

It's Not About Putting A Ring On It

BY: RACHEL CHOI IN FEMINIZZLE ON MAR 13, 2014



When I first saw the pictures of my senior friend's engagement during spring break, I was shocked. As a sophomore, the last thing I expected was for college students to get engaged. The first thing all the girls wanted to see was the ring, and you could tell by the look in their eyes, that all of them were itching to get one of their one. On the flipside, none of the boys cared. Instead, I saw them slapping the guy on the back and congratulating him on "doing it right".

As the years progressed, I saw more of those diamond rings (it's just heavily pressed carbon) on all the girls' fingers (surprise, surprise), and it got me thinking: why was so much attention given to an engagement ring? It wasn't like it was the key to world peace. It was as if they were placing the ring on a pedestal. The amount of value these girls placed on it made me wonder if something deeper was going on.

My interest in this phenomenon got me thinking about our good old American popular culture. When I look through TV shows, movies, and

celebrity magazines, it's hard to ignore the seemingly constant focus on the engagement ring. It made me wonder if there was this idolization of marriage and romance in our culture.



Now don't get me wrong. I'm not against engagement rings. But the possibility that the most media and people place significant importance on only the engagement ring seems a little dangerous if not weird. There are so many important meanings for rings, and yet our society seems to only value rings that have to do with marriage. All those purity and promise rings seem to be seen as significant, while class rings or religious rings get less limelight as though they weren't as important. This is scary, because by placing unnecessary importance on an engagement ring, it reveals that there are subtle, underlying sexist ideologies about women and marriage that still exist in our society today.

Now society might see engagement rings as the ones with true value, but if you look at examples from history, literature, and even films, it becomes more evident, that the ring doesn't only mean marriage.

In fact, it's more aligned with the meaning of power.



During the time of the Egyptians, rings were a symbol for eternity. They described the ring as “it returned to itself, like life; and the shape was worshipped in the form of the Sun and the Moon.” (hisotryof.net)

In the Bible, it was a symbol of power. Genesis 41:43 states “Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand... and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

In other Ancient cultures such as the Greeks, the ring was used as a charm against evil or even as a symbol for slavery. In the cult of Demeter and Persephone, rings were given to new members, as an object that would protect them from danger.



Even in the classic fantasy book *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R Tolkien, we see rings as a symbol of ultimate power as the rings are known as “The Rings of Power”. They are given to the three races of elf, human, and dwarf, but the One Ring rules over all of them. Everyone who has the One Ring becomes hungry for its power. In fact, the ring is engraved with the famous words “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them and in the darkness bind them” (Tolkien, 1954).



As the meaning of the ring evolved over time, the love and marriage aspect of the ring began to overpower the other meanings. Historically, the value of marriage was crucial for a woman and her power decreased after marriage. “After a woman married, her rights, her property, and even her identity almost ceased to exist...Victorian society viewed marriage as women’s natural and best position in life.

“(http://webpage.pace.edu/nreagin/tempmotherhood/fall2003/3/HisPage.html).

What’s interesting is that there was no equivalent for the men, and many would be sleeping with other women while binding their wives only to them.

In modern culture, the issues of feminism are becoming better known, and women are now independent through their careers and their rights than

they were historically. But this focus on marriage seems to have trickled down into our society (as everything in history tends to do), and in turn seems to have prescribed the engagement ring as the only meaningful ring that matters. Personally, it makes sense. I think everything in this life begins from something, and that's why we have history: to learn where we came from and see how it has influenced us. But that shouldn't stop us from making the change that we want to see. And in this more patriarchal society, we have to remember that *marriage isn't the only thing a girl can look forward to anymore*. Yes ladies, it's true. You can all breathe freely now.

In fact, engagement rings shouldn't be the only ring that is known to have significant value and recognition in society. After all a ring from a grandmother, or a graduation ring, or a baptism ring may be just as important to someone if not more, than an engagement ring.

What do you think? Should we as women take back the ring and claim it's meaning for our own?

Image Courtesy of porimg.cimcontent, 4.bp.blogspot, webpage.pace.edu, historyplace, and img3.wikia.nocookie.