

Jewelry in the Cycles of Everyday Life

Petra Ahde

University of Art and Design Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland, petra.ahde@taik.fi

Abstract: This paper explores the relation of jewelry in cycles of everyday life. Rituals and emotional attachments connected to jewelry have a strong influence in wearing and possessing jewelry. Families and kinship act an important role when emotional attachments are arising and merging in to jewelry. Emotional attachments as well as jewelry being part of family traditions make the biographies of jewelry long. Long biographies of products could be considered as design drivers when designing new products. This paper discusses about two aspects, emotions and rituals, which could be taken under consideration when designing new jewelry.

Key words: *Jewelry, rituals, emotions*

1. Introduction

This paper discusses about people expressing their societal connections by their jewelry [3, 6]. Pieces of jewelry play an important role in people's lives indicating them as individuals in their kinships as they also indicate individuals' life rhythm [7]. Wearing jewelry as societal signs can be compared to the ways of wearing totemic items in Durkheim's early sociological study about primitive cultures in North America and Australia [3]. However, the way people wear these societal signs are nowadays in western cultures broader, since it is not anymore the only way to express the kinship one belongs to. According to Durkheim, the jewelry as totemic items were worn on kinship related occasions, where it was meaningful to indicate which clan one belonged to. Nowadays people have alternative ways to express their kin, e.g. family names and more permanent places in which to live. Therefore, I discuss here about wearing jewelry nowadays being not only about expressing one's own style, but also expressing their societal aspects. So, in consequence of that, the jewelry worn is not only a sign of being part of the kin but also signals individuals' place in the kin and acts as signs of social status. Sociologist Georg Simmel has made a notion of adorning in European upper class about a century ago [8, 10]. He argues in his essay "Adornment" that people have two main reasons to adorn themselves: 1) they are pleasing the others with the adornments 2) while they are expecting the ones they have pleased with their adornments to return the favor. In order to get feedback, respect and admiration for their jewelry, people have to participate in social gatherings, which, in Simmel's time, typically took place in leisure time. These reasons to adorn are also true nowadays.

2. Data and analysis

This paper is based on literature and on stories people have written about their jewelry. Kalevala Women's Association collected the stories through a writing competition for their purpose to preserve Finnish oral history.

I have studied 464 stories written by Finnish women of different backgrounds. The stories were truly versatile since the people wrote under the title “*Jewelry Speaks of Its Wearer*” without any further rules. A writing competition with a title but no further rules gave freedom for authors to write about what they felt worth mentioning. This way of collecting data does not give restrictions for the contents but makes it more comprehensive. For this paper I have studied further the stories that have discussed jewelry in relation to life’s rhythms. Often in the stories, the everyday life wearing of jewelry and wearing them on special occasions was described. Many of the stories also discussed about the memories connected to jewelry. These memories often grow from the special occasions where jewelry is worn. These special occasions were discussed more thoroughly when there were more emotions involved. According to the stories, memories of special occasions are stronger when the emotions related to them are stronger [see also 3]. The versatility of the stories did not make the data interpretation simpler, but richer. To gain data interpretation insights, we conducted three different data interpretation workshops with fellow researchers. These three interpretation workshops were run with a design game approach in three different locations (Helsinki, Chicago, and Kuopio) and with three different groups of participants (jewelry company representatives, design research students and jewelry design students) [9]. The outcomes of all three interpretation workshops were rather similar which made them reliable in a design research setting.

3. Jewelry in Rituals

According to the stories, wearing and possessing jewelry is above all related to the social practises people are involved with. These social practises have a strong influence on both everyday life and special occasions. The everyday life social practises are often related to work and leisure time whereas the social practises related to special occasions are related to loved people and achievements, for example Christmas, birthday parties and graduations. According to the stories, people have different ways of wearing jewelry depending on the occasion. Some pieces of jewelry are worn only on family related special occasions; some are everyday life jewelry, while wearing some jewelry overlaps between these two socially different states of life. Sometimes jewelry ought to be worn only on particular occasions, which has led to the situation that they have been worn only once per person. Like the brooch in the following quotation. It is only worn by the brides of the family on their weddings.

“My mother Edda’s engagement jewellery is the adornment of the family’s brides’ wedding dresses. [...] She (author’s sister) has brought it to the wedding occasions to adorn the wedding dresses. It has been at least on Riitta’s, Elina’s, Peppi’s, Jaana’s, and Mirja’s wedding dresses. Some of them have worn it in front in the middle and some of them on the side depending on the bride. “

Rituals are an essential part of family oriented festive occasions. Di Leonardo argues on behalf of the importance of the rituals when starting a new life in a new environment after her study of Italian-American immigrants’ life in California [4]. She points out the fact that women are the ones who perpetuate not only the rituals but also all the social connections inside the kin. They organize the social occasions, send the holiday cards and cherish, perpetuate or create the objects related to the rituals. According to the stories, jewelry worn in rituals of family related occasions are societal signs. Wearing the jewelry on family occasions is more about people feeling being part of their kinships than just pleasing the others by looking good. People feel that the jewelry they are wearing connects them to their family. Therefore, the occasions to wear the particular pieces of jewelry are considerate and meaningful. Durkheim argues in his study, about totemic items in archaic societies, that by wearing particular totemic items people indicated themselves as part of the society [3]. This same feature is seen in the

stories; the authors describe that wearing a particular jewelry strengthens their connection to the family. The author of the following quotation is expressing her feeling about being one loop in the chain of women.

"This necklace is not for everyday wearing. When wearing this necklace I feel that I am a loop in a millenary chain of women; attached to its joy and grief. It is demanding for its wearer and for the wearer's outfit. It is a piece of jewelry for festive occasions."

4. Emotions and Jewelry

Strong emotions often arise when wearing or just possessing jewelry, since they are often received as gifts, inherited, bought for an important reason, or there has been hard work done to achieve it. Later, the emotional attachments may provoke or restrict wearing them. When memories related to the jewelry are truly meaningful the possessor considers wearing it more carefully. Since some people are afraid of losing their significant jewelry, they only wear them on important occasions. Some emotion attached jewelry is worn both on special occasions and in everyday life. They may ought to be worn on certain occasions. For example one woman writes about her brooch which she got as a Christmas present when she was a young girl. Back then she was helping a lady in her everyday errands and they became close friends despite of their age difference. This brooch figured a dancing girl. Decades later this lady passed away, and the woman went to the funeral wearing this brooch. She felt that she had to wear that particular brooch because she had got it from the lady. However, since the brooch figured a dancing girl, she felt it was inappropriate to wear it at a funeral. She decided to wear it inside her jacket, so the others would not see the brooch but she could feel the closeness to the lady. For her it was obligatory to wear the brooch because of the emotional attachment. The codes of wearing jewelry in particular venues do not have strict rules, but are rather emotional unwritten codes of behaviour or habits to perpetuate traditions.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The two themes discussed in this paper are rituals and emotions, and how they are related in wearing and possessing jewelry. According to the stories, emotional attachments people have with their jewelry influence wearing them. These emotional attachments have grown during the time and are strongly related to occasions where they were received and worn. The paper also discusses about rituals in which jewelry is involved. We saw that jewelry often ends up as a physical object of an intangible memory of some special occasion. Later this physical object will act as a memento of that special occasion. The tangible object also helps the story or memory to be remembered and handed down to the next generation.

In more theoretical terms, the reasons to adorn and wear pieces of jewelry do not differ too much from the times and societies Georg Simmel and Emil Durkheim have studied. Durkheim, whose study is based on archaic societies in North America and Australia, about a century ago, argues that pieces of jewelry are one kind of totemic items. Simmel, who was Durkheim's coeval, studied sociology of European upper class and argues that adorning is for oneself and at the same time adorning for others in order for one to be complimented by the others. These same reasons for adorning can be found from the present stories I studied for this paper, although the reason for wearing pieces of jewelry presented by Durkheim is different from Simmel's. According to Durkheim, people adorned themselves to classify themselves as part of their society, not because of expressing themselves as individuals, which Simmel argues for. Nevertheless, both of these reasons to wear jewelry and

adorn are true nowadays. However, since our societies are different from the ones Durkheim and Simmel have studied, these theories do not work completely in today's world. We do not live in societies today, which are determined by clans, as were the ones Durkheim studied. Today we have also other ways to express the kinship we belong to than totemic items. Nowadays we express our kinships not only by jewelry as today's totemic items, but also for example by our family names, by nationalities, as well as by our styles. The style, however, is no longer predominantly only about expressing the social class which we belong to, as it was in the time and society where Simmel made his conclusions.

These reasons to adorn are not always mediated from wearers to viewers, but still people do communicate with their jewelry. People indicate the cycles of their everyday life by adorning themselves differently on special and on ordinary days. As the stories asserted, the cycles of life are essential in ways of adorning. People connect themselves to the family histories with their jewelry. Wearing jewelry has roles in perpetuating the family traditions and rituals. Jewelry is often worn or handed down in emotional family related occasions. In these occasions the memories and emotional attachments arise. Memories and emotions related to jewelry influence their long biographies. When people have emotional attachments with their jewelry, they tend to take more care of their jewelry and perpetuate them in order to hand them down in families. Such understanding of life cycles, emotions and rituals can also be used as design drivers when designing jewelry.

6. References

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