

The Symbolic Meaning of Diamond Engagement Rings

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Symbolism

Based on our interviews, all of our receivers and givers agree that diamond rings mean “love and forever.” One of the receivers, KC, states that the diamond ring means a promise from her partner. They were in a long distance relationship where she lived in Philippines and her partner, Alejandro, lived in Nevada. For her, the ring was a promise to her that he will take care of her and their love would last forever. However, some of the receivers think it is acceptable if they get married or engaged without diamond ring. Elena said that it was just important to have a ring which shows that “you are old fashion-ly taken for”.

Based on the receivers and givers responses, they are both influenced by their culture. Most of them mentioned that they think it is normal to get married with diamond rings since it is culturally expected of them. This cultural norm has lasted for a long time, so the concept that the diamond represents “love and forever” will always be in the back of their minds. Though, not receiving a diamond engagement ring would not change the strength of the relationship and feelings of the person. This can suggest why some of the informants mentioned that receiving specifically a diamond ring was not that important.

Gestation

Almost all the givers spent high effort and time into looking for the “perfect” ring. That effort impacted the receivers greatly. They were more appreciative and proud at the fact their partner spent a lot of time searching for a ring the receiver would like. Even though the receivers did not strongly desire a diamond engagement ring, the fact that their partner put a lot of effort made the ring mean more. This was shared in Elena’s interview. She said that her future husband did so much to make sure that the ring was perfect for her and even considered how the ring would affect her work. It gave the ring more meaning to both the giver and receiver.

Furthermore, one of the givers, Drew, mentioned that during the proposal, girls have the chance to say no. Although he might not care about giving a diamond engagement ring, he knows that girls care. Since he loves this girl and cares about her needs, he made sure that he presented her with a diamond ring.

Presentation

Based on our informants proposal stories, the meaning that the presentation gave to the ring was primarily because it was reflective of their relationship. The best example to support this is the proposal of Steven and Natalie. Steven wanted the proposal to be grand and perfect. It was on fourth of July and they were lighting fireworks together; however, he accidentally dropped the ring, Natalie fell, and nothing went quite as planned. Nevertheless, when asked about their engagement, they both explained this story laughing and agreed that it was the perfect reflection of their relationship.

Reformulation

The gesture and the presentation of the ring strengthened and affirmed the relationships of the couples. Again using the example of Steven and Natalie, they bonded over the hiccups in the proposal even more. When looking at KC's and Alejandro's engagement, his presentation was very casual. Regardless of that, to KC since they had a long distance relationship, it meant that he would always be there for her. It strengthened and affirmed what they had together.

Associations

At first some of the receivers said that they did not require the ring for the proposal; however, when other factors such as family, friends, and expectations came up, they admitted that they would want a ring. The diamond industry has created an associated reference group for men and women. Men's associated references group, is a happy fiancé because he gave her "the

ring.” Women’s associated reference group is a bride to be that has an engagement ring.

Cultural Meaning

Based on the interviews, one of the reasons why the receiver wants the ring is based on cultural norms and pressure that their family and friends gives them. For the informants Elena and Damon, Damon’s family was present during the proposal which took place on a vacation in Germany. Immediately after Elena showed everyone that was there and she FaceTimed her best friend and family back home. This shows that family was her top priority.

Only recently have cultures given women some type of freedom and independence. Susannah Wellford (2017) explains in U.S. News that in America, “marriage has evolved a lot since the times when women had to marry to survive. Love and emotional support are the key reasons that people marry now, not financial necessity.” Though, there are still some old fashion families need to know that someone will take care of their daughter for them. The best way for them to know that the giver is financially stable is a diamond engagement ring. If the giver can provide an expensive ring, then that must mean that they can take care of their daughter. It also shows to the public that the woman is marrying a man of money and maybe even status. Elena claimed that if she received a ring with a smaller diamond, she wouldn’t care; however, she would feel like she would have to defend her finance for giving her a ring that had less of a monetary value. In addition, another receiver, Natalie, mentioned influences from her Armenian heritage. She mentioned that the taste and style for a ring is rooted to the typically “flashy” taste in Armenian culture. She states that being able to show off a fancy looking ring helps with family approval.

Contrary to that, the receiver, KC, mentions filipino culture and why she did not expect a diamond ring. Living in the Philippines, she stated that it was uncommon to be presented with a

diamond engagement ring. The meaning of the ring was different for her culturally; however, she admitted that receiving the ring also helped with family approval. The cultural expectations between these two informants are different, yet the visible gesture of effort and financial stability reassured their families.

Beliefs

Historically speaking, men were expected by society to provide for their spouse. According to the article “The true significance of a diamond engagement ring, and how to make it even more special!,” Toby Gray (n.d.) states, “a diamond engagement ring is a symbol of certainty for a woman, it represents the security that comes with being in a committed relationship, and tells all the world that she is significant in your eyes.” Using KC and Alejandro’s situation, the ring represents a promise that they will not only reunite, but also get married one day.

Importance

When asked what makes a diamond engagement ring important to our informants, most of them used language such as “it’s just what you do,” “it’s what’s expected,” or “it’s a custom.” However; it was revealed that the importance of the ring was not for them as individuals.

The importance of a diamond ring for receivers ultimately came down to receiving family and social approval. KC and Elena both admitted that although they were not necessarily looking for a diamond engagement ring, being able to show it to their family and have their approval meant a lot to them.

The primary importance of a diamond ring amongst the givers is to make their partner happy. A majority of the givers admitted to spending a lot of time and high effort to research engagement rings and what their partner might like in terms of style. They all mentioned that

their partner is going to “wear the ring for the rest of their life” so their partner’s taste and style was the most important consideration. Their partner needed to like it, but the givers also needed to be able to afford it. All the givers stated that finances and cost is a secondary consideration, so once they found a “perfect” ring in regards to style, they then sought out for the best price.

Marketing and Consumer Implications

After conducting interviews and analyzing the responses, we found that our receivers still believe in the symbolism of getting an engagement ring. They know that it is important to have the ring as a symbol of being officially “taken” and no longer single; however, some explained that it did not necessarily have to be a diamond ring. This is important for jewelers and marketers to be aware of. The trend and cultural norm of giving and receiving a diamond ring may not be as popular going forward in the future. While it has a long history of tradition, a few of our receivers would be satisfied with alternative rings.

It is clear to see that family and culture play a big part in why couples still follow the tradition of giving a diamond ring. There are lot of external pressures that make them feel like they need to conform to this. This includes their family, friends, colleagues, and society as a whole. Deciding to not give a diamond ring could cause a lot of judgement and criticism from others, especially since diamonds are supposed to mean “forever”. It is common to see pictures of engaged couples (specifically on social media) where the bride-to-be is showcasing her ring. These pictures are constant reminders saying that diamond rings are for getting engaged. Not following this may make the couple feel like they are not engaged.

Recommendations

The slogan “a diamond is forever” takes partial credit for the tradition of giving diamond engagement rings. Jacob Shamsian (2017) says that, “the reason diamonds are the gem of choice

is because of a massively successful advertising campaign from one of the biggest diamond companies in the history of the world". This marketing campaign and slogan has brainwashed consumers in believing that they have to give diamond engagement rings. Marketers need to work hard to help continue this trend if they want to make sales in the future. Jewelers should promote their diamond rings through commercials that appeal to consumers emotions. To be more specific, it should elicit positive emotional appeal where the consumer thinks about their parents and grandparents getting engaged and married. It will hopefully make them want to follow in their footsteps of engaging with a diamond ring.

Companies need to be prepared for the possible changes in the diamond ring engagement trend. Based off what our receivers mentioned, it would be a smart move to offer alternative rings. It could be rings that still have diamonds but also incorporates gems like rubies, emeralds, or sapphires. This is something that can already be seen with celebrities and famous figures. Kate Middleton received an oval sapphire gem ring that was surrounded by a bed of diamonds which was proposed to her by Prince William. Since consumers are easily influenced by people like this, it can be assumed that there will be a demand for these types of rings in the future.

References

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