *'How to read European Armour'* Donald. J la Rocca (2017, p.97) explains the techniques that were used at this time to create interesting decorative textures such as 'etching', 'mercury gilding', 'heat bluing', 'engraving' and 'inlay and damascening in gold or silver' to name a few, all of which can be used in the making of jewellery. It can be argued that armour was made of the optimum material for its functional purpose. As you can see in Figure 2, some of these techniques are depicted, the clearest technique being the contrasting gold inlay that sits against the steel. Clearly, and armour's functionality added to its inherent value. However, the ornamental motifs always persisted through each evolution.



Figure: 2, Maker Unknown, Breastplate, 1565, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Certainly, these decorative features would not have enhanced the effectiveness of the armour. So why was embellishment of these pieces important? Research into the work of Patterson A, (2009) explains that because armour united fashion, function, and Jewellery, with ornament, material, and cultural value, it flourished into a cultural symbol of honour. He also explains that it was important for young Aristocrats to attend Organised tournaments to fight and be “Taught the importance of nerve, self-

control, ritual and ceremony.” (Patterson A, 2009) which in turn, led to the importance of distinguishing one-self or one group with their ornament.

According to Donald, J la Rocca, (2017) as the early to mid-sixteenth century arose, and armour continued to increase in popularity, plate armour reached a ‘peak in both stylistic and functional perfection.’ As a result, the majority of armour of this time fell under “the broad categories: field, Tournament or ceremonial.” (Donald, J la Rocca,2017). Medieval tournament armour allows us to understand that decorative wearables enhanced the human experience of entertainment.

Having concluded our evaluation of armour we will now move on to the fascinating relationship and history of rings. There are clearly many pieces of jewellery that we could discuss in this period; however, the most relevant to discuss for this topic is rings. For example, Sandra Hindman, *et al* (2007, p.13) describes the collectors of medieval rings as those who look beyond the ‘beauty’ of the materials as well as the craftsmanship, engaging in the significance of the pieces as they shed light on the arts, religion, literature, business practices and sentiments of a so called ‘vanished world’. Collectors use their experienced eye to examine the details of the rings of this time, understanding that even the way the ring is worn offers clues into the Identity, character, tastes, and status of the previous owner. With this information in mind, it is very clear that even rings were functional in medieval society, conveying a wealth of information that could be communicated from one person to another.



Figure: 3, Maker (Unknown), Renaissance signet ring, (1500).

The use of Rings has stood the test of time and it can be further argued that they represent one of the most recognisable symbolic pieces of jewellery with a universally understood meaning, particularly an engagement ring is a good example of this, “worn as an indication of the intent to marry.” (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.107) Interestingly, according to Sandra Hindman et al (2007, p.130) marriage rings can be dated back as far as the Roman empire. The example Hindman examines in her book ‘Toward an art

History of medieval rings: A private collection' has an engraved inscription which appears to be written in reverse. Hindman suggests that this ring is intended for sealing (Sandra Hindman et al, 2007, p.130), much like a signet ring.

Signet rings served a significant role in European history, according to Gänsicke, S et al (2019, p.109) signet rings were “a seal in the form of a ring with a flat, engraved bezel bearing the monogram, coat of arms, or the distinctive mark of the wearer”. They were clearly unique to each individual who wore them, this would indicate not only who wore the ring but also their ‘rank, authority and affiliations’ (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.109). This was primarily done by men in the nineteenth century and would serve as a way to authenticate particular personal or official documents using them to create an impression in clay or wax seals (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.109). This would have been very effective as it would have been very difficult to replicate these stamps.

They became so popular, in fact, “eventually seals were replaced by handwritten signatures, and signets became largely symbolic” (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.109). This information clearly shows how important jewellery was during this time as functional equipment in society. “By the end of the fourteenth century and fifteenth century, sealing was so wide spread that even those who did not possess family arms owned signet rings” (Hindman, S et al, 2007, p.194) They were so attached to the wearer’s identity that signet rings were “Often found in tombs on the index finger of men and women” (Hindman, S et al, 2007, p.82) bringing with them this ancient form of identification.

Concluding this chapter, it is clear to see the immense impact jewellery and ornament made on humankind throughout history. Function can be seen through their everyday items such as belt buckles, through the various uses of armour, field for battle, tournament for entertainment and ceremonial for occasion wear. Rings were shown to

be not only decorative, but hugely symbolic and so important to be used to seal government documents. These were protected and cared for items that were worth more than even their material value. They were a form of communication and identification through their symbols and shapes. It is clear that for the upper-class society, they were vital tools to understand and participate in society.

Chapter 2. Evolution of materials in Jewellery

In Chapter one, we discussed Medieval-Renaissance armour and jewellery. So far, we have examined a complicated relationship with jewellery in European history as its function was not only decorative, nor only useful, but had its own role in society as it distinguished class, community, and culture. During the mid-twentieth century, however, jewellery went through a drastic change (Phillips, C. 1996, p.195). Although Major jewellery houses continued to work with precious materials, smaller designers began to question the ‘nature’ of jewellery’s role in society. Rejecting the status and exclusivity that was undeniably attached to expensive, precious jewellery they began to explore with new materials described as having “almost no intrinsic worth” (Phillips, C. 1996, p.195). This was a rebellion against the elite and a rebellion against tradition. Jewellery became objects of artistic performance; a rejection of sexual stereotypes and “contamination by exploitation” becoming sculptural objects of intrigue.



Figure: 4, Reytan, D. J *Yellow Gold Broach* (2007)

According to Phillips (1996, p.196), unlike early modern jewellers, innovative jewellers of this time “Committed to the idea that jewellery should promote equality, and therefore worked in non-precious materials” which included Aluminium and plastics. An example of this can be seen in Figure 3, which is a silicone broach which is described as ‘conceptually recycled’ (Manheim, J, 2009, p.73). Artistic expressions of injustice were important for the societal development of this time. Might this jewellery be costume jewellery? According to Tolkien, T and Wilkinson, H, (1997) “Costume jewellery means pieces which are made primarily from non-precious materials” The birth of costume jewellery was significant because it allowed consumers of average incomes access to jewellery in large quantities, making jewellery no longer items only accessible to the elite (Tolkien, T and Wilkinson, H, 1997). However, with this new accessibility to jewellery began a culture of overconsumption of once precious goods.

Within the fashion world “Consumerism was a rising trend in the 1950s as a growing middle class wanted new products to enhance the quality of their lives. There was little concern about any negative implications from this trend” (Marcketti, S. 2020). There are obvious parallels between fashion and jewellery during this time. For example, the public were tired of watching the elite enjoy their lavish and luxurious lifestyles, and due to this “Top ranking designers often ran companies that turned out more down-market versions of their original designs, selling at low prices.” (Tolkien, T and Wilkinson, H. 1997) to accommodate for this new consumer change. This was most clear in the fashion industry, but undoubtedly was a trend that effected all forms of wearables.

Molly Martain’s (2021) book titled ‘*The Art of Repair*’ has been a very strong influence into the examination of the topics in this research. One statement that

particularly stands out reads “repairing a beloved item of clothing enhances the experience of wearing it” allowing for a “renewed sense of ownership.” However, with growing accessibility to textiles and jewellery today, they have almost entirely lost their long-term value. Martain (2021) explains that “To repair something (anything) in the modern world is a defiant act”. What we can interpret from this is that there are no longer reasons to repair anything when everything is so easily replaced. In other words, with readily available and perfectly new merchandise so easily accessible, why would we waste our time mending an old worthless object?

Jewellery has a unique attachment to these questions of worth; according to my research jewellery has historically been an item of long-term value. It has been an item of meaning, honour, and respect. How could something with such strong connotations of worth and value be so worthless and fleeting? As I continue this essay, it will be argued that consumers should indeed be influenced by the material of an object, when considering its overall value. It will be interesting to consider if precious metals are still important to the consumer, when purchasing modern day jewellery, as we consider the buying trends of the modern world.

In recent years there has been a movement within the jewellery community to create jewellery out of recycled materials. This type of jewellery has been made from items such as plastics, to paper, clothing, and even organic matter. Julia Manheim is a notable jewellery designer that is known to have created jewellery from recycled materials and has said to have grown an ‘International Reputation’ from her work. with the motivation for her work being a “Concern for the thoughtless disposal of materials” she began a desire to pursue sustainability in her work through both jewellery and art. According to her book, Manheim, J (2009) on sustainable jewellery.

It is apparent that Manheim's intentions with her jewellery are good, but it is important to question, is this work inherently sustainable? Manheim has evidently researched her work for the most ecologically friendly methods of recycling possible, touching on the use of non-ecological glues and how this can contaminate the discarded materials (Manheim, J, 2009). A concern that weighs heavily on this topic is what impact does this recycling really have on our society? Could these recyclable materials be better used in other industries such as the toy industry? Manheim, J, 2009, does partially touch on this as she connects her jewellery work to the furniture industry. The main question I want to present, however, is what benefits do recyclable material jewellery really have? And do the benefits of this 'sustainable' jewellery' really outweigh the negatives?

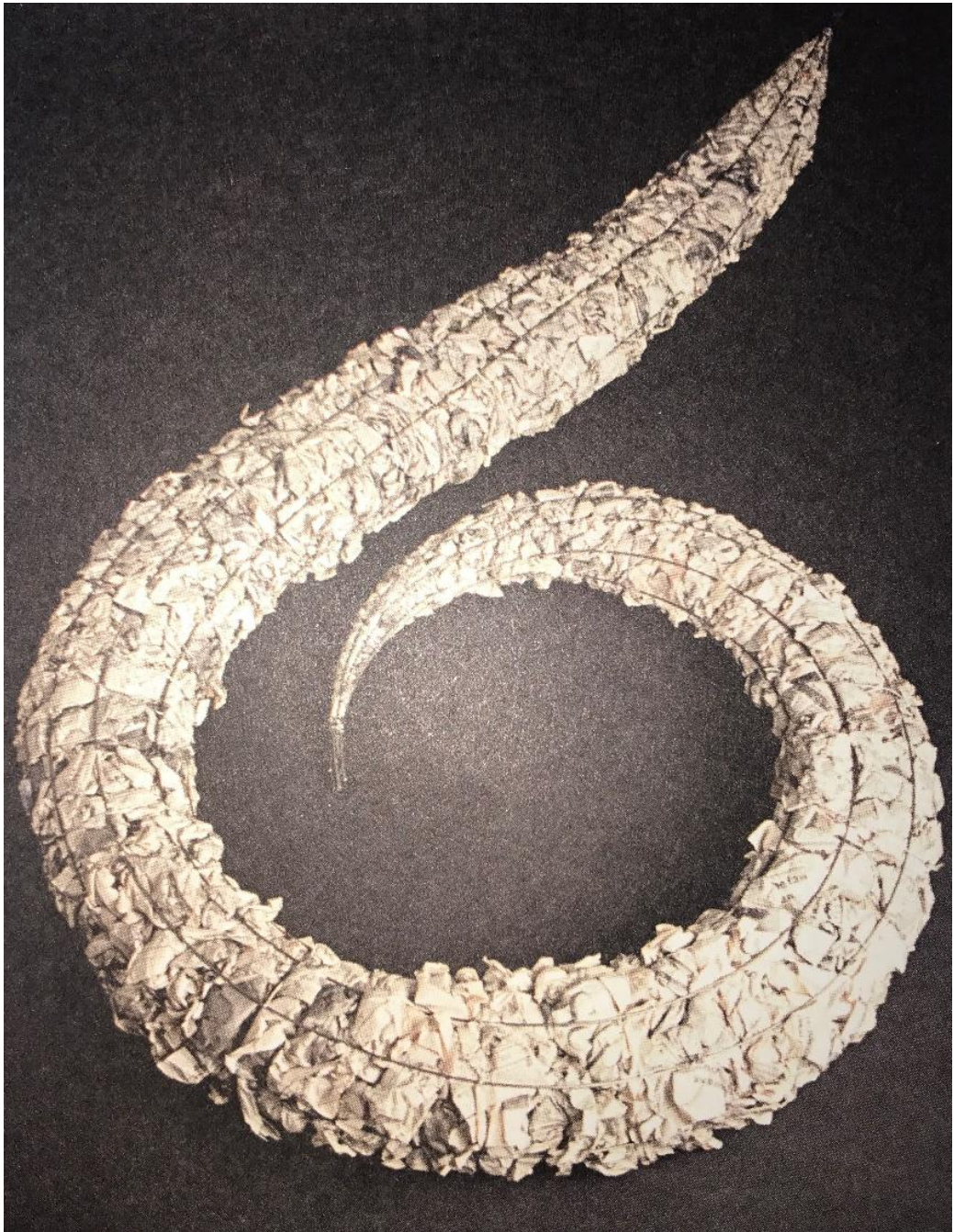


Figure: 5, Manheim, J *Rough Staff*, (1990)

An interesting quote from Manheim reads that Jewellery has “been considered in the broadest sense of the word, embracing objects or images which relate to the body and are usually worn in the same way, however fleeting” (Manheim, J, 2009). Analysing this statement further it is interesting as it tells us about Manheim’s relationship with jewellery and her understanding of society’s relationship with it. Understanding that

this description of ‘fleetingly’ worn jewellery implies a detachment to the objects themselves and therefore an interesting lack of perceived value for it.

According to Sara Marcketti (2020) “As the main component of a fashion product, the selection of materials is paramount in designing sustainable fashion”, is this also true for jewellery? If so, what materials are most functional when designing jewellery?

Considering the long-term impact of this type of recycling in jewellery, it is important to question if this is a way of turning waste items into other waste items? As mentioned previously these materials are considered of “almost no intrinsic worth” (Phillips, C. 1996, p.195). Regardless of if they are recycled or not, these pieces no matter how beautiful or intriguing will not realistically function for long as jewellery.

When the ‘plastic age’ began (roughly 70 years ago) there were so many benefits to the world because of its versatility (King, P. 2019 p.2). One of plastics great benefits was its potential to provide a more sanitary environment. This was evident through the popularisation of plastic and disposable items such as single use cutlery and plastic sealed packaging. Has the use of plastic in design gone too far? It should be considered that the recycling of materials such as plastics can contribute to a consumer justifying the use of them. According to Peter King (2019, p.3) plastics are extremely hard to recycle and can only go through this process a limited number of times. With this in mind the use of plastics in objects such as jewellery may be unnecessary. To fight the environmental impacts of plastics it is important to only use them when necessary. According to King (2019 p.2), the recycling of plastics is ‘poorly managed’ and “Discarded plastics can be found almost everywhere on earth – in the depths of the oceans, on top of mountains, and in the polar ice”. To lift the weight of plastic recycling off of other industries, jewellery as an industry should consider disregarding plastic as a material for mass production. Plastic can be used as an expression of art,

but the world evidently cannot sustain the mass production of plastic as it is. It can also be argued that plastic jewellery has not been considered to have an afterlife throughout its lifetime, particularly in the same way that other materials, such as gold, which according to the World Gold Council (2022) “The majority of recycled gold - around 90% - comes from jewellery” with the other 10% obtained from technology.

Chapter 3 Instagram Poll Research

As we have discussed in previous chapters jewellery and fashion are endlessly intertwined. Ralph Turner (1996, p.29) makes a very important point when he says that “the issue that the materials with which an object is made influence our evaluation of it. This is certainly true of jewelry where the intrinsic value of the material can get in the way of our aesthetic perception.” The point being made here is that at the end of the day, plastics are still plastics, no matter the shape. It will never hold long term value. Sara Marcketti (2020) asserts that apparel and most textiles today are considered disposable due to the inexpensive production of these items, they do not hold ‘long term worth’. This mindset is consistent among consumers of fast fashion. With this short-term value there is little regard for material quality “Today, quality seems less important than stylishness” (Marcketti et al, 2020).

Are Marcketti’s statements true? An Instagram poll undertaken for this research essay documents a sample of the modern perception of jewellery from students between the ages of 18 to 30 years old. Of course, one single survey with varied total replies cannot represent the entire consumer market of Europe, nor the world. However, the results of this poll can give us a glimpse into some ideas of jewellery that were most common among this sample of both men and women.

Question	Answer A	Answer B	Total
Do you Own Jewellery?	0-10 Pieces	10+ Pieces	94
	44	50	
Do you Wear Jewellery Day to Day?	Every Day	Occasionally or less	99
	67	32	
Is Jewellery Useful?	Yes	No	92
	70	22	
Do you own a jewellery box?	Yes	No	91
	38	53	
Is jewellery Precious?	Yes	No	81
	71	10	
How long do you keep your Jewellery?	1-9 Years	10+ years	84
	37	47	
Do you keep/ own Family/ Heirloom jewellery	Yes	No	87
	58	29	
Do you Buy jewellery in Sets?	Yes	No	82
	27	55	
Does your Jewellery Tarnish?	Yes	No	82
	34	48	
What Price range do you purchase jewellery?	€1 - €49	€50+	77
	50	27	
Do you Buy Jewellery with the intention of a symbolic meaning?	Yes	No	65
	34	31	
Do you care if your jewellery is pure metal or at least plated?	Don't Care	At least plated	63
	24	39	

Figure 6. Minnock. G. *Instagram Poll* (2021)

The results of these polls were interesting for a multitude of reasons. When asked ‘Do you own a jewellery box’ out of 91 responses 42% of people (38) admitted to not owning one. This answer is interesting because fashion has become available for everyone with similar items available at varied price points (Marcketti, S. 2020). Furthermore, it is interesting to see that 67% (58) of people own family owned or heirloom jewellery. The difference between these two answers in a total of twenty individuals. The total response differs between these questions by only four people. This begs the question, where do they keep these precious items of jewellery? With variation of these heirloom pieces in mind, would these participants be wearing these heirloom pieces daily? The variables that contribute to the answers may be countless, which means that this question may only be answered with a larger sample size.

68% of people (67) Choose to wear jewellery every day, however interestingly only 44% of people (37) admitted to not keeping their jewellery for any longer than ten years, to a variation of fourteen responses. This may be due to the quality of the jewellery they buy or receive. Let's compare this research with the number of people whose jewellery is confirmed to noticeably tarnish. This resulted in 41% of people (34) which is notably similar to the number of people who seemingly don't keep jewellery long term. Why is this? Perhaps, as the demand for fashion has increased from 'two to four collections' annually, this has led to expectations for new fashion pieces every few days "Fast fashion has made fashions disposable" resulting in a pattern of overconsumption that cannot be maintained. (Marcketti, S. 2020).

Overconsumption of jewellery may be less noticeable compared to fashion. We must consider that ten years may not be a long time to own a piece of jewellery, much like a house or a car jewellery can be a long-term investment. Unlike a car however, jewellery isn't as likely to depreciate in value. According to the World Gold Council (2021) the price of gold often fluctuates according to demand, the status of the economy and the rate at which it is mined. According to Sandy Black (2010) "Since the early 1990s, fashion has become both faster and cheaper. The chain of supply and demand, previously tied to a rigid pattern of biannual seasonal fashion cycles" this also can be said about jewellery. It is interesting to consider that jewellery lags behind fashion on the pathway to overconsumption."

Is this due to a comparative longer life-expectancy of jewellery? According to my Instagram Poll 88% (71) people chose to say that jewellery is precious. Yet still, 44% of people (37) do not keep it any longer than ten years. This was with a three-person response difference. Regardless of that variation, if we assume that we believe our jewellery is precious, then we are likely to keep it for a long time, longer than ten years

at least? These (34) people who do think jewellery is precious but do not keep it for longer than ten years may indeed truly believe that their jewellery is precious. The hypothesis for this seemingly extreme contradiction may be that to the modern consumer ten years is a long time. As Black (2010) explains “Fast fashion works in decreasing circles, squeezing the production loops tighter. However, competition is fierce at all levels, and aggressive expansion of luxury and designer marketing have also played their part in stimulating demand and driving down prices.” Fast fashion may be a component to this as the lifespan for clothing shortens; for example, ten years to own a top, may be a very long time. In the fast production of fashion “There is little time to consider the needs of the person wearing the garment or make decisions about the materials, production, care, and afterlife” (Marcketti, S. 2020), resulting in the fast deterioration of these items.

According to the Instagram poll taken as part of this research essay, I found that to the question ‘what is your personal opinions on jewellery that you think are uncommon?’ 50% of people (4/8) had answers along the lines of: jewellery looks better when it is smaller and simpler, or they mentioned that ‘big’ pieces of jewellery or statement pieces didn’t look good or were impractical. This was interesting as this could actually be a common opinion among this generation. Jivan Astfalck, et al (2005, p.11) explain that there are multiple mass-produced jewellery pieces which are easily recognisable as jewellery and easy to wear. They are practical, and can be both expensive or inexpensive, with variation in both quality and durability. These are often pieces that do not ‘evoke questions of debate’. These pieces are tailored to market demand and produced in bulk usually abroad. Interestingly enough, the rest of the responses to this question were all unique to each other relating to various different aspects of jewellery preferences, this included price, materials, brands, and historical fashions.

Overconsumption of jewellery begs the question of symbolic value and meaning in jewellery. Jewellery throughout history has been important meaningful symbols for humankind, has this meaning been lost over time? What meaning does jewellery truly hold? This is a hard question to answer without doing a large survey. One thing can be said for sure though, is that Jewellery no longer tells us as much about the wearer as it once did. In the clothing industry “There is also little time to encourage the development of truly innovative ideas” (Marcketti, S. 2020) this also seems to be true of jewellery. Jewellery is no longer broadly unique to each person.

Chapter 4. Corporate Values and Branding

Moving back to the discussion about materials in jewellery. It has come to my attention that there is a recent phenomenon known and marketed as ‘Waterproof Jewellery’ by a European brand named Hey Harper (2022). Hey Harper, is an up-and-coming European jewellery company that heavily advertises itself as an ‘Anti-luxury’ jewellery brand. On the Hey Harper (2022) website page titled ‘WATERPROOF, HOW?’ they explain that their solution to achieve inexpensive jewellery that is ‘long-lasting’ is due to “stainless steel with a 10x stronger coating process!” (Hey Harper, 2022) which is achieved after a process called ‘Physical Vapor Deposition’ (PVD). They claim this to be durable enough to be scratch resistant and is ‘less likely’ to cause allergies (Hey Harper, 2022).

On its ‘about us’ page the brand goes on to say that they the market of gifting jewellery has been built on ‘high prices without quality’ (Hey Harper, 2022). Explaining that “At Hey Harper we are tired of the pretentious meaning of the luxury industry” (Hey Harper, 2022), this comment comes off quite aggressive as it is written in all capital letters. These are harsh generalisations about the luxury jewellery industry, which interestingly seem to be more fittingly directed toward the cheap jewellery industry. This is because after a certain threshold expensive jewellery is likely to be made of precious materials, those of which are certainly tarnish resistant. As mentioned previously costume jewellery “refers to ornaments made of silver and non-precious metals such as base metals, substitute gems, and a range of plastics” (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.43). It can be fair to assume that the ‘luxury’ jewellery industry that they are referring to does not refer to costume jewellery. According to Gänsicke, S et al, (2019, p.119) jewellery will tarnish if chemical changes occur on the surface layer of a metal or alloy. This tarnishing is one of the most obvious ways

jewellery can deteriorate. This is because precious metal jewellery such as “Pure gold does not react chemically” (Gänsicke, S et al, 2019, p.119) on its surface. This would mean that only skill and craftsmanship can be the variation in product quality in the luxury jewellery industry that is being referred to.

This type of marketing shows a brand that is catering to consumers with an expectation for quality regardless of the price. This jewellery that they are making is certainly costume jewellery. This attitude toward the ‘luxury’ jewellery industry is misplaced and is certainly a spread of misinformation to their customers. Their ‘long lasting’ jewellery claim explains their jewellery’s colour lasts up to two years, while other companies colour only last for two months (Hey Harper, 2022). Who are these other companies they are referencing? Surely as mentioned previously this cannot be the ‘pretentious’ luxury industry of jewellery that they are referring to, as of our research this information has been proven to be blatantly untrue. As mentioned previously, it is my hypothesis that jewellery now has a much shorter life expectancy. It is worrying that this two-year colour expectancy is considered ‘long lasting’ according to this brand. Richard Evans notes a very valid point in his Journal article ‘Business Ethics and Changes in Society’ Explaining that “businesses are not distinct social entities but merely activities of society as a whole” (Evans, R. 1991, p.872) they can give huge insight to portions of society and their mindsets as well as write a narrative for a large group of people.

To answer the question why aren’t precious metals still desirable to the modern consumer? To give the brand the benefit of the doubt, it could be true that quality jewellery is not easily accessible to the everyday consumer. Cheap jewellery is now important because people don’t want to pay the large, sometimes unreachable price for quality jewellery. According to Tolkien and Wilkinson (1997) it is no secret that ‘Real’

jewellery is an expensive commodity. It is true that “Precious jewelry, in which all or most all of the materials used, such as gold, diamonds, pearls or gemstones are considered valuable in their own right.” (Tolkien, T and Wilkinson, H, 1997). With overconsumption becoming a normal everyday experience for many, there is room to assume that now many consumers expect jewellery to become green over time.

There has been a push by the media for seasonal, trendy consumption throughout the 20th and 21st century. A sample analysis by Denisova, A. (2021) over 1000 women’s ads were analysed, this varied from Influential Instagram posts to whole magazine issues. They counted all of the linguistic ways that encouraged a consumer mindset described as ‘tropes of consumption’, examples of this being ‘must-have’, ‘upgrade your wardrobe’, ‘hot’, ‘cool’, ‘game-changing’ in these types of media (Denisova, A. 2021, p.15-16). It is hard to blame the consumer for their overconsumption with this kind of pressure being put on them. Brands that encourage overconsumption must take responsibility for their contribution to landfill waste, “businesses can no longer be discussed merely in terms of its social impact since so many businesses today are international in their ownership, employment, the distribution of their products and the environmental impact of their by-products” (Evans, R. 1991, p.872).



Figure 7. Hey Harper (2022) About us, 'Anti-luxury' Video

Is this brand a better option for consumers? And is what they are doing better for the environment? with this price point, how much are workers being paid and where are these pieces being made? According to Saleem Ali (2009, p.9) “around 13 million people in 30 countries are engaged in small scale mining.” And a further “80 to 100 million individuals across the developing world rely on income that is indirectly derived from the industry” (Ali, S. H. 2009, p.9). Saleem further explains that incomes from small scale mining can be ‘sporadic’, with “environmental health and safety poorly regulated” (Ali, S. H. 2009, p.9). It is difficult to confirm where the materials used by Hey Harper are coming from, but from a personal perspective it is difficult to get past the aggressive marketing techniques and misinformation being spread by this brand. It is difficult to trust the products of a brand with marketing that sends such a clear negative narrative against other companies of the same industry, particularly without promoting ethical or sustainable practices in its advertisements. If any of the materials used are recycled, why are they not advertising that?

According to the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment ((CCSI), 2016, p.51) mining provides us with many materials used in everyday objects, however, it generates a lot of unusable waste. Mining is bad for the environment; we need to minimise the need to mine. Regardless of the current challenges mining already faces, the materials gained that can be used from the processes of mining can ‘minimise the inputs to waste’ through recycling of those materials (CCSI, 2016, p.51). The world needs to become more accustomed to purchasing recycled jewellery and eventually recycling jewellery. Saleem states that “Consumers should carefully consider the source of minerals and ascertain what government mechanisms are in place to regulate the industry in that region.” (Ali, S. H. 2009, p.11) to reduce waste and to prevent encouragement of unfair or unsafe labour. Unfortunately, according to Evans “the objectives of businesses are easily diverted towards minority interests, such as maximisation of profit for the owners” (Evans, R. 1991, p.873) this can lead businesses choosing to use unethical resources and/or labour to increase profit. Pressure needs to be put onto these businesses to change.

Mining within the jewellery supply chain can improve, “Sustainable mining entails minimising inputs of water, energy, land, chemicals and other materials, as well as outputs of waste, effluent and emissions.” (CCSI, 2016, p.52). Communities and consumers need to voice their concerns to drive these miners towards more ecological practices using the ‘appropriate incentives and regulatory enforcement’ (Ali, S. H. 2009, p.11). this can be done by businesses choosing to only purchase ethical and sustainable materials, forcing the mining industry to reconsider their current practices. “Consumers have developed a powerful lobbying voice and can significantly influence retail companies through their spending choices” Black, S. (2010) Once the burden of logistical growing pains that come with the development of more ecological mining as

well as perfecting recycling for consumers passes it will be easier to keep this sustainability cycle going.

The CCSI's proposition to do this involves a collaboration between governments and companies 'across the supply chain' (CCSI, 2016, p.51). Moving on, what should we hope for and expect from companies and the world of design in the future? As designers we are responsible for the impact our products make on the world, good and bad. According to Sara Marcketti (2020) "Design is increasingly moving towards positive change, offering a perspective that considers global impact rather than just an individual's desire", examples being the price point or profit. According to Marcketti (2020) "Currently, there is no one model or checklist for designing sustainable, circular fashion". This issue needs to be recognised sooner rather than later as this could prevent further complications as we the world will have to correct mistakes that have been previously made. According to (Marcketti, S. 2020) we should be "Broadening the designer's role beyond individual garments to look at designing new systems for consumption, use, and disposal" and proposing systems that begins at the design stage of how the product can be eventually recycled or reused. This is important for the jewellery industry because it is very easy to make pieces from appropriate and sustainable materials. To be given the choice to do otherwise is extremely unnecessary.

A company that stands out to me in achieving sustainable business practices Chupi jewellery. Founded by designer and current CEO Chupi Sweetman, her aim was to create beautiful 'heirloom' jewellery using responsible, sustainable business practices (Chupi, 2022). According to the Chupi's (2022) Website 'Our Story' Page, the company was created in Ireland with a mission to create long lasting pieces using '100% recycled gold and lab-grown, recycled or mines diamonds certified through the Kimberly process'. This kind of positive action toward change is much to be admired,

according to the Kimberly Process (2022) website, the Kimberly process “is a multilateral trade regime established in 2003 with the goal of preventing the flow of conflict diamonds” (Kimberly Process, 2022).



Figure 8. Chupi (2022) ‘The Chupi experience’

Ethical and sustainable design in jewellery is an easy choice. As an industry we have the ability to enforce change not only in the way we obtain materials, but also the ability to change the minds of consumers about how much that they consume. It is my personal feeling that it is unnecessary for the cheap jewellery industry to be oversaturated due to their encouragement of overconsumption and output of landfill waste. According to Black (2010) “Ethical and sustainability awareness have become a fundamental part of everyday life in twenty-first-century society, engendering significant changes in behaviour”. The general public as customers have the ability to drive the industrial change as. Overall sustainability education should be more widespread.

Conclusion

Jewellery in the modern world is complicated. It has evolved from something worn by only the elite to a widespread public activity. Jewellery told people about who you are, where you came from and your role in society. It indicated class and was something to be respected. The evolution of materials in jewellery has greatly impacted our societal view of these pieces. “With peer pressure to dress fashionably, as well as the easy consumption of high-end counterfeit goods, some believe that it is their right to have the same access to high fashion and luxury as the wealthy.” (Marcketti et al. 2020). Similar to fast fashion, jewellery has become disposable. This attitude needs to change.

In this research essay we have discussed the European Medieval-Renaissance relationship with jewellery. We learned that they had a very strong relationship with jewellery in their everyday life. This could be seen in the ornament of their armour, their perception of jewellery to be functional in items such as belt buckles and the use of jewellery as a reward for notable service. As we moved into the modern-day use of jewellery, we can see that jewellery moved away from tradition with an artistic movement. We see that jewellery of ‘no intrinsic worth’ popularised and saw the beginning of mass-produced jewellery. The market of jewellery has become oversaturated with costume jewellery which has lowered the life expectancy of jewellery significantly.

There are many changes that need to be made within the jewellery industry, many of which can and will enhance the experience of that object for the consumer. Jewellery does not need to be made out of cheap and disposable materials and are ultimately less functional that way. The jewellery industry can encourage more ethical mining through preventing purchase from unethical and unsafe mines. Jewellery companies can make better choices in the materials that they use, ensuring a long lifespan for their products.

Consumers can choose to buy less and longer lasting jewellery to prevent landfill waste. If we work together as a society, we can uphold these standards. We as an industry do not need to take part in fast fashions or overconsumption.

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