

JEWELRY AS PROVOCATEURS OF EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how emotions provoke wearing and possessing of jewelry. Emotions act an important role in the individual's mores, customs and habits with their sensitivity of jewelry. This paper illustrates jewelry provoking emotions from the possessor's individual past and from their family histories. Jewelry is often possessed by many generations in the families and due to their long biographies various memories are often attached to jewelry.

Keywords: emotions, design, jewelry, narrative data, design probes

1. INTRODUCTION

"In the 60's, my mother got a silver pendant as an engagement gift from her fiancé, who later became my father. Their marriage has lasted longer than three decades. It has been powerful, lively and has at times faced even major difficulties. My parents are committed to each other, since they have promised to stay together until the end. Now when they have become seamlessly merged with each other, I admire their calm happiness. At the eve of my wedding day I got the same pendant from my parents. For me, it symbolizes perdurability, trust, and commitment over problems."

People's possessions work as provocateurs of emotions experienced in the past as the quotation above states. According to the data studied for this paper, the original emotion may have been experienced by someone else but still, the current possessor of the product may evoke and feel that emotion when wearing the jewelry. For example, if the jewelry symbolized love and commitment for the earlier possessor, as for the mother above, it will provoke the same emotions for the current possessor, the daughter. According to the data

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studied for this research, families connect their meaningful jewelry to rituals in family gatherings to perpetuate the stories, histories and beliefs attached to their jewelry.

This paper will explore how significant objects provoke emotions. Wearing and possessing jewelry evokes emotions through connections with meaningful people and occasions. People tend to create emotional attachments with their meaningful possessions. These emotional attachments grow as time passes and when there have been special occasions and people related to the product's history. The product biographies will lengthen when the possessor considers products as significant. When the possessions are considered significant people are willing to perpetuate, cherish and take care of them in order to have them for a longer period of time, and also to pass them to the future generations.

This paper will not instruct designers on how to design longer lasting emotional products, but it will open the discussion about the significance of kinship related, loved old objects. This paper proposes that the long biographies of current possessions could be applied as design drivers for future product design.

2. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Besides the literature review, three diverse ways to approach the topic of emotional attachments were applied in this paper. First I interpreted and analyzed 464 stories women wrote about their significant jewelry. This narrative data are truly versatile since people wrote for a writing competition under the title "*Jewelry Speaks of Its Wearer*" without any further rules. The stories were gathered in Finland in spring 2007. People were asked to write about their jewelry via news paper ads across the country. I have studied the stories by using a qualitative data interpretation approach even though the number of stories is high. Secondly, we developed a design game called "*Narri*" to interpret the stories in groups [1]. The stories were interpreted in three different design game sessions. Thirdly, I conducted a survey by applying a Design Probes [2] approach. There 28 research participants self documented their ways of wearing jewelry and were interviewed.

2.1. Narri

After initiative interpretation of the narratives we [1] developed a design game called "*Narri*". The data were interpreted by applying a design game "*Narri*" which was developed to manage the interpretation of such a big number of stories while consuming fewer resources. We arranged three individual design game sessions to interpret the stories. The set-up for each session was different but the protocol of the game was the same. The design game approach for interpreting stories was found to be an efficient way to study the stories. Three different data interpretation workshops with help from fellow researchers were conducted. 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. First jewelry company representatives played the game to get deeper understanding of end users' thoughts of their jewelry, then jewelry design students used the game as a starting point for their design project and then design research students to learn about interpreting narrative data and to improve the game "*Narri*" [1]. The outcomes of all

three interpretation workshops were rather similar with each other, which made them reliable in a design research setting.

2.2. Design Probes and in-depth interviews

In addition to the stories gathered for this research I have conducted a Design Probes study [2] and in-depth interviews with 13 participants in the Chicago area in the United States, and 15 participants in the Helsinki area in Finland. With the additional data gathering from a small number of participants I wanted to verify and narrow the initial insights raised from the large narrative data. The design of the self documentation kits in the Design Probes study was based on the initial insights of the interpretation of the narrative data. The kits were designed to evoke the memories connected to jewelry and for participants to document their everyday wearing of jewelry. They were asked to photograph and sketch their jewelry, and write about the histories of them, as well as to describe the timelines of the jewelry. The follow-up interviews were conducted after the participants returned the self-documentation kits. The interviews were conducted with in-depth interview protocol and discussed topics were based on the information the participant provided with the self-documentation kit.

All the quotations in this paper are from stories from the narrative data or from interviews. The pictures are from the Design Probes self documentation kits or taken by the author during the interviews.

3. EMOTIONS

People tend to build emotional attachments with their jewelry. Emotions can be loaded to the jewelry in everyday life occasions and in special occasions. Attaching emotions may happen whenever there is something worth memorizing in the possessor's life. It may be a feeling of good luck in an everyday life event or it may be a feeling of closeness to the ancestors in a ritualistic family gathering like a wedding. One cannot decide beforehand when the emotional attachments with jewelry arise, but based on the stories, family related venues filled with rituals give good settings for them to arise. According to the stories, many people connect themselves to their family histories with pieces of jewelry. Since jewelry are worn, handed down and received as gifts in family related rituals they perpetuate these rituals for the future possessors as well [3, 4].

Sometimes people can gain powers or energy from other people related to jewelry. They can be the jewelry's earlier possessors or the persons who gave them or the producers or designers of jewelry. Like in the following quotation, the possessor of these pieces feels closeness to the jeweler from a distance. She is wearing jewelry because she feels that she gains energy from the jeweler. The jeweler is a colourful, lively and energetic person with whom the possessor feels closeness when wearing these pieces of jewelry. In this case, the possessor has met the jeweler personally several times and knows her, and describes her, the jeweler, as being an eccentric personality who is mediating some of her character through her creations to the possessor. The possessor of the jewelry is feeling the closeness of the jeweler even they live far away from each other.

"It's too much a part of her. As I continue to wear Sandra's pieces, I know they have become a part of me also. It's sort of like being with her even though she is a thousand miles away."

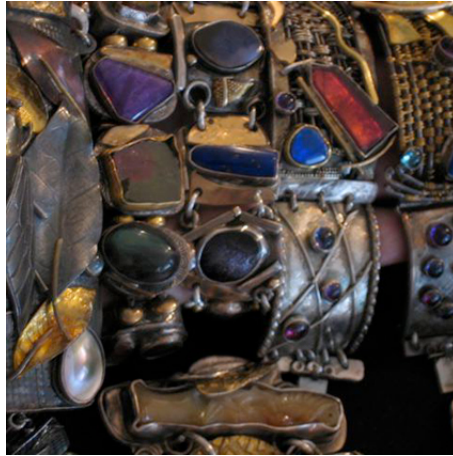


Figure 1: The energetic personality of the jeweler is being mediated to the current possessor of this piece when she is wearing jewelry made by her.

Pieces of jewelry with emotional attachments are also worn to highlight earlier experienced emotions. They are tying the wearers to the past emotion related occasions. According to the stories, people are wearing particular pieces of jewelry in order to feel closeness to earlier experiences and to the people related to those. People are gaining various powers especially related to family members and family histories when wearing emotionally meaningful jewelry. The powers are mediated whenever they are believed to be needed [5]. People feel that they gain various kinds of powers from the jewelry they wear. Sometimes they wear the jewelry when they have a need for certain power, for instance protection or happiness. But, sometimes jewelry is believed to provide powers like happiness or protection, so people are wearing them in their everyday life. Sometimes it is thought that that it is better to avoid unhappiness by wearing happiness providing jewelry, while some people are wearing them only when they need happiness. [5].

4. MEMORIES

Emotions are often built up on the strong memories from the past [6]. When a person is involved in some extraordinary occasion it will be remembered in the future. People's world views are built on the memories and important emotional happenings from their pasts. Often jewelry is involved in emotional occasions, especially when those are related to families or family rituals.

Jewelry is often received as gifts for special reasons [7]. I have distinguished reasons for receiving into three categories: age, achievement, and calendar related gifts, based on the stories. In this categorization, the age related gifts are e.g. birthday presents, or gifts got because of confirmation school. Achievement related gifts are received as e.g. a recompense for work done, graduation gifts, or when one has retired on a pension from daily work. Then, the calendar related gifts are e.g. Christmas gifts, wedding anniversary gifts, or Mothers' Day gifts. Women in the stories described receiving gifts as truly emotional happenings. As pieces of jewelry act as key objects in the emotional happenings thereafter they start to act as mementos of those emotions. According to the stories, it is important for possessors to

reminisce upon and memorize the stories related to jewelry in order to feel them again. These memories are often handed down to the future possessors with the physical product. So to say, the pieces of jewelry act as vessels in which possessors can load memories and emotions in order to be able to store them and pass them on to the future possessors [8]. According to the stories, people seem to need to attach intangible memories into the tangible objects. It is also important to carry the memories. Memories become tangible with jewelry and people can carry them with them. The memory related pieces of jewelry become memory containers for their possessors [8]. Sometimes, when the jewelry is old, memories are from particular eras in the person's life like the pins in the following picture. But often memories are from particular occasions.



Figure 2: Pins of bib with pearl and mother of pearl ornaments. An 84 years old grandmother got them in her very early days, and is now wearing them to provoke the memories from the childhood home.

According to the stories, often pieces of jewelry received as souvenirs have a similar function as memory vessels as have the other gifts [7, 6]. It does not make a difference whether souvenirs are received from someone or bought by the possessor herself. Also other pieces of jewelry bought by the possessors themselves often end up as memory vessels. Only time and emotion related occasions are needed for the piece of jewelry to become a meaningful piece of jewelry loaded with memories.

“My sister gave me a necklace that she bought when she was on vacation. And, it does have that look like she picked it up from one of those beach vendors. It is just a necklace with a lot of shells on it. I think I’ve maybe worn it once. But, my sister and I we don’t get along at all. Sometimes I just feel like if I never see her again it is just fine. But I keep that piece of jewelry just because... It just reminds me of the time she gave me a gift that was nice. But, I never wear it.”

The memories connected to the pieces of jewelry are not always nice or positive. The quotation above states that even if at the moment the possessor cannot get along with her sister, the piece of jewelry reminds of the time their relationship was still nice. The following quotation is about an unpleasant memory, but the piece itself is nowadays a statement of the good marriage and getting thorough hard times together. This woman was pregnant with

twins who were born too early and who did not survive. After the funeral, her husband gave her a bracelet with a heart with their names on it. She wanted to have something which would remind her of the twins, and that she could always have with her and close to her body, touching her. Therefore, she got this bracelet with the names of the twins engraved on the heart in it.

“And I would wear it every day, just to kind of have them with me.”



Figure 3: A woman carries a bracelet with the names of her twin daughters who did not survive premature labor. She wanted to have something tangible to remind her of this unhappy event; even though she would not ever forget it.

5. FAMILIES

According to the stories, family relations play an important role in memories and emotions connecting to jewelry. Pieces of jewelry are often handed down to next generations in families. The processes of handing down jewelry often follow unwritten rules in the families. Often, it is preplanned who will be the new possessor of a family heirloom. Also, handing down processes follow formulas that have developed in families during decades or even centuries. These handing down processes are similar to the handing down of totemic items in archaic societies Emile Durkheim studied about a century ago. He discovered the formulas inside the clans where people were handing down objects and mores related to the totemic objects. [4] When a tangible piece of jewelry is handed down to a new possessor, the intangible memories and emotions connected to the piece of jewelry are handed as well in the form of stories. According to the stories, when purchasing new jewelry, people sometimes think their future as not being possessions of the current owner but also future members of families. Like in the quotation below, the informant, who has two sons, wishes for a daughter so that she could feel being worthy of having more expensive jewelry. Thereby, the jewelry would not only be her possession but also her daughter's possession.

“I may wear those ones even when I get old. ...Hmmm. ...I want a daughter. Yes, because one of my friends says, who has a daughter, I can give this to my daughter. Even if it is so expensive it is good to wear for me and my daughter.” (Yumiko)

Even if this quotation shows the wish for the next generation, pieces of jewelry often work as connectors between the generations. Often the same piece of jewelry may be worn and possessed by many generations in the families [9]. These multigenerationally possessed pieces of jewelry may evoke emotions from many generations ago. According to the stories, women wrote about the emotions that their mothers or grandmothers had felt and nowadays they feel the same emotions when wearing the same piece of jewelry. In the following quotation the current possessor of the necklace is hoping that the future possessors may have the same feelings that she and the earlier possessors have had when wearing it.

“Some day I want to give it to my own daughter and hope that she will pass it on to hers, and maybe the chain can continue even longer. One woman’s happy moment could continue in a women’s, mothers’ memento throughout generations.”

Since jewelry is often received as gifts from family members, they act as connectors to them, and provoke emotions connected to gift givers. The owner of the brooch in figure 4 is the grandmother of the girl who made it from bark at school. This brooch is one of the grandmother's fall jewelry because of its color and earthy feeling, and it is as worthy as the ones she has made of precious materials.



Figure 4: The brooch is made by attaching a heart shaped piece of bark onto the ready made brooch mechanism. This brooch is made by the possessor’s granddaughter.

6. RITUALS

People sometimes need to memorize occasions and people from their past for various reasons. Memorizing can be collective or personal. Collective memorizing happens for instance in rituals connected to the family gatherings when pieces of jewelry are involved. These ritualistic family gatherings are for instance Christmas parties, weddings or funerals

[3, 4, 10, 11]. In these venues, jewelry may have some kind of a role; they may be given, received, handed down or worn in a ritualistic way. The roles of the jewelry in the rituals connect them to the possessors' lives. The ritualistic way of handling jewelry is made up of the mores of the ritual. Therefore, the possessors have to perpetuate the mores linked to the jewelry as well as the jewelry themselves. For instance, the brooch in the following quotation has a role in all of the family's weddings, and it has to be kept in the family for all the upcoming weddings. It is asserted in the story that the current wearer of the brooch is able to choose how to position it on the wedding dress but it seems to be almost mandatory to wear it in some way.

"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 the front in the middle and some of them at the side depending on the bride."

Often these pieces of jewelry which have roles in rituals are kept in the families for generations. During the generations the rituals develop within the families. The family rituals may change due to the peoples' lives; moving to places, political environment, and spouses from other cultures or religious backgrounds, but the same objects may stay despite of the changes. The family rituals are often open to adaptation due to the changes in families by assembling the new mores to meet the traditional ones. For instance, like the following quotation shows, the tradition of giving Valentine's day gifts has changed in this family due to the country where they are living. The earrings are a gift from the husband. This immigrant family did not yet have established mores to follow on Valentine's Day, so the wife got these on her birthday a month after Valentine's Day, as a sort of Valentine's Day gift.

"So, this one is my birthday present gift from my husband. He usually don't get gift without I am asking. But this time he went to store and he kept it for himself. My birthday is in March and in February there is a Valentine's Day and, that day he did not get anything for me. Actually in Japan, usually women give gifts for men." P: "On Valentine's Day?" *"Yes, so it is the opposite from here. So he thought he did not need to get anything. But I - we are living in States - so I expected to get something on the Valentine's Day. But he did not give me anything so I got so upset. So, in March in my formal birthday he remembered that. So he got this gift for me. We usually give some gift for each others, but this time, ... usually we go together and buy something, only this time he went to the store and he chose to get this. I really like this design. That's why this is kind of special for me."*

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this paper I have discussed about jewelry as provocateurs of emotions. Based on three utilized research approaches, I have argued for memories, family connections and rituals playing important roles in jewelry with emotional attachments. Emotions related to jewelry act as provocateurs to wear jewelry, but jewelry also, when worn evoke the emotions of the wearer. In other words, jewelry are provocateurs of emotions in two ways: the emotions provoke wearing jewelry and wearing jewelry provokes emotions.

Pieces of jewelry work as mediators between the present and past time. Often when a piece of jewelry has been involved in some emotional occasion, it works as a reminder of that particular occasion later. According to the stories, women sometimes evoke the emotions from the past by wearing the particular piece of jewelry. They often also wrote and told, that touching the piece evokes memories. Physical contact with a piece is not necessary in all cases. Therefore, according to the stories, sometimes knowing that the piece of jewelry is in the jewelry case is enough to evoke the emotions. When the possessions are considered significant people are willing to perpetuate, cherish and take care of them in order to have them for a longer period of time, and also to pass them to the future generations.

The interpretation of a large collection of stories states that memories, family relations and rituals are important when emotions are attached into jewelry. Even though the number of the stories is high, for this paper, they were studied by utilizing a qualitative approach. When people are writing and telling about their emotions, the experiences shared are individual. There are similarities in the stories, but not in the way that a quantitative approach would have been possible to apply for this topic and this data.

Often the family gatherings with ritualistic features e.g. weddings, baptisms or graduations are truly emotional occasions. That is why they are remembered and rememorized later. Often jewelry is also involved in these occasions. They are either given to the next generation, received as gifts or received as signs of a new era in the person's life. The occasions as ritualistic provoke the involvement of jewelry. It may be wearing them or shifting the ownerships of them. Pieces of jewelry with strong emotional attachments often have long biographies. Possessors take care of them and plan their future. They are often felt to be possessed by the whole family rather than one possessor at a time.

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