

**Why a Diamond Means Forever:
The Creation of the Diamond Engagement Ring Tradition in the United States, 1939-1996**

by

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Abstract

In 1947 “a diamond is forever” became the official slogan of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited and is to date one of the most recognizable slogans in the history of American advertising. This dissertation utilizes De Beers advertisements and N.W. Ayer & Son agency records from the Great Depression through the early 1990s to explain how diamond engagement rings became the symbol of love and commitment in American culture. “Why a Diamond Means Forever” also seeks to explain how the success of these campaigns was due to N.W. Ayer & Son’s ability to adapt its De Beers advertisements to changes in the American economy, courtship, and marriage. Consequently, these advertisements reinforced the changing gender roles of the period by portraying a domestic ideal of women as dependent consumers and men as providers. The fifty-seven-year span of N.W. Ayer & Son De Beers advertisements demonstrate not only the reflected and prescribed gender roles within marriages, they demonstrate American culture’s continual march to meet the male provider and female dependent consumer marriage model. Despite the rise of Second Wave Feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s and an increasing social acceptance of wives working outside of the home to help support their families, this ideal family model of a male provider and a female dependent consumer lasted well into the 1990s and lingers into the present. Despite all the social changes of the last few decades of the Cold War, this vision of the nuclear family endured because it offered a sense of contentment and security in a seemingly insecure world.

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Introduction

The diamond engagement ring; for many this tiny object is loaded with both personal and social significance. In 2019, the diamond engagement ring still remains the expected symbol of a couple's intention to marry. According to The Knott's "2011 Jewelry & Engagement Study," 77 percent of the 1,000 grooms it surveyed proposed on bended knee with a diamond engagement ring for their fiancée.¹ While the history of the engagement ring itself traces back to the Roman Empire, the giving of diamond engagement rings did not become the accepted custom in the United States until 1952. This tradition was the direct result of thirteen years of strategic advertising and marketing campaigns by the advertising agency N.W. Ayer & Son on behalf of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited to make the diamond engagement ring the symbol of love and commitment in American culture. In 1939, with Europe erupting in war and the United States still recovering from the Great Depression, the diamond industry, like other luxury trades was experiencing lagging sales numbers with little sign of improvement. Anxious to turn the diamond industry around, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, CEO of De Beers sent his son Harry to N.W. Ayer & Son's offices in Philadelphia December 1938, to discuss possible marketing research and advertising campaigns. At the beginning of January 1939, Ayer conducted a marketing survey that determined that consumers most equated diamonds with love. By 1952, the campaigns

¹ This report is based on a survey of 10,000 brides and 1,000 grooms regarding jewelry preferences, choices, and attitudes surrounding the engagement and wedding. The Knott's survey is used by wedding industry retailers to better understand potential clients and to expand their business. XO Group, Inc., "08/30/2011: 2011 Engagement & Jewelry Statistics Released by TheKnot.com & WeddingChannel.com," XO Group, August 30, 2011, <http://www.xogroupinc.com/press-releases-home/2011-press-releases/2011-08-30-2011-engagement-and-jewelry-statistics-released.aspx> (accessed July 12, 2012).

proved a lasting success as 85 percent of marriages in the United States that year began with a diamond engagement ring. These high sales numbers continued even after N.W. Ayer lost the De Beers account to J. Walter Thompson in 1996 and have continued into the present, suggesting that the symbolism of the diamond engagement ring retains its appeal with American consumers.²

N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers' continual efforts to "sell" diamond engagement rings to the American consumer did far more than sell a product, their advertising and marketing campaigns reinforced existing gendered aspects of courtship and marriage through World War II and into the present. By promoting the diamond engagement ring as the symbol of betrothal, the agency homogenized American courtship practices. Much of their campaigns' success was due to Ayer's ability to create advertisements that resonated with social perceptions of what an American marriage could and should look like with a male provider and a female "dependent consumer." While the concept of the provider role for men has been discussed in a number of works relating to marriage in the United States, these works tend to define women's roles as dependents of their husbands. Although this study agrees that in the idealized model of marriage women would have to depend on their husbands for financial support, the role of dependent overlooks the agency that women expressed through their consumption of everyday materials. Because women were responsible for the purchasing of food, clothing, and other necessities for the family they were able to exercise their authority as consumers while still maintaining their status as dependents; thus making them into dependent consumers. This study defines dependent consumerism as the socially accepted practices and customs of Cold War America that expected

² Jennifer L. Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition: N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers's Advertising Campaigns in the United States from 1939 to 1952," Master's thesis, Miami University, 2010, 1; George Frederick Kunz, *Rings for the Finger* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1917), 199.

women to make or directly influence household purchases but only with the finances that their husbands were willing to provide for the maintenance of the household.

After years of financial instability, Cold War Americans longed to shed the unpleasant memories of the Great Depression and World War II and looked forward to a new era of prosperity and permanency. From this desire developed the image of a prosperous and harmonious family life. The single income family became the hallmark of the “American way of life.” Within this marriage and family model, husbands and wives were expected to participate in heteronormative activities that reinforced their gendered roles within society. By the beginning of the twentieth century, marriage became less about the exchange of property between families and more about a set list of responsibilities that men and women fulfilled for their spouses. Described as expressions of love and affection, a man’s ability to provide for his family and a woman’s ability to provide emotional support for her spouse, household labor, child care, and sexual services became the requirements that guaranteed the couple a comfortable home life.³ As the diamond engagement ring itself is an object desired and consumed by a woman but requires the man that she is dating to purchase it for her, the marriage proposal and subsequent engagement period served as an early proving ground for how an “ideal” marriage should develop around the concept of dependent consumerism.⁴

De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements serve as a lens by which we can observe how World War II and Cold War Era Americans idealized a version of marriage that was increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for the majority of families to achieve. As Elaine

³ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 157-58; Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 218, 298.

⁴ Pequignot, “Creating an Engaging Tradition,” 35, 41-43, 46.

Tyler May observed in *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America*, marital discord in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stemmed in part from an increased sense that purchasing luxury goods for one's own personal comfort was in fact a necessity of everyday life. This put increased pressure on men to provide more money for their families to afford extra luxury goods and for women to then utilize those luxury goods to transform the home into a warm and welcoming space without running the family into debt. The signs of marital discord often appeared when one or both spouses began to feel that their wife or husband was not living up to this new set of standards. If they continued to fail to meet up to these new social standards the couple could wind up in divorce court.⁵

The fifty-seven year span of N.W. Ayer & Son De Beers advertisements demonstrate not only the reflected and prescribed gender roles within marriages, they demonstrate American culture's continual march to meet the male provider and female dependent consumer marriage model. Despite the rise of Second Wave Feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s and an increasing social acceptance of wives working outside of the home to help support their families, this ideal family model of a male provider and a female dependent consumer lasted well into the 1990s and lingers into the present. Despite all the social changes of the last few decades of the Cold War, this vision of the nuclear family endured because it offered a sense of contentment and security in a seemingly insecure world.

⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 139.

Literature Review

As this study traces rising popularity of the diamond engagement ring within American culture it will utilize a wide variety of historical disciplines as well as interdisciplinary approaches to both visual culture and gender analysis. Earlier literature concerning the rise of diamond engagement ring in the United States falls into two categories: the corruption of the international diamond industry and the rise of America's "wedding industry" throughout the course of the twentieth century. Edward Jay Epstein's *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds: The Shattering of a Brilliant Illusion* is one of the fundamental works on the history of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited business practices within the United States during the twentieth century and provides a summary of its advertising campaigns through the early 1980s. Vicki Howard's *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* gives a general overview of De Beers' advertising within the United States in order to support her thesis that consumerism has turned, or in some instances created, American wedding traditions that have resulted in a nearly \$70 billion-a-year industry. Like Howard, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* by Cele Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck examines the De Beers advertising campaign conducted by N.W. Ayer & Son as part of the United States' growing wedding industry.⁶ No research to date has analyzed the history and impact of the advertising campaigns themselves into the twenty-first century. This study builds on these earlier works and then examines and interprets N.W. Ayer advertising campaigns for De Beers; demonstrating the ways in which these campaigns drastically changed the traditions of courtship in the United States to include diamond

⁶ Edward Jay Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982); Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

engagement rings. This study agrees with Howard, Otnes, and Pleck that the tradition of diamond engagement rings is linked to the rise of the wedding industry, but engagement ring advertisements are also part of much larger cultural and social trends of the period. By advertising across social and economic lines N. W. Ayer & Son and De Beers reflected the rise of consumer culture in the postwar era. The advertisement campaigns for De Beers also reflected the changing gender roles of the late 1930s through the early 1950s in which white and middle-class women were expected to stay at home and men were expected to provide for their family. My own study furthers the conversation about the history of diamond engagement rings in American culture by looking more in-depth at the cultural impact and gendered implications that these advertisements had on the American way of life at the end of the Great Depression through the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

One of the more significant scholarly issues that this dissertation seeks to address is the use of images in historical discourse by integrating visual culture with more classical methods of historical analysis. While historians have increasingly become more interdisciplinary in the past, the profession as a whole tends to shy away from the use of images as historical evidence. Twenty years ago George H. Roeder, Jr. stressed to his fellow historians that visual sources, like written sources, are compelling pieces of evidence to help us understand the periods in which we study. Yet written sources continue to dominate our discipline to this very day. He urged historians break away from our reliance solely on written sources and to venture more into using visual sources as a means of interpreting the past. This study agrees with Roeder that visual sources are just as telling of a particular time period as written sources.⁷ This study also agrees

⁷ George H. Roeder, Jr., "Filling in the Picture: Visual Culture," *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (March 1998): 275-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030884> (accessed March 1, 2010).

with Peter Burke's assertion that images do not always represent reality, merely one perception of reality. Like any piece of written evidence, we must analyze and place visual sources within the historical context of the period.⁸ This dissertation also takes the position that advertisements are essential for historical analysis of a particular culture or period because they both reflect and prescribe the social norms of a particular culture at any given time.

To date Ralph M. Hower's *The History of an Advertising Agency: N.W. Ayer & Son at Work, 1869-1949* remains the only business history account of N.W. Ayer & Son. Much of Hower's work focuses on the top-level administration of the agency during its first eighty years in business. While his work provides an excellent account of who managed Ayer during this period and the various accounts left in their creative hands, his work offers little to no details of the day to day operations of the agency. This study seeks to expand on Hower's original research by bringing the history of N.W. Ayer & Son into the 1990s. Rather than focusing on the upper management of the agency, this study will examine two interconnected departments within Ayer's New York offices: the creative team and the Diamond Information Center. It was these two departments that worked year-round for over fifty-seven years to cement the diamond engagement ring as the symbol of love and commitment even as the ideal of life-long commitment gave way to the reality of rising divorce rates within in the United States. The two departments' managers at the time Ayer acquired the De Beers account, Gerold Lauck and George Skinner, ensured that both the advertisements and the marketing for De Beers conveyed the same message to consumers. They constantly shared any and all information that appeared useful for the projects going on in each other's departments. This study also goes a step further

⁸ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 122, 130.

by examining the work and lives of three female Ayer employees who between them made up the majority of the advertisements and marketing material for the De Beers account. Francis Gerety, the creator of the De Beers' tagline "a diamond is forever," wrote all of the copy for the De Beers ads from 1941 until her retirement in 1970. Dorothy Dignam from the Diamond Information Center wrote many of the press releases and promotional materials for jewelers seeking to increase their diamond sales. Finally, Gladys Babson Hannaford, also from the Diamond Information Center, spent most of the early 1950s promoting diamond engagement rings in lectures and interviews across the county. It should perhaps also be noted that while these women promoted diamond engagement rings throughout their careers with Ayer, both Gerety and Dignam never married and Hannaford remained a widow throughout the course of her employment with the agency. Taking into account the large number of women assigned to work on the De Beers account, this study seeks to show how Ayer's business practices of hiring women to work on so-called "female products" proved ultimately to be the key to the account's continued success.⁹

Just as this study seeks to include the De Beers campaigns within the realm of business history, it also intends on placing diamond engagement rings within the history of American consumer culture. While the works of Howard, Otnes, and Pleck offers the perspective that the purchase of diamond engagement rings demonstrates the rising level of consumer goods intended for the booming American wedding industry, the diamond engagement ring takes on a wider significance within the larger context of American consumer culture.¹⁰ Adopting the view that

⁹ Ralph M. Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency: N.W. Ayer & Son at Work, 1869-1949*, revised ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949).

¹⁰ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*; Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*.

diamond engagement ring consumption was a way for white middle-class Americans to publicly display their family's economic prosperity and stability, this study agrees with Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic*, that consumption could act both as a means of conformity and as a display of a couple's "individuality" within America's middle-class Cold War society. Though every engaged woman was expected to have a diamond engagement ring, a woman's ring was the physical embodiment of her fiancé's devotion to her alone.¹¹

The field of advertising history over the course of the past thirty years falls into two camps: that of T.J. Jackson Lears and Stephen Fox. Lears believed that advertisements shape society by prescribing certain social and cultural norms or values to their intended audience. Lears further argued that at the end of the nineteenth century, advertisements encouraged Americans to turn away from frugality and instead adopt the practice of what nineteenth-century economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen referred to as "conspicuous consumption." Rather than promoting the sales of things Americans needed, the dawn of the twentieth century featured advertisements that instead showed consumers what they wanted to buy.¹² Fox took the opposite approach to Lears. He believed that advertisements reflect social and cultural norms to the consumer.¹³ Like Fox, historian Roland Marchand asserted that advertisements are a reflection of society. Marchand, however, differs from Fox as he believed that advertisements are not a true reflection of society, but a *Zerrspiegel*; a mirror that distorts or enhances certain images. Advertisements therefore offer readers a glimpse of certain social realities while still distorting

¹¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

¹² T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 27; T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 10, 63.

¹³ Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 272, 330.

the image to reflect the ideals of the consumer.¹⁴ More recently, Katherine Parkin's study of gender roles within American food advertisements argues that ads are in fact a shaping force because they mold the "mental images" of the reader.¹⁵ This study suggests that advertisements act as both a reflection of social and cultural values and as a shaping force. Advertisements reflect the social and cultural norms of a given society. While advertisements reflect these norms, they do not always reflect the realities of everyday life. Ads shape the ways in which consumers adhere to the social and cultural norms reflected in their images. Advertisements prescribe to the consumer the best method to conform to these norms; often by purchasing and consuming the advertised good. In the case of N.W. Ayer & Son's De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements, the ads reflect Americans' vision of an "ideal" marriage based on the male provider/female dependent consumer model. Ayer's De Beers ads shaped the way Americans began marriage. By making the diamond engagement ring a symbol of love and commitment in American culture, these ads made the diamond engagement ring an essential step on the road to a happy married life.

The creation of the diamond engagement ring tradition is just one half of this study. The other half focuses on how De Beers advertisements are representative of American's perception of marriage and family. Over the past thirty-two years historians have assessed and reassessed the institution of marriage throughout the twentieth century, particularly during the course of the Cold War. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families and the Cold War* is still regarded as the cornerstone of family history during the Cold War years. Her concept of "domestic containment" remains as a valuable perspective of how the extended American family

¹⁴ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making the Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xvii, xix.

¹⁵ Katherine J. Parkin, *Food is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 8.

structure gave way to the nuclear family.¹⁶ May's emphasis on social conformity also suggests that maintaining the appearance of marital satisfaction and stability served as a weapon against communism and a way for families to publicly demonstrate their "Americanness." Her perspective on marriage suggests that Americans spent a great deal of time and energy maintaining the illusion of conforming to the ideal family model but mainly failed to practice it in its entirety within their daily lives.¹⁷ Examining the political and legal history of marriage, Nancy Cott's *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* suggests that the institution of marriage possessed strong ties to the political stability of the nation. Stable marriages held society together. In order to preserve the "welfare" of marriage within the United States, the America legal system constantly reshaped laws concerning marriage to reflect the institution of marriage's transition from a system of female dependence from father to husband to one that recognized a woman's "choice" to become a dependent of her husband.¹⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz's "Beyond *The Feminine Mystique*: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1945-1960," argues that the printed representation of the postwar American woman included far more than the white middle-class homemaker image we associate with it today. Utilizing a wide range of women's magazines, Meyerowitz argues that American women were told to view their marriages as an equal partnership between themselves and their husbands. While women were encouraged to express their individuality within their marriages, their primary responsibilities were to maintain the home and care for their children.¹⁹ Basing her conclusions on a wide collection of marriage advice books and marriage studies, Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, a History: How Love*

¹⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 79.

¹⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*.

¹⁸ Cott, *Public Vows*, 15-16, 52-53, 157-58, 167-68, 222-23.

¹⁹ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond *The Feminine Mystique*: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 243, 229-62.

Conquered Marriage makes a far more positive assessment of marriage within twentieth-century American society. She suggests that the evolution of marriage over the centuries has finally metamorphosed into a truly egalitarian institution. With the rise of prepackaged foods, men no longer need to rely on their wives to cook for them. With the ever-increasing number of women in higher paid positions within the workforce, wives no longer need the financial support of a husband to ensure their financial security. In other words, marriage within the United States is no longer a necessity for personal survival. Americans can marry not because they have to but because they want to. Love, not survival, is the true marker of a modern American marriage.²⁰

Kristen Celello's *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* suggests that over the course of the twentieth century, concern over rising divorce rates caused marriage experts to increasingly encourage couples to work on their marriages. When their advice proved ineffective against the rising wave of divorce, experts simply lowered the bar as to what constitutes a "successful" marriage. Throughout the Cold War the hallmark of a successful marriage was one in which a couple stayed together even when they could not stand life with their spouse. Furthermore, it was increasingly women's responsibility to ensure that their marriages were successful. Women were expected to be helpmates to their husbands, take care of the children, maintain the house, and help promote his career. And if a wife failed in her duties the subsequent tension within her marriage was entirely her fault. Celello argues that eventually the influence of the Second Wave Feminist Movement encouraged women to stop working on failed marriages and move towards finding their own personal happiness outside of their marriages. With the rise of "family values" platform of the New Right, the 1980s marked a rush to return to the marriage model of 1950s America. Maintaining a

²⁰ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 308.

happy marriage continues to be mainly “women’s work.”²¹ While this study does not completely agree with Coontz’s conclusions on the evolution of marriage within the United States, it largely concurs with all five historians that American society during the Cold War placed an inordinate amount of pressure on women to maintain a happy and successful marriage, but it also suggests that men in many ways felt a great deal of social pressure to provide for their families. Failure to provide for one’s family challenged men’s masculine identity. Their financial contribution to the marriage was expected to serve as the marker of a man’s love for his family.

This study does not intend to serve as a sole representation of any one type of history. It instead hopes to offer readers a way through which we can better understand how gender roles impact our everyday lives and how we choose to view ourselves in relation to the rest of society.

Sources and Methodology

Linking the symbolism of diamond engagement ring consumption to Americans’ perception of marriage requires detailed accounts from both the creators of the engagement ring tradition and the consumers themselves. In 1996, De Beers gave their United States advertising account to one of Ayer’s chief competitors, J. Walter Thompson, thus ending one of the longest partnerships in advertising history. After the loss of the De Beers account, Ayer slipped further into decline and was eventually bought out by Bcom3, officially closing its doors in 2002. All the agency’s records pertaining to the De Beers account are divided into three archival collections: the N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, located in the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives Center in the National Museum of American History; the Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials; and the J. Walter Thompson Diamond Information Center

²¹ Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Vertical File, both located in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.²² When I initially began this project in 2008, the N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records were the only publicly available records pertaining to Ayer's De Beers account. This collection consists of more than four hundred thousand advertising proofs prepared by the agency and printed in newspapers and magazines across the United States as well as company newsletters, oral history interviews with famous Ayer employees, and correspondence between the agency and their clients. These records provided a detailed account of all the print advertisements Ayer commissioned for De Beers as well as concise reports of how the agency was promoting diamond sales throughout their fifty-seven-year relationship.

After N.W. Ayer & Son lost the De Beers account in 1996, the agency transferred all of their account records to J. Walter Thompson. Since J. Walter Thompson is the current advertising representative for De Beers worldwide, all of their records from the last twenty-three years pertaining to the De Beers account are not available for public research. Any and all Ayer records transferred to J. Walter Thompson that the agency deemed unnecessary for ongoing advertising campaigns are located in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University. This includes the J. Walter Thompson Company Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s: a vast collection of press releases, newspaper clippings, photographs, fashion reports, scripts, lectures, speeches, information on famous diamonds, sales pamphlets, information on the diamond industry as a whole, and correspondence relating to diamond sales within the United States. The Diamond Information Center, part of the agency's Public Relations Department, was managed by a full-time staff of Ayer employees whose sole

²² N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

responsibility at the agency was to market diamonds to American consumers. Supervised by George W. Skinner, this all-female staff was responsible for monitoring, and in some cases altering, how consumers felt about diamonds. This collection presents much of the day to day business and concerns Ayer faced while creating the diamond engagement ring tradition.

The third collection relating to Ayer's De Beers account is the Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, 1939-1998, which is also located in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University. Robert K. Jeffery was a jeweler from Bridgeport, Connecticut who in the late 1960s was employed by N.W. Ayer & Son to work as promoter of diamond sales on behalf of De Beers. Jeffery continued to work for Ayer for another seventeen years and during that time amassed a collection of documents, artwork, and printed promotional materials that he commissioned, used, or referenced in diamond advertising. The collection consists mainly of items distributed by N.W. Ayer & Son to jewelers during the 1980s and 1990s. Other items featured in the collection pertain to the diamond industry as a whole, including marketing statistics, and gemology periodicals. This collection not only provides insight into the last few years of the agency's management of the De Beers account, it displays the techniques that they encouraged jewelers to use to make diamond engagement rings more appealing to the public.

Advertising images and company records are not enough; to truly understand how diamond engagement ring advertisements both reflect and prescribe heteronormative gender roles to American consumers requires data collected from and about married couples during the twentieth century. Using data from marriage studies such as the Kelly Longitudinal Study, this study seeks to demonstrate how Americans from the Great Depression and into the twenty-first

century felt about their marriages as well as their ability and willingness to conform to the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model popularized in the early postwar years.

Using a combination of gender and visual culture theory, this study will analyze Ayer's De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements from 1939 to 1996 for the gendered implications contained within their images. French philosopher and theorist, Roland Barthes' concept of three classes of messages hidden within the advertisement allows for a multi-level analysis of both the image and text. The first layer, the linguistic text, possesses both a "denoted" message and "connoted" message within the actual text of an advertisement. The denoted message is the caption of the advertisement while the connoted message is the brand name of the product. The second layer is the "symbolic message" contained within the image of the advertisement. Each image contained within the ad contains social and cultural cues to indicate the expected norms of one's culture. Finally, there is the third layer, the non-coded or "literal message" of the image. This is the contents of the image itself. The image of a tomato in a spaghetti sauce advertisement is just a tomato until one takes into account the symbolic and linguistic messages contained within.²³ Marketing experts Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick's combination of reader-response and text-interpretative analysis give equal importance to the visual and textual images within an advertisement and emphasize that the consumer's interpretation of the images is based within the social context of their culture.²⁴ In Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, she introduces a concept known as gender performativity. She argues that one's perception of what is considered to be distinctively male or female is the product of one's culture. Much like in a play or sketch, we act out the gendered roles that

²³ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 33, 38-45.

²⁴ Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising: Text-Interpretive, Experimental, and Reader-Response Analyses," *The Journal of Consumer Research* 26, no.3(June 1999): 37-40, 52.

members of our sex are expected to play within our culture.²⁵ Combining these three theoretical concepts will expose the ways in which De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements became detailed scripts by which millions of American couples held fast to as they headed to the altar and throughout their married lives.

Taking into account fifty-seven years of De Beers advertisements, this study will merge both the theoretical analysis of these images with N.W. Ayer & Son De Beers account records and the results of the featured marriage studies. The images will effectively set the scene for the triumphs, trials, and tribulations of marriage within a white middle-class American society as well as the various methods that N.W. Ayer used to continually make engagement rings and marriage appealing to consumers in different generations.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is organized both thematically and chronologically. Chapter one details the beginning of the relationship between N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. In December 1938, De Beers and N.W. Ayer agreed to a ten thousand dollar contract to conduct marketing research and begin a nationwide advertising campaign in the United States. Through this marketing survey Ayer determined that Americans most closely associated diamonds with love. It determined that the most effective way to market diamonds was through the promotion of diamond engagement rings. Before 1939, the giving and receiving of diamond engagement rings was an unestablished practice in American culture. Through its early advertising campaigns for De Beers, N.W. Ayer managed to revive and expand the diamond

²⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), xv, 184-88.

engagement ring tradition. Selling at least one diamond to every engaged couple not only kept the diamond market afloat, the campaigns increased diamond sales nationwide by 25 percent within the first year.²⁶ The institution of marriage experienced tough times as well. The economic hardships postponed or ended thousands of engagements and an ever-increasing number of mothers searched for employment outside of the home to help feed their families. This breakdown of traditional gender roles within the institution of marriage became the antithesis of the “ideal” marriage during the height of the Cold War.

Chapter two explores N.W. Ayer’s campaigns for De Beers during World War II. While the marriage rate declined during the Great Depression, the impending draft and the United States’ involvement in World War II promoted a steady rise of the number of marriages. During the war Ayer successfully managed to project the diamond engagement ring as a necessity within America’s courtship practices. The advertisements it created on behalf of De Beers appealed to consumers because they offered the recipe for a blissful marriage after the war. This recipe for a happy domestic life centered around men’s roles as providers and women’s roles as dependent consumers. By promoting the male provider/female dependent consumer model, these engagement ring advertisements both reflected and prescribed the gender roles couples were expected to perform in a postwar United States. During these years the giving and receiving of diamond engagement rings played an important part of the performance of heterosexual gender roles by both men and women. Men were expected to buy a ring for their intended. The ring served not only as a physical symbol of his love, but also of his financial stability. By accepting the ring, a young woman agreed to be the man’s partner and act in a manner that supported her future husband’s goals and decisions.

²⁶ Pequignot, “Creating an Engaging Tradition,” 10-11.

Chapter three examines the De Beers campaigns from the early postwar years through the 1950s. With continually climbing sales numbers, De Beers gave N.W. Ayer & Son an expanded budget for its annual research, advertising, and marketing campaigns. It was during the early part of the 1950s that the agency decided to take a more “psychological approach” towards reaching the American consumer. This approach emphasized a careful cultivation of the next generation; further cementing the engagement ring “tradition” within American culture. Social anxieties during the Cold War over the potential spread of communism within the United States combined with the period’s rising employment rates and marriage rates increased consumer spending. The popularization of the “white wedding” created the perfect environment in which N.W. Ayer could solidify the diamond engagement ring’s role as the symbol of love and commitment in American marriages. De Beers ads during this period continued to promote the male producer/female dependent consumer model as the foundation of the “ideal” marriage in American society even as couples faced marital realities that departed from this ideal.

Chapter four examines the De Beers campaigns from the 1960s through the 1970s, a period of considerable change to the institution of marriage within the United States. As the Baby Boomer generation came of age, they sought to promote themselves as different from past generations. They no longer viewed marriage as the first marker of adulthood. More women from the Baby Boomer generation attended and graduated from college before marriage. More importantly, this generation of Americans the accepted that their wives could have a career outside the home. The emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1960s brought an increased awareness to the dissatisfaction that many women felt about the state of their marriages. American attitudes on marriage in the 1970s stressed that if couples could not find happiness within their marriage it was far better to divorce than live out the rest of their days resenting one

another. While the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate an era of rising discontent with the male provider/female dependent consumer model, Americans during this period were unwilling to completely break with this system. While the texts of De Beers ads during this period played to a greater sense of individuality within the consumer, the images and language of these advertisements continued to emphasize the male provider/female dependent consumer model of previous decades. De Beers advertisements' adherence to the prescribed gender roles of past generations suggests that while the Baby Boomers and various social movements challenged the male provider/female dependent consumer model, many Americans continued to accept this model as the formula for the ideal marriage.

Chapter five investigates Ayer's De Beers campaigns during the 1980s. The images and text in De Beers advertisements continued to reflect and prescribe the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model as the "ideal" American marriage. De Beers advertisements of this decade also reflect the glamour, indulgence, and narcissism of the 1980s—which emphasized visible markers of personal success and material wealth—by encouraging men to purchase bigger and better diamonds for wives and fiancées. Due to this increased social demand for conspicuous consumption, more married couples during this decade came to rely on the financial support of both spouses to keep up with the rising cost of living. With rising pressures for couples to financially and emotionally support their households, more couples throughout the 1980s chose to divorce. Even with rising divorce rates, the wedding industry boomed in this decade as more of the Baby Boomer generation came of age and chose to marry. The language and images of De Beers advertisements from the 1980s continued to offer a vision of the "ideal" American marriage as grounded in the male provider/female dependent consumer model despite considerable changes to marital relations in everyday life.

Chapter six examines the De Beers advertisements during the last six years that N.W. Ayer & Son managed the account and brings us to the present. After handling the De Beers account for an almost unprecedented fifty years, the agency struggled to hold on to the account. On 1 January 1996, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited “chose to go in another direction” and gave their \$35 million-a-year advertising contract to J. Walter Thompson. While diamond sales figures held strong throughout the 1990s, N.W. Ayer & Son lost its popularity as a top-ranking advertising agency. The 1990s marked a break from tradition in American marriages. Unlike past decades when many Americans married while they were still in their teens, men and women in the 1990s were increasingly delaying marriage until the later part of their twenties. Increasing numbers of Americans during this period chose the option of never marrying at all. While conservative efforts, such as the Defense of Marriage Act, attempted to rigidly define and preserve the institution of marriage within the United States, the end of the twentieth century also marked the rapid decline of the male provider/female dependent consumer model as the ideal form of marriage for many Americans. In 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Obergefell v. Hodges* fundamentally redefined marriage within the United States by legalizing same-sex marriage.

Even though marriages in the United States no longer strictly adhere to the male provide/female dependent consumer model, the diamond engagement ring tradition remains intact. J. Walter Thompson continues to manage advertising campaigns for De Beers’ brands in the United States. Like its predecessor, the agency’s advertisements for De Beers continue to emphasize that diamonds are symbols of love and commitment. To court millennial couples, De Beers and its partners hired the advertising agency Mother to launch its latest diamond engagement ring campaign in 2015 that states that “real is rare, real is a diamond.” Featuring

images of couples holding hands with the diamond engagement ring as the focal point of the image, the “Real is Rare” campaign remolds N.W. Ayer’s “a diamond is forever” for a new generation of American consumers. These continued images of happy couples with diamond engagement rings suggest that while many Americans no longer view marriage as strictly between a man and a woman, for couples that continue to choose to marry the diamond engagement ring remains the symbol of love and commitment in American culture.

Finally, this dissertation concludes with an examination of the possible future for the institution of marriage and the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States. America’s wedding industry continues to grow each year despite a gradually declining marriage rate. By the early twenty-first century weddings and the search for the perfect spouse have become a major source of entertainment for many Americans. Americans’ continued desire for diamond engagement rings combined with shifting attitudes regarding who should receive a diamond engagement ring calls into question just what sentiments and values the diamond engagement ring symbolizes today.

Chapter 1: The Courtship of Two Companies, 1939-1941

De Beers: a name that today is the personification of luxury and the leading name in diamond mining and sales around the world, but in 1938 that name was in danger of dying out. Diamond sales declined throughout the 1920s and the Great Depression. With Europe on the brink of another world war, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, CEO of the largest diamond mining company in the world, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, feared for his company's future. To combat the potential financial ruin of the empire that he had spent a lifetime building, Oppenheimer sent his son and heir, Harry Oppenheimer, to New York to meet with the American advertising agency N.W. Ayer & Son to discuss the possibility of marketing diamonds to the American public. The result of that fateful meeting marked the beginning of a fifty-seven-year relationship between De Beers and Ayer and the creation of the diamond engagement ring as the ultimate symbol of love and commitment in American culture.

Rise of an Empire: A History of De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited

Forged deep within the earth over three billion years ago, a diamond is the hardest substance in the world. Its name is derived from the Latin word *adamas*, which means "firm" and "unyielding." These crystalized carbon structures proved so durable in fact that for centuries the only material that could cut and shape diamonds was another diamond. First discovered along the banks of the Kristna and Godavari Rivers in India in 800 B.C.E., these precious stones were traded as far away as China, Greece, and Rome. The Greeks believed that they were made from the tears of the gods. Some even believed that diamonds possessed magical healing properties

and an ability to ward off evil. During the Renaissance, diamonds were used by European royalty to symbolize their power.²⁷ Due to sumptuary laws, diamond consumption in Europe was limited to elites.²⁸ By the nineteenth century diamonds were still considered to be the possessions of the aristocracy and wealthy elite, but in the 1860s and 1870s the discovery of large deposits of diamonds in South Africa made them accessible for purchase. This discovery also provided the raw diamonds that built the world's largest diamond cartel, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited.²⁹

In 1866 a fifteen year old boy named Erasmus Jacobs discovered a “glittering pebble” near his family farm on the banks of the Orange River in South Africa.³⁰ Three years later, a Griqua herdsman discovered an eighty-three and a half carat rough diamond in the same area. His discovery of the now famous Star of South Africa diamond prompted a diamond rush to what is today Kimberley, South Africa. By 1871, miners from all over the world flocked to the farmlands in Kimberley to seek their fortune.³¹ One of these farms, owned by two brothers named Johannes Nicholas and Diederik Arnoldus De Beer, proved to be one of the most prosperous claims in the region. Tired of having miners squatting over their land and destroying their crops, the brothers soon sold their land to a group of investors for £6,000. Though the

²⁷ Victoria Finlay, *Jewels: A Secret History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 319, 331, 346; Morton R. Sarett, *The Jewelry in Your Life* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 13; De Beers Group, “Nature’s Treasure,” De Beers Group, <https://www.debeersgroup.com/en/Diamonds/Natures-treasure/> (accessed February 1, 2014).

²⁸ Mark Tungate, *Adland: A Global History of Advertising* (Philadelphia: Krogan Page, 2007), 91.

²⁹ De Beers Group, “The Heritage of De Beers,” De Beers Group, <https://www.debeersgroup.com/en/> (accessed February 1, 2014).

³⁰ Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 62; Finlay, *Jewels*, 339; Robert M. Hazen, *The Diamond Makers: A Compelling Drama of Scientific Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11; De Beers, “The Heritage of De Beers.”

³¹ Finlay, *Jewels*, 339; De Beers, “The Heritage of De Beers;” Colin Newbury, *The Diamond Ring: Business, Politics, and Precious Stones in South Africa, 1867-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12-13; Tom Zoellner, *The Heartless Stone: A Journey through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 120-21.

brothers left the region, the De Beer name remained associated with the mining site.³² Just as South Africa's diamond rush intensified, a seventeen-year-old man named Cecil Rhodes journeyed to South Africa to join his brother in a cotton farming venture. His journey to South Africa marked the beginning of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited.

Cecil John Rhodes was born in England on 5 July 1853. Always a sickly child, Rhodes suffered a heart attack at the age of seventeen, leaving his parents to send their son to the warmer climate of his brother Herbert's South African cotton plantation. Upon Cecil's arrival in 1870, Herbert left him in charge of the plantation while he tried his hand at prospecting his claim on the De Beers farm. Rhodes soon joined his brother at the De Beers site, but quickly discovered that the claim was unprofitable. In spite of this setback, Rhodes recognized an opportunity to make money providing goods and services to the more than fifty thousand miners encamped at Kimberley. Initially he sold ice cream and jugs of water to the miners, but soon found a more lucrative opportunity. The miners needed a constant supply of water to dig deeper into the mine shafts. The problem was that too much water in the mines caused the soft yellow soil to erode and collapse on the workers. The miners needed a reliable water pump to keep the water levels in the mines at a manageable level. Rhodes used all of his savings to buy the only steam powered water pump in South Africa. Not long after Rhodes purchased his water pump the Kimberley mines flooded, walls collapsed, and trapped miners had to be lifted out of the shafts with ropes. The individual claim owners desperately needed Rhodes's water pump to continue with production and had no other choice but to pay whatever price he asked for his services. When miners could not pay Rhodes with cash, he took a portion of the ownership of their claims.

³²Anthony Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 6; Matthew Hart, *Diamond: A Journey to the Heart of Obsession* (New York: Walker & Company, 2001), 36-37; Zoellner, *The Heartless Stone*, 123.

By 1880, Rhodes used his profits and amassed mining claims to form the De Beers Mining Company Limited. In 1887, he and his largest competitor, Barney Barnato, attempted to ruin the other's company by trying to out-produce the competition. This flood of diamonds onto the market caused a drop in diamond prices. Rather than continue depreciating the market value of diamonds, Barnato and Rhodes agreed to a merger and on 12 March 1888, they established the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. Rhodes was named the company's founding chairman and Barnato became a director of the company until his death in 1897.³³

With an iron grip on diamond production in South Africa, Rhodes made no qualms about how he wanted to manage both his company and the diamond industry as a whole. He knew that owning the largest diamond mine in the world would not secure the diamond market; he would have to control both production and distribution to ensure that the price of diamonds remained stable and increasingly profitable. Acting as De Beers's chairman, Rhodes immediately reduced South Africa's diamond production to 40 percent. This decreased production created the illusion that diamonds were scarce. Rhodes then streamlined De Beers's diamond distribution into one principal company in London, The Diamond Syndicate. In other words, Rhodes sought to make De Beers, and the diamond industry as a whole, a model of vertical integration. The company controlled all aspects of diamond production and pricing. Continued use of this business model caused the price for rough diamonds to increase by 50 percent by the turn of the twentieth century. By 1900, De Beers controlled 90 percent of the diamond industry, and effectively, the

³³ Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 68-74; Hazen, *The Diamond Makers*, 11; Hart, *Diamond*, 40-44; De Beers, "The Heritage of De Beers."

diamond market itself. Rhodes's successors maintained his policy of restricting the number of diamonds mined and placed on the market each year to keep the market stable.³⁴

Once Rhodes established a profitable system for producing and selling diamonds, he set his sights on expanding the British Empire in Africa. Under the authority of a royal charter granted to him by the British government, Rhodes assisted in the colonization of millions of square miles across eastern and southern Africa. For his colonizing efforts, Rhodes had several countries named after him: the former countries of Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and the Rhodesian Federation. After his many successes as a businessman and colonizer, Rhodes died in 1902 at the age of forty-eight. A life-long bachelor with no heirs, Rhodes bequeathed nearly his entire fortune to Oxford University. This generous endowment laid the foundation for the Rhodes Scholarship. Without an immediate successor to Rhodes, De Beers was left without a strong leader to usher the diamond industry into the twentieth century. It would be another twenty-seven years before another mining magnate would rise to take control of De Beers; his name was Ernest Oppenheimer.³⁵

Ernest Oppenheimer was born on 22 May 1880 in Friedberg, Germany. The fifth son and eighth child of a Jewish cigar merchant, Ernest eventually became the founder of the most successful family dynasty in the diamond mining industry. From an early age his father encouraged him and his older brothers to move to England for better economic opportunities.³⁶ In 1896 Ernest joined his brothers, Louis and Otto, at the diamond distribution firm of Dunkelsbuhler and Company in London. Initially, his job with the firm was to sort diamonds for

³⁴ Hart, *Diamond*, 44-45; Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 7-10; Zoellner, *The Heartless Stone*, 127-128; Theodore Gregory, *Ernest Oppenheimer and the Economic Development of Southern Africa* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 17.

³⁵ Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 66, 74-75.

³⁶ Gregory, *Ernest Oppenheimer*, 48; Stefan Kanfer, *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds, and the World* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), 153.

the monthly “sights,” an event where a select group of buyers are given a selection of diamond lots for purchase. After displaying a talent for sorting diamonds, the firm sent Ernest to South Africa in 1902 to serve as one of their diamond buying agents in the region.³⁷ Fifteen years later, Oppenheimer acquired financing from American backers to establish his own gold mining operation in South Africa. In 1917 he established the Anglo-American Corporation. Just two years later Oppenheimer began a mission to take control of the diamond market.³⁸ Oppenheimer and his business partners amalgamated the diamond claims in Southwestern Africa; establishing the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa. This region held considerably richer diamond claims than the claims controlled by De Beers. Rather than compete with De Beers and potentially ruin both companies, in 1926 Oppenheimer offered these mines to De Beers in exchange for a large amount of stock in the company. He was also appointed to its board of directors. Over the next year Oppenheimer continued to purchase De Beers stock whenever he had the chance and as a result, he became the controlling figure of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. In 1929 he became the chairman of the company. Oppenheimer then merged Anglo-American with De Beers in 1930 and took control of the majority of the world’s diamond industry.³⁹

When the effects of the Global Great Depression hit England and South Africa, Oppenheimer initially believed that this economic recession would be like any of the others the company had faced in the past and saw no need to decrease diamond production. He soon discovered that this recession was far more devastating to De Beers than previous recessions. De Beers continued to buy diamonds from its producers for as long as it could, but by 1932 the

³⁷ Gregory, *Ernest Oppenheimer*, 48, 50-51; De Beers, “The Heritage of De Beers.”

³⁸ Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 79, 87.

³⁹ Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 89-90; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 82-84.

company did not have the capital to keep the mines open. On 16 February 1932 Oppenheimer and the board voted to suspend all diamond mining operations by the end of March in order to reduce the company's expenditures to the bare minimum. By 1935 diamond sales increased considerably, but not enough to revive production and the diamond mines still in operation continued to be unpayable through 1937.⁴⁰

By September 1938, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, CEO of the world's largest diamond mining corporation, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, faced a difficult problem. As the United States and Europe remained in the grips of the Great Depression and rumors of war loomed on the horizon, the mining magnate recognized that the company he worked most of his life to build was in danger of financial ruin. Diamond sales spiraled downward. To save his company, Oppenheimer sent his son to New York to meet with an advertising agency that could propose new ways of increasing sales. That crucial meeting established a fifty-seven-year relationship between De Beers and N.W. Ayer & Son that transformed the diamond engagement ring into the ultimate symbol of love and commitment in American culture.

The Art of the Sale: The Early History of N.W. Ayer & Son & American Advertising

Just as the diamond industry developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the American advertising industry transformed itself into a professional business of advertising agencies working to sell goods and services to provided consumers with a slice of the American dream. Before the advent of the advertising agency, businesses wishing to advertise their wares were forced to deal directly with local newspapers. The modern American advertising agency began in the nineteenth century when the first advertising agents convinced newspapers to sell

⁴⁰ Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 145-46, 155, 170.

their advertising space on commission to businesses. Essentially, the first advertising agents were brokers between the newspapers and merchants.⁴¹ One of the “founding fathers” of American advertising agencies was Volney B. Palmer of Philadelphia. Palmer started his agency in 1841; combining his advertising business with his real-estate, wood, and coal enterprises. He solicited clients for advertising in newspapers, sent the copy to printers, and collected his fee; usually 25 percent of the amount paid to the printers. After four years of success in Philadelphia and the surrounding cities, Palmer established branches in Boston and New York. By the late 1860s advertising agents began annual contracts with publications, managing all the advertising space in each contracted newspaper. In 1869, Frances Wayland Ayer established the first substantial advertising agency in the United States: N.W. Ayer & Son. Ayer chose this name for the agency as an homage to his father and first business partner, Nathan Wheeler Ayer.

Possessing no formal knowledge of the advertising industry, Ayer, a Philadelphia native, spent the year before founding his own agency scouring the city for clients to advertise in his employer’s newspaper, the *National Baptist*. That year, Ayer earned twelve hundred dollars in commissions, prompting his employers to offer him two thousand dollars a year for his services. Rather than accepting this lucrative offer, Ayer decided to start his own advertising agency on 1 April 1869. By 1877 N. W. Ayer & Son brokered advertisements for eleven religious newspapers; a popular reading material in many American homes.⁴² In 1875 Ayer revolutionized the advertising industry with the creation of the open contract system. In years past advertising agents like Ayer worked for both the newspapers and the advertisers brokering advertisement space in each publication and receiving a commission for their work. With the open contract system, the agent worked for the advertiser, providing custom advertisements for

⁴¹ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 89; Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency*, 6-8.

⁴² Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency*, 10-17, 20, 25-26, 29.

their product and placing them in publications. By the late 1870s, N.W. Ayer & Son became one of the first agencies to provide a wide range of services for its clients. In 1879 the agency conducted its first marketing survey. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s N.W. Ayer & Son's clientele shifted from local retailers to corporations with nationwide distribution. During this period the agency began to produce advertising copy for its clients and in 1900 N.W. Ayer & Son established its Copy Department for this exact purpose. With continued successes over its first two decades in business, N.W. Ayer & Son became one of the most respected advertising agencies in the industry.⁴³

The early advertisements produced by N.W. Ayer & Son and other early advertising agencies helped transition Americans from a self-sufficient culture to a consumer-based culture. Advertisements frequently displayed new and wonderful products that consumers could purchase to save themselves the time and the hassle of making them at home. By the late 1890s, packaged, brand-name household products became the first nationally advertised goods. These products included items such as cereals, soaps, and baking ingredients. Magazines became a new frontier for advertising agencies to promote their clients' products.⁴⁴ Between 1916 and 1926 magazine advertising had increased by 600 percent. To attract the reader's attention, magazines throughout the 1920s were nearly filled to the brim with advertisements featuring expensive four-color ads of consumer goods. Advertisements in magazines became so important that by 1926 the *Saturday Evening Post* began printing a full index of advertisements in its editorial content so that readers could find advertisements just as quickly as its articles. As new consumer industries emerged, advertising agencies were responsible for facilitating the relationship

⁴³ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 90, 93-94.

⁴⁴ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 47-48, 69, 82.

between business and the American public. Agencies worked to increase the speed in which new products were introduced to consumers as a means to improve their standard of living.

Stylistically advertisements during the 1920s tended to favor colorful illustrations of consumer goods placed on a unified layout on the page. The copy in these ads also leaned towards a clean, polished appearance with prominent headlines but smaller copy actually describing the virtues of the product. Rather than commend the practicality of a product's use or function, 1920s advertisements sought to portray consumer items as a means to satisfy consumers' personal wants. Advertising during this period fueled a cycle of desire, consumption, and production. In a consumer-based survival of the fittest, the advertisements that most appealed to consumers' desires were rewarded with increased sales. Increased sales generated by advertising allowed manufacturers to escalate their scale of production and reduce the cost of their products. More affordable consumer goods allowed consumers the ability to further indulge their personal desires to consume these preferred products. This rise in consuming goods increased manufacturers' profits and gave consumers the ability to raise their standard of living.⁴⁵

In the 1930s, as many Americans were forced to cope with the economic hardships of the Great Depression, advertising agencies shifted the language and focus of their advertisements in order to convince consumers to start spending again. Advertisers focused on how a client's product was both attractive and necessary. Unlike the vibrantly colored illustrations of 1920s advertisements, ads during this period were subdued in color. Many manufactures could not afford national campaigns with expensive four-color ads. Departing from neat copy layouts, Depression Era advertisements utilized larger, bolder headlines accompanied by short articles

⁴⁵ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 7, 2, 9, 302; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 295-96.

describing the merits of the product to appeal to consumers' continued desire to maintain the highest standard of living possible. Many advertisements during this period used fear tactics to persuade consumers to use a particular product. A popular fear tactic employed in advertisements during this period was to show consumers the ramifications of no longer purchasing quality products. One example of this sensational advertising was a Scott toilet tissue ad that informed consumers of the risks to their families if they purchased substandard toilet tissue. Their children could contract "Toilet Tissue Illness," a rectal disease caused by the use of harsh toilet tissue. The only way for parents to save their child from such a fate was to buy the soft and safe Scott toilet tissue for their family. Another example of advertisements using scare tactics to sell a product was a 1936 Paris Garters ad for men's sock garters. Capitalizing on Americans' fear of unemployment, the advertisement suggested that a man ruined any chance he had for a successful job interview if he was too busy rolling his socks back up to make a good impression on the interviewer. A simple pair of Paris Garters would save him from this fate. Consumers were warned that a man who could not keep up his own socks had no place in the workplace.⁴⁶

The economic hardships of the Great Depression put many advertising employees out of work. By the mid-1930s, thousands of copywriters were out of work; joining millions of other unemployed Americans.⁴⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son felt the pressures of these current economic hardships on their industry. Some of its clients became more demanding, wanting more new advertising for less money, and the agency lost some of its accounts to competing agencies when it refused to lower its rates and copy standards. Ayer experienced a sharp decline in revenue

⁴⁶ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes*, 199-202.

⁴⁷ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 238-239.

from 1931 through 1934, but the agency's president, Wilfred W. Fry, and other Ayer executives, helped to keep the agency afloat. They agreed to drastic salary cuts—or refused a salary altogether—until the agency's financial situation improved. This gesture managed to keep operations solvent for a short period, but by 1932 Ayer was forced to reduce its staff and keep its remaining staff on as part time employees.

By the fall of 1933 N.W. Ayer did see some financial gains as the agency secured a number of newspaper, radio, and magazine advertisements, but the agency continued to limp along. By 1937 N.W. Ayer & Son elected a new president, Harry A. Batton, a longtime employee with the agency. Clarence L. Jordan became vice president in charge of accounts and Gerold M. Lauck served as vice president in charge of copy. Under their combined leadership, N.W. Ayer managed to increase its annual revenue that year and gave merit-based wage increases to its employees. By 1938 the agency was solvent enough to begin searching for new talent; something it had been unable to do for most of the decade.⁴⁸ It was during this period of economic recovery for N.W. Ayer & Son that the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited looked to the agency to solve its own financial crisis.

A Fateful Meeting: Oppenheimer Hires N.W. Ayer & Son

By the late 1930s the economic repercussions of the Great Depression ravaged luxury trades in both the United States and in Europe. High quality diamonds were no longer selling in Europe and with the threat of yet another global war on the horizon, De Beers was unlikely to sell more diamonds on the European market in the next decade. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, wealthy

⁴⁸ Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency*, 149-150, 154, 168-170, 173-174.

Americans continued to purchase diamonds, though the popularity of the stone in the United States was on a slow decline. Faced with few prospects, Ernest Oppenheimer believed that the best solution to save the diamond trade was to convince American consumers to purchase De Beers's excess production, and, in turn, stabilize the diamond market.⁴⁹ By the fall of 1938, he approached N.W. Ayer & Son to create an advertising and marketing campaign that could resuscitate/reinvigorate diamond sales.⁵⁰ On 6 September 1938, Ernest Oppenheimer's son and heir, Harry, met with N.W. Ayer executives to discuss a strategy to increase diamond sales in the United States.⁵¹

The Ayer executives proposed a series of investigative marketing surveys to gauge Americans' feelings and perceptions about diamonds. Harry Oppenheimer agreed to the idea and on 2 December 1938 he authorized a check for ten thousand dollars for Ayer to begin its "Diamond Market Investigation Survey and Report."⁵² Ayer interviewed some 2,073 married women, 2,042 married men, 480 college-aged men, and 502 college-aged women and asked their opinions on diamonds, whether or not they owned a diamond, and their willingness to buy a diamond in the future.⁵³ The surveys' results generated a mixture of optimism and concern for both Ayer and its new client. On a positive note, the surveys suggested that the middle class continued to serve as the base for future U.S. diamond sales. The jewelers Ayer surveyed

⁴⁹ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 10; Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63.

⁵⁰ Kenneth W. Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," (speech, The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Jan. 8, 1956), box 62, folder 730, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 4.

⁵¹ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 10; Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 4.

⁵² S.A. Springbett to N.W. Ayer & Son, 2 December 1938, series 18, box 1, folder 6, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵³ James B. Twitchell, *20 Ads that Shook the World: The Century's Most Groundbreaking Advertising and How It Changed Us All* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 94.

suggested that an increase in diamond advertising would increase their diamond sales and that they would be willing to participate in a national diamond advertising campaign.⁵⁴

Other results from the diamond surveys were more troubling. The consumers Ayer surveyed considered diamonds to be too old fashioned; a trend that was on its way out. They also noted that less than two-thirds of the women surveyed owned a diamond engagement ring. These young women indicated that they would prefer a new car, a fur coat, or a trip abroad to a diamond engagement ring. The surveys also suggested that most Americans lacked any basic knowledge about diamond classification or price ranges.⁵⁵ Lacking this information, American consumers tended to purchase poor-quality diamonds that averaged less than eighty dollars a stone.⁵⁶ The surveys also suggested, however, that Americans closely associated diamonds with love.⁵⁷ Focusing on this relationship, N.W. Ayer set about creating a campaign that would solidify and strengthen this link between diamonds and love.⁵⁸

The creative teams at N.W. Ayer determined that the most effective method for marketing diamonds to American consumers was to promote diamonds to a mass audience, not just to the wealthy. The agency also determined that its efforts would need to appeal to both middle-class and wealthy Americans, as the middle-class was their primary audience, even if the wealthy generally set the fashion trends for the nation.⁵⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son's creative team theorized that the best method to raise diamond sales was to promote a product that contained at least one diamond; something they believed that the majority of Americans could afford.

⁵⁴ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 5.

⁵⁵ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 5.

⁵⁶ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 10; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 122.

⁵⁷ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 10-11; Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63;

⁵⁸ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 10.

⁵⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," Ayer News File (March 31, 1941), series 16, box 6, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

Utilizing consumers' perception that diamonds equal love, N.W. Ayer decided to rekindle the diamond engagement ring tradition and save De Beers from financial ruin.⁶⁰

Rekindling an Old Flame: N.W. Ayer and the Diamond Engagement Ring Tradition

A plan to increase sales of diamonds through the sale of diamond engagement rings was a gamble for the agency. The early history of the engagement ring is rather vague. According to the gemologist George Frederick Kunz, the history of the engagement ring traces back to the ancient Romans in the second century BCE. The Romans exchanged plain iron rings as a sign of betrothal. The diamond engagement ring made its first appearance on 17 April 1477 at the betrothal ceremony of Archduke Maximilian of Austria to Mary of Burgundy. American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sometimes received a ring consisting of two rubies, an emerald, garnet, amethyst, diamond, and sapphire arranged in a row so that the first letter of each gem spelled out the word "regards." These "regards" rings were meant to symbolize a man's regard for the woman he wished to marry.⁶¹ N.W. Ayer & Son recognized that a number of specific changes in dating and marriage that would impact diamond sales. The economic hardships suffered by millions of Americans throughout the 1930s greatly affected marriage and family life in the United States. Within the first three years following the stock market collapse in 1929 unemployment rates in the United States had tripled; leaving nearly a quarter of all U.S. citizens out of work. U.S. marriage rates plummeted by 22 percent between 1929 and 1939, as both young men and women opted to postpone marriage or remain single

⁶⁰ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 6-7.

⁶¹ Kunz, *Rings for the Finger*, 199, 226-27.

because they could not financially support a family.⁶² The economic hardship of the Great Depression also ended tens of thousands of engagements. Throughout the 1930s women in the United States noted the limited availability of “marriageable men.”⁶³ To overcome these obstacles, the agency had to make the concept of the diamond engagement ring so appealing to American consumers in love that they would overlook the financial repercussions of their purchase and instead focus on the love that the ring symbolized.

Utilizing the data gathered from the “Diamond Market Investigation Survey and Report,” N.W. Ayer established a two-prong approach to sell diamond engagement rings to Americans. First, it would create a series of advertisements that emphasized the rarity, beauty, and value of diamonds while at the same time alluding to the idea that diamonds were the ideal symbol of love and affection. Second, N.W. Ayer would establish a publicity campaign that would incorporate diamonds into everyday life.⁶⁴

Successfully executing Ayer’s plan for De Beers was no simple task for the agency. By continuing to follow Rhodes’ business practice of limiting the number of diamonds available in the market at one time, De Beers was in violation of the United States’ Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. The act stated that any one corporation’s control or restriction of a product was a criminal offense and offending companies were banned from conducting business within the United States.⁶⁵ While De Beers could not retail its products directly in the United States, it

⁶² David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* The Oxford History of the United States, V. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), May, *Homeward Bound*, 41-42.

⁶³ Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 34.

⁶⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Public Relations,” Ayer News File (September 9, 1957), series 16, box 10, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 6.

⁶⁵ Pequignot, “Creating an Engaging Tradition,” 11; Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 49; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 199.

could sell uncut diamonds to U.S. manufacturers through its Diamond Trading Company in London.⁶⁶ Furthermore, N.W. Ayer & Son's advertisements could encourage diamond consumption by American consumers, but the advertisements could promote De Beers specifically as a diamond retailer. In the early years of its business dealings with De Beers, N.W. Ayer & Son proved to be an important liaison between the diamond industry and American consumers. Due to the trade restrictions preventing De Beers from retailing its products directly to American consumers, the cartel allowed N.W. Ayer complete creative control over the promotion of its product within the United States.⁶⁷ De Beers was not concerned with how N.W. Ayer worked to increase diamond sales on its behalf, just as long as those efforts were successful. Ayer executives, therefore, only met with De Beers once a year to discuss the content and successes of the campaigns.⁶⁸

On 6 April 1939 S.A. Springbett, the London Secretary of De Beers issued a check for ten thousand dollars for Ayer to launch a national advertising campaign.⁶⁹ One week before N.W. Ayer launched its national campaign promoting De Beers diamonds, it notified American jewelers in the *Jeweler's Circular Keystone* to prepare themselves for an increase in diamond promotions nationwide. Ayer stressed to jewelers the importance of diamond sales for their businesses and strongly encouraged jewelers to take part in this nationwide campaign. On 6 August 1939, the first De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisement appeared in the September issue of *Ladies Home Journal*.⁷⁰ This first series of advertisements for De Beers were

⁶⁶ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 11; Bergenstock and Maskulka, "The De Beers Story," 38.

⁶⁷ The De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited is referred to as a cartel because it and its subsidiaries restrict competition in the diamond industry. This allows De Beers to keep diamond prices at a stable level.

⁶⁸ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 4, 6-7.

⁶⁹ Warner S. Shelley to S.A. Springbett, 5 May 1939, series 18, box 1, folder 6, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁰ N.W. Ayer & Son, "An unprecedented announcement affecting every jeweler in America: Within the week, DIAMONDS will be Nationally Advertised," advertising tear sheet, 1939, series 3, box 148, folder1, N.W.

in an economical, but stylish two-tone print of blue and black set on a white background. Rather than exclusively promote the diamond engagement ring to American consumers, these advertisements supported three separate campaign goals. The first, and principal, goal of the campaign was to reinvigorate the diamond engagement ring tradition by turning it into the ultimate symbol of love and commitment in American culture. The agency's second goal for the campaign was to encourage married women to support the diamond engagement ring tradition by stressing an emotional connection between diamonds and family. Ayer's third goal for the campaign was directed at men. Ads suggested that buying diamonds would provide men with a renewed sense of personal pride as good providers who also possessed good taste.

In its first series of advertisements, Ayer attempted to achieve all three of its campaign goals with ads that pitched the concept that a diamond engagement ring symbolized a man's eternal love and devotion to his future bride while at that the same time trying to build the public's confidence in the value of diamonds.⁷¹ One such advertisement, "For him the diamonds are set in rings of beauty..." appeared in the 23 September 1939 issue of *The New Yorker*. The image at the top of the advertisement features a couple standing in a field facing a church. The text conveys the sense that the man's choice of a diamond engagement ring would ensure either prosperity or failure in his future married life, stating that:

There are many things a man must consider when undertaking one of his life's most important purchases –his diamond engagement ring...That with this symbol, he institutes a new dynasty which will bear his name beyond his generation. Once bestowed, it is imperishable. The woman he makes his wife

Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷¹ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 4, 6-9.

will never relinquish it to meet more affluent circumstances....Each man owes it to his future to give the most beautiful diamond he could buy.⁷²

The diamond engagement ring thus embodies a man's ability to fulfil his role as a husband, provider, and father. A loyal wife will treasure her diamond not only for its beauty, but as a promise of a bright future to come. The bottom of the ad features a diagram of "quality" diamonds of various sizes, shapes, and price ranges. This display of diamond prices and size ranges was part of Ayer's efforts to inform the public about the many factors affecting the price of a diamond. While the ad encourages consumers to become more informed about diamonds, it also advised consumers to use their jeweler to steer them towards the diamond of their dreams.⁷³ Another ad titled, "Of the Glory of the Times," depicts the image of a woman's dressing table with her jewels displayed next to a picture of her husband. The text states that the jewels her husband bestowed upon his female family members marked the happiest events in his life. The diamond engagement ring was merely the first step towards a lifetime of happiness.⁷⁴ The campaign proved a success. After the first four months, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that the number of diamonds imported to the United States increased by 38 percent; infusing more than ten million dollars into the diamond market.⁷⁵

⁷² N.W. Ayer & Son, "For him the diamonds are set in rings of beauty....," advertising tears sheet, 1939, box 3, folder 1, Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Of the Glory of the Times," advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁵ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (May 10, 1940), series 16, box 5, folder 11, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

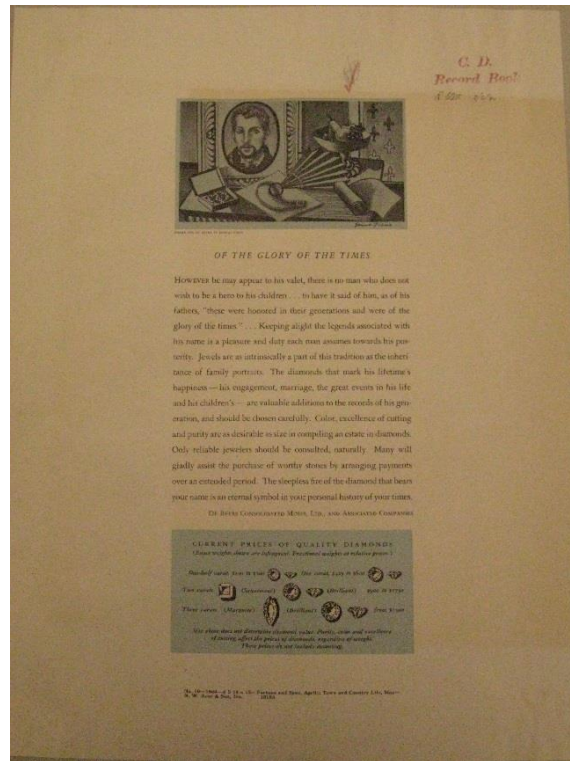


Figure 1.1 “Of the Glory of the Times,” was one of the first advertisements for diamond engagement rings by N.W. Ayer & Son on behalf of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Of the Glory of the Times,” advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

After the initial successes of the first De Beers campaign, N.W. Ayer moved to instill into the American consciousness the perception that diamonds were valuable and emotionally meaningful objects. To accomplish this goal, the agency decided to pair diamonds with priceless paintings from famous artists from around the world. This “Great Artists” campaign featured paintings from the De Beers art collection by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Dietz Edzard, Bernard LaMotte, Andre Derain, Raul Dufy, Pierre Matisse, and Marie Laurencin. Unlike the

economical two-tone advertisements from the first year of De Beers ads, the “Great Artists” campaign was printed in full-color pages to capture the consumer’s attention.⁷⁶

The first of these ads, titled “O, Time Too Swift!,” made its appearance in the 7 September 1940 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁷⁷ The ad features a Pablo Picasso painting of a mother reaching down to caress her child. The text conveys the sense that while childhood is fleeting, the beauty of a mother’s diamonds forever reminds her of the love and affection she holds for her child.⁷⁸ Another advertisement from the series, “How Noiseless Falls the Foot of Time,” repackaged the same Picasso painting with a text designed to appeal specifically to men. The advertisement plays on the idea that the years of watching one’s children grow end quickly, but a diamond can serve as a messenger carrying a father’s love and affection for his family.⁷⁹ The “Great Artists” campaign became an instant success as diamond sales increased by 25 percent within the first six months. By 1941, U.S. diamond sales had increased by 55 percent.⁸⁰

While Ayer’s De Beers advertisements were the most visible method the agency used to promote diamond engagement rings, these ads were not entirely responsible for the sudden rise in diamond sales in the United States. Just as Ayer’s advertising department worked to promote diamond engagement rings in magazines across the United States, the newly formed Diamond Information Center spent the first two years of the De Beers campaign utilizing public relations

⁷⁶ N. W. Ayer & Son, “De Beers,” *Ayer News File* (August 12, 1940), series 16, box 5, folder 12, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, “O, Time Too Swift!,” advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; Pequignot, “Creating an Engaging Tradition,” 12.

⁷⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “How Noiseless Falls the Foot of Time,” advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁰ Pequignot, “Creating an Engaging Tradition,” 12; Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63-64; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Diamonds,” *Ayer News File* (April 7, 1941), series 16, box 6, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

tactics to encourage Americans to embrace diamond engagement rings as an essential symbol of love and commitment.⁸¹ Supervised by George D. Skinner, the publicity center provided information about diamonds to jewelers, newspapers, and magazines across the United States. The center also organized events that inserted diamonds and, more importantly, positive discussions about diamonds into the public.⁸² While Skinner had the final say on most of the promotions sent out by the Diamond Information Center, day-to-day operations within the center were managed by a group of women led by Dorothy Dignam. Originally a reporter for the *Chicago Herald* and an experienced advertising agent, Dignam joined the agency's Public Relations Department in Philadelphia in 1929. When N.W. Ayer gained the De Beers account, Dignam was transferred to the agency's New York office to oversee publicity for the account. Until her retirement in 1962, Dignam was one of the Ayer employees most associated with the agency's public relations efforts for De Beers in the United States.⁸³

⁸¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Public Relations," 6.

⁸² N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," Ayer News File (March 31, 1941), series 16, box 6, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

⁸³ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Copy for Ayernews," (1988), series 19, box 7, folder 4, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

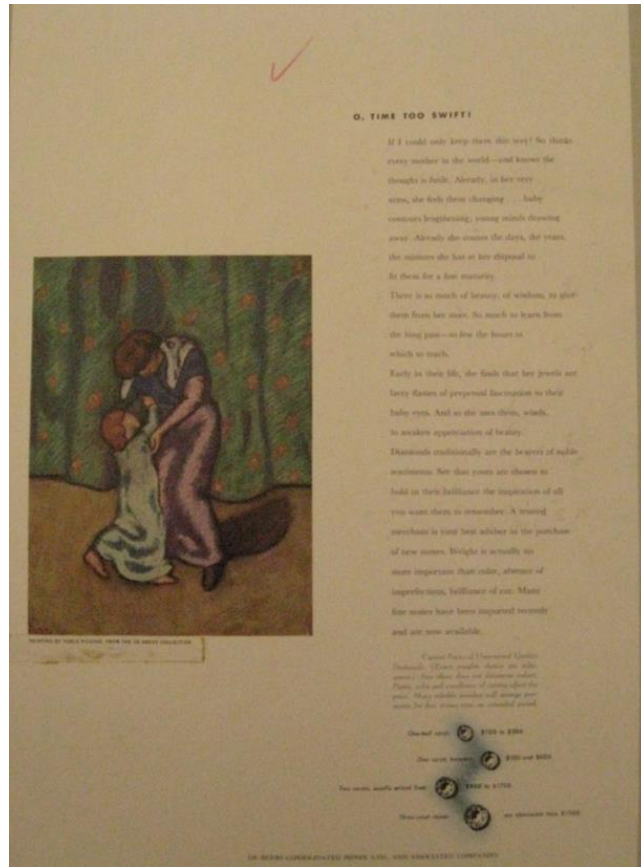


Figure 1.2 “Oh Time Too Swift!” was one of the advertisements featured in the “Great Artists” campaign by N.W. Ayer & Son for De Beers. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Oh Time Too Swift!,” advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

N.W. Ayer & Son’s Diamond Information Center was responsible for monitoring trends and providing information about diamonds to news media and jewelers across the United States as well as sponsoring and organizing promotional events featuring diamonds. The methods employed by the Diamond Information Center to reinvigorate and strengthen the diamond engagement ring tradition ranged from orchestrating grand promotion events to inserting casual references to diamond engagement rings in newspapers and radio broadcasts in major cities across the county. One of these impressive promotional events took place in Chicago in the fall

of 1940. Peggy Le Boutillier, a representative of the Diamond Information Center traveled from New York to Chicago to assist with organizing a fashion show featuring the famous Jonker diamond. The charity fashion show was intended to be the highlight of the Chicago social season, complete with a real-life princess to model the diamond. Le Boutillier spent the week escorting the model, Princess Alexandra Galitzine Rostislav of Russia, around Chicago. She also interviewed the princess at Chicago's NBC radio station; discussing the diamonds presented during the fashion show.⁸⁴

During the first week of November 1940, N.W. Ayer's Public Relations department organized its own all-diamond fashion show in New York City. Pairing fashion designers with diamond jewelry designers, the fashion show intended to promote both diamonds and the rising fashion capital of the free world. The agency detailed in a company memo the reasons behind organizing such a large event, stating that "the diamond promotion was intended to capitalize on this trend by advocating American-styled diamond jewelry with Made-in-America fashions."⁸⁵ Before the start of the fashion show, the Diamond Information Center sent noted women's commentator for CBS, Mary Margaret McBride, to observe a diamond-cutting exhibit and view some of the pieces featured in the fashion show. After the fashion show, McBride reported on the new diamond jewelry to over sixty-six radio stations across the United States. The next day another women's radio commentator for NBC, Nancy Booth Craig, reported on the diamonds she had seen during the show. Adelaide Hawley, the fashion commentator for the MGM newsreel, took photographs of the fashion show, which were then promptly shown in movie

⁸⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Phew!," *Ayer News File* (November 14, 1940), series 16, box 5, folder 13, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 4.

⁸⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (November 26, 1940), series 16, box 5, folder 13, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 3.

theaters across the country. To ensure a large crowd on the day of the show the Diamond Information Center also generated press releases about the event to all the major New York City newspapers.⁸⁶ One of these press releases for the November 5, 1940 issue of the *New York Herald Tribune* included famous jewelry designers' diamond engagement rings featured in the show and the prices for each piece. It described Cartier diamond engagement rings for one hundred dollars and Tiffany & Company rings for fifty dollars; demonstrating to American consumers that these beautiful designer diamond engagement rings were affordable even on a middle-class income.⁸⁷

In some cases Ayer also created rules of etiquette for wearing diamond engagement rings and showed tips on how to get a man to propose with a diamond ring. A 1940 press release, titled "What to do When the Engagement Ring Arrives!," instructed women to be sure to wear their diamond engagement ring on their left ring finger and present it to their friends and family to signify their new status. The press release stated that the diamond engagement ring embodied a fiancé's authority and the promise to share in his prestige.⁸⁸ In February 1940 NBC's Nancy Booth Craig dedicated her radio broadcast in Cincinnati to the upcoming leap year. Craig opened the broadcast by stating that her friend and "diamond girl," Dorothy Dignam, had some advice for unmarried young ladies looking for clever ways to use the tradition of unmarried girls proposing to their beaux on Leap Day.⁸⁹ According to Craig,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁷ N. W. Ayer & Son Diamond Information Center, "Bulletin on Beauty Article," (1940), box 8, folder 122, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-2.

⁸⁸ N. W. Ayer & Son Diamond Information Center, "What to do when the Engagement Ring Arrives!," (1940), box 62, folder 730, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-2.

⁸⁹ Nancy Booth Craig, "Little Leap Year," NBC radio broadcast, (February, 1940), box 62, folder 730, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-2.

Dignam and the other women at the Diamond Information Center suggested that these unmarried women could try sending a telegram to their boyfriend that read: “Happy Leap Year –wire reply re engagement –you and I.”⁹⁰ In case the young lad needed a hint that his lady love wanted and deserved a diamond engagement ring, Dignam suggested that women measure their left ring finger with string, tie it into a bow, and include it in a love note with the instruction to use the string to pick the ring. The message was clear, if a young woman was going to take a “leap of faith” by proposing to her boyfriend, she should be rewarded with a diamond engagement ring.⁹¹

On 18 May 1940, the Diamond Information Center sponsored a play at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. titled “How to Turn a Date into a Diamond.” Ayer promised audiences with “A little show with the wisdom for all ages... the elusive male caught and roped (into buying you a ring).”⁹² This one act play was designed to teach young single women how to get a man to propose and ultimately give them a diamond engagement ring. Once again, the message promoted by N.W. Ayer was clear: the ultimate goal for a single woman was to get married and to show off her new-found, and richly deserved position with a diamond engagement ring.⁹³

During the first seventeen months of the campaign, the Diamond Information Center collected over twenty-seven thousand newspaper and magazine items that mentioned or directly featured diamonds. These publications represented an estimated circulation of over a billion

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., 3-4.

⁹² N.W. Ayer & Son Diamond Information Center, “How to Turn a Date into a Diamond,” (1940), box 62, folder 730, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 2.

⁹³ Ibid., 1-4. Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of information available on this play beyond what was included in the program. Any newspaper articles that mentioned the play only stated its showtimes, location, and that it was about helping women get engaged.

readers.⁹⁴ By the end of 1941 diamond sales nationwide had increased by over 55 percent, but it was still uncertain that this rise in both De Beers's and N.W. Ayer & Son's good fortune would last.⁹⁵ As the world was forced into a second global conflict the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited was faced with a potentially devastating image problem that threatened to undo the success of the engagement ring campaigns. By 1942 N. W. Ayer & Son would have to do battle with the American public to preserve and increase the rising popularity of the diamond engagement ring.

⁹⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (April 7, 1941), 3.

⁹⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (April 7, 1941), 1.

Chapter 2: Diamonds for Brides and Bombers: De Beers Advertisements during World War II

On 28 June 1942, sitting in his bunk at Camp Roberts, California, Private Robert E. Quirk wrote a letter to his fiancée, Marianne. The letter was about the night of their engagement and his plans to buy her a diamond engagement ring on his next leave. He wrote, “You always hear about the fellow’s getting down on one knee and holding his hand over his heart while he’s asking for her hand in marriage.... All I said was: ‘When I get back to Detroit, if I buy a diamond, would you wear it?’ It doesn’t sound like the proposal every girl dreams of, does it, honey?”⁹⁶ Robert Quirk, like many American soldiers drafted in World War II, likely bought into the idea of giving a diamond engagement ring to his fiancée due to the efforts of N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers. As detailed in chapter one, the efforts of N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited during the Great Depression dramatically changed the American courtship process by popularizing the diamond engagement ring. The success of the agency’s advertising campaigns was not entirely due to its creative efforts, however. In order for N.W. Ayer & Son’s efforts to continue to be successful it had to successfully navigate and, when necessary, adapt to changes within American consumer, courtship, and marriage practices to sell diamond engagement rings to Americans during World War II.

⁹⁶ Robert E. Quirk to Marianne Gutzeit, Camp Roberts, CA, 28 June 1942, in *When You Come Home: A Wartime Courtship in Letters, 1941-1945*, ed. Robert E. Quirk (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 77.

High Hopes: Ayer's Early Plans for De Beers Advertising during World War II

Encouraged by the steady increase in diamond sales nationwide, by the summer of 1941 N.W. Ayer & Son proposed a new marketing and advertising campaign that would increase the overall reach of diamonds, especially diamond engagement rings, to consumers over the next year. The agency declared in its company newsletter, *Ayer News File*, that the two-color advertisements it used for De Beers in 1939 would be replaced by bolder and more expensive four-color advertisements. These new advertisements would be placed in publications with the highest national circulation: *Time*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Life*. The agency also authorized three-color De Beers ads for women's and fashion magazines: *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The Ladies Home Journal*. Finally, Ayer planned a series of black and white ads for *The New Yorker* and jewelry trade magazines such as *The National Jeweler*, *Department Store Economist*, and *Jeweler's Circular Keystone*. These proposed diamond engagement ring advertisements targeted young men and women, while additional ads for other diamond-encrusted accessories focused on attracting older married couples.⁹⁷

By 1940 with the prospect of war looming on the horizon, Americans faced the possibility of once again doing without certain luxury goods. This call for responsible consumption challenged N.W. Ayer & Son to create advertisements that would convey to consumers the belief that even during times of war it was safe to spend their money on "necessary" luxury items like diamond engagement rings. For its trade advertisements the agency created a campaign that linked industrial progress and prosperity with love and romance. The money spent by the United States War Production Board had helped to bring about the end

⁹⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (June 2, 1941), series 16, box 6, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1-2.

of the Great Depression. United States factories were producing war goods, farmers had found a market overseas with the Allies, and the domestic economy as a whole improved. The United States' official entry into the war in 1941 also created a labor shortage as millions of working-age American men were sent overseas to fight. This labor shortage in turn created higher wages, so that suddenly men and women found themselves with more money to spend on luxury items than they had had in years. The agency ran a series of advertisements for De Beers that linked this new prosperity to marriage.⁹⁸ One such advertisement, "Factory Whistles Play the Wedding March," informed department stores that government defense spending put twelve billion dollars back into the U.S. economy. This economic boost meant that finances were no longer an obstacle for young couples wishing to marry. As the advertisement suggested, it was up to department stores and jewelers to take advantage of this opportunity and increase their diamond engagement ring promotions.⁹⁹ Another advertisement, "Bugles over America," features Cupid flying around the factory smoke, signaling the United States' economic recovery. "Love in Boom" shows another pairing of weddings with factory imagery with the bride and groom surrounded by wedding bells, rotating machine gears, and smoke stacks.¹⁰⁰ Like "Factory Whistles Play the Wedding March," these advertisements advised jewelers about the potential rise in the engagement ring market because "as never before the diamond engagement ring becomes a priceless symbol of the deep bonds which men and women cherish most in these times."¹⁰¹ In these advertisements marriage and wartime emotions mirrored industrial activity.

⁹⁸ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 55.

⁹⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Factory Whistles Play the Wedding March," advertising tear sheet, 1941, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁰ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Bugles over America!," advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, "Love in Boom," advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰¹ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Love in Boom."

By using the language of production, represented by smokestacks, gears, and factory whistles, N.W. Ayer connected the power of United States capitalism with marriage.¹⁰²

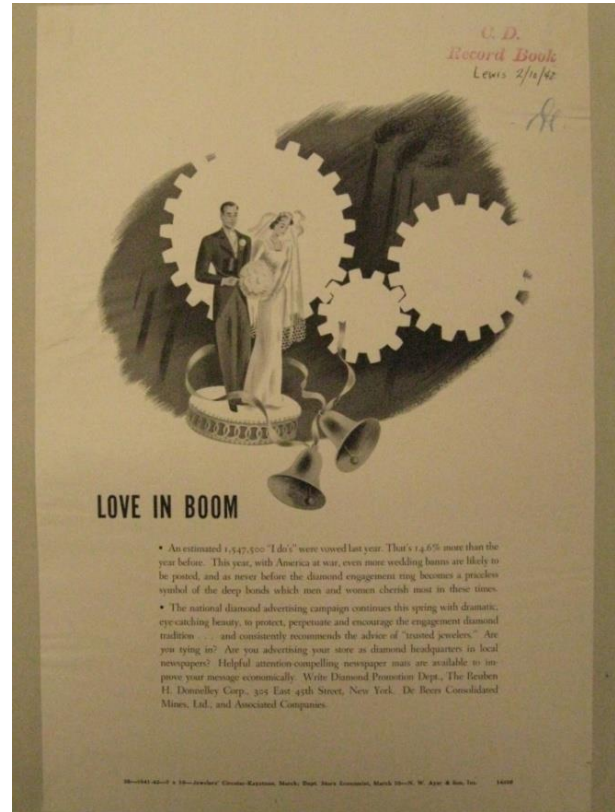
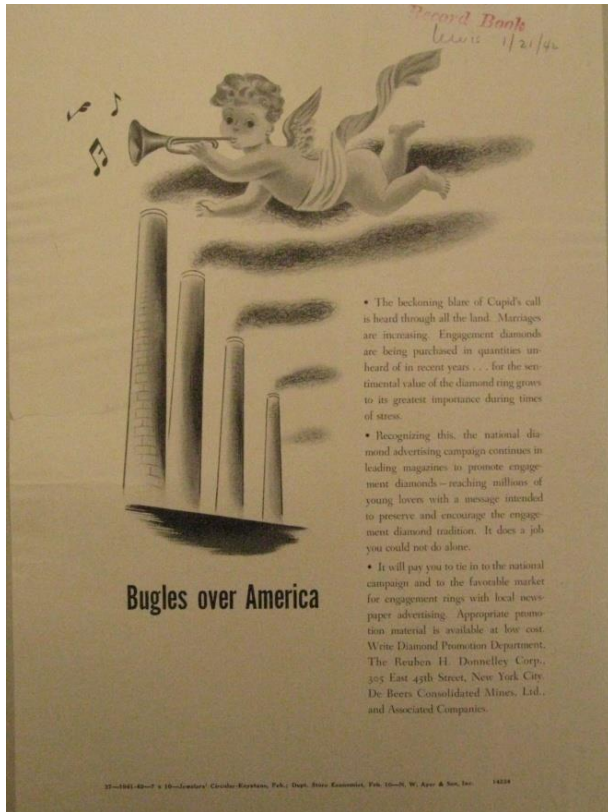


Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2. “Bugles over America!” and “Love in Boom” both linked love with industrial progress. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Bugles over America!,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Love in Boom,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers wanted to make sure that jewelers and department stores could take advantage of the potential increase in the number of marriages if the United States entered the war and instituted a draft. As stated in one of their advertisements, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers rather crassly encouraged retailers to take advantage of the “emotional urgency

¹⁰² Howard, *Brides Inc.*, 55.

stimulated by conscription.”¹⁰³ Moreover, the agency made it a point to appeal to young couples who may not have had the means to purchase a large diamond outright. This marketing strategy mirrored Keynesian economic theory popularized during the 1930s. By allowing younger men the opportunity to buy smaller diamonds, they created a broader distribution of purchasing power that stimulated consumer demand and dramatically increased sales.¹⁰⁴ Many of the agency’s advertisements for De Beers during the war featured—just as they had during the Great Depression—three or four diamonds at the bottom of the page. The major change was that the new ads started pricing diamonds from a quarter carat. By offering smaller, more affordable diamonds, the agency appealed to younger couples. Other advertisements offered alternative ways to purchase the ideal engagement ring. One such advertisement titled, “If we could only keep it this way always,” depicted a West Point cadet and his bride as she weeps with joy at the prospect of their future married life together. The advertisement highlighted diamonds at varying price ranges. The text explained that many jewelers would arrange extended payment options. This option made it possible for young soldiers, like Private Robert E. Quirk, to buy a diamond engagement ring for their sweethearts without paying for it upfront.¹⁰⁵ As the advertisement states, “You are buying now for your life to be.”¹⁰⁶ The focus is not on the price of the ring, or the debt incurred in buying it on time, but rather on the prospect of a happy life together after the war.

¹⁰³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “The Marriage Bureau Hums,” advertising tear sheet, 1941, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 54-56; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 79.

¹⁰⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “If we could only keep it this way always,” advertising tear sheet, 1941, Author’s personal collection.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 2.3. "If we could only keep it this way always" is one of the De Beers advertisements that offered smaller stones in order to appeal to younger men. N.W. Ayer & Son, "If we could only keep this way always," advertising tear sheet, 1941, author's personal collection.

With the onset of war it appeared that De Beers could look forward to increasing diamond sales as young soldiers prepared to be separated from their loved ones. But America's official entrance into the war in 1941 soon forced N.W. Ayer and De Beers to put these plans, and consumer diamond engagement ring advertisements, on hold. By 1942 instead of working

on new advertising for De Beers, the agency was tasked with preserving the cartel's good name amongst American consumers and continued to pursue rising diamond engagement ring sales.¹⁰⁷

A Change in Tactics: The Issue of Industrial Diamonds

By 1941 the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited had already been embroiled in the war for two years. In 1940 it closed all of its diamond mines worldwide for the duration of the war. The Blitzkrieg destroyed De Beers's Diamond Trading Company in London in 1941, forcing it to move all of its operations to Berkshire until the end of the war.¹⁰⁸ For their part, Ernest Oppenheimer and his family actively participated in supporting the Allied forces. Harry Oppenheimer volunteered to serve in the Reserve of Officers, Union Delta Force, and served in its Intelligence Section. He and thousands of other Allied Troops served in North Africa, helping to curb the Italians' invasion of the region. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer's wife, Ina, organized a charity market with her friends in Johannesburg to raise funds for small luxury items that could be sent to Allied troops serving in Africa.¹⁰⁹ By late spring of 1941 the Oppenheimers donated their family estate to the Red Cross to be used as a convalescent home for Allied troops while the family stayed in Harry's cottage on the property for the remainder of the war. The Oppenheimer family also paid for all of the wounded soldiers' medical expenses and even installed a state-of-the-art operating room in their home so that surgeons could perform operations on site.¹¹⁰ Despite their family's continued support of the Allies during the war, the Oppenheimers were also careful to protect the interests and future of De Beers and the diamond

¹⁰⁷ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 9.

¹⁰⁸ De Beers Group, "Our History," De Beers Group, <http://www.debeersgroup.com/en/our-story/our-history.html#1940> (accessed January 3, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 179-180, 192.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

industry as a whole. This desire to protect the diamond industry soon placed De Beers in conflict with the United States government.

Industrial diamonds had become a strategically important material for both the Axis and Allied Powers.¹¹¹ They were needed to accurately and consistently cut precision parts needed in weapons and support equipment manufacturing. The major warring powers also needed diamonds to create jeweled bearings in guidance systems and instruments in both submarines and airplanes. As early as 1940, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt expressed concern that the United States would run out of its stock of industrial diamonds and would be unable to replenish its supply if London and other major diamond distribution centers fell under Nazi control.¹¹² When the United States entered the war in 1941 it had less than a year's supply of industrial diamonds to continue weapons manufacturing. Economic planners estimated that the United States needed a minimum of 6.5 million carats of industrial diamonds for wartime production. Fearful that the United States would run out of this vital material and would be cut off from De Beers's stockpiles, Roosevelt ordered the War Production Board to purchase the necessary 6.5 million carats from De Beers before it was too late. Oppenheimer immediately refused to supply the U.S. with such a large amount of industrial diamonds. He argued that if the United States had a surplus stockpile of diamonds once the war ended, it could sell these diamonds on the open market, making the international diamond market unstable. Moreover, Oppenheimer firmly believed that the United States government's perceived shortage of industrial diamonds was a farce as the cartel had made regular sales of large quantities of industrial diamonds to the U.S.

¹¹¹ Industrial diamonds are diamonds that lack the clarity of gem diamonds and are too internally flawed to be used for jewelry. Because they possess the same hardness as gem diamonds, they are useful in manufacturing, particularly cutting or drilling processes.

¹¹² Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 50-51; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 88-89.

government.¹¹³ Angered by this lack of cooperation, Roosevelt instructed the State Department to call on the aid of Winston Churchill's War Cabinet to force De Beers to fill the diamond order. State Department officials were disappointed to find that the British government representatives responsible for hearing their request were in fact former De Beers executives who blocked their request at every turn. When diplomacy failed, the U.S. government resorted to threats to ensure De Beers's cooperation. A Justice Department memo from Attorney General Thurman Arnold, dated 16 April 1942, stated that U.S. government officials had implied to the British government that they would interrupt the supply of airplanes to Great Britain if it could not persuade De Beers to sell its industrial diamonds to the United States. Oppenheimer eventually agreed to sell the United States one million carats of industrial diamonds, a mere fraction of the original amount requested. Roosevelt continued to pressure the British government to force De Beers into selling the U.S. government the remaining 5.5 million carats it requested. With each new request De Beers claimed that it did not have enough diamonds readily available to fill the order all at once. By 1943 the apparent shortage crisis had passed, and it appeared that the U.S. government had given up its quest to strong-arm the cartel into complying with its demands.¹¹⁴ This stalemate meant that De Beers and N.W. Ayer could once again revive their advertising and promotional campaigns in the United States.

While the United States government received enough diamonds to supply weapons and equipment manufacturing for the remainder of the war, N.W. Ayer & Son was charged with the task of restoring De Beers's reputation with American consumers while also urging them to

¹¹³ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 50-51; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 89-91; Newbury, *The Diamond Ring*, 346; Kanfer, *The Last Empire*; 228; Hocking, *Oppenheimer and Son*, 205.

¹¹⁴ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 50-51; Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 89-91; Kanfer, *The Last Empire*; 227-28; Janine Roberts, *Glitter & Greed: The Secret World of the Diamond Empire* (New York: Disinformation Company Ltd., 2003), 116.

continue buying diamonds. Essentially, it had to change De Beers's reputation from that of a hoarder into a supporter of the war effort. The agency started by halting all gem advertisements to consumers from the summer of 1942 through September 1943. During this period N.W. Ayer directed all of its De Beers advertising towards department stores and jewelers. A national run of trade and retail magazine advertisements recruited jewelers and department store clerks into an army that could address the public's concern that purchasing gem-quality diamonds would deplete the military stockpiles needed for the war. In the hopes that they would pass the information on to consumers, N.W. Ayer also produced trade literature to educate jewelers and jewelry departments about the distinction between gem-quality diamonds and industrial diamonds. The agency wanted to make it perfectly clear that brides did not have to sacrifice their diamond engagement rings for the war effort.¹¹⁵ One De Beers advertisement, titled "Grind it to Powder," did picture a bride removing her engagement ring, showing her willingness to sacrifice her ring to "help give him clearer vision."¹¹⁶ The text from the ad assured the patriotic bride that the Allied Forces had plenty of diamonds for the cause, so American brides did not need to ration or collect gem-quality diamonds for the war. According to N.W. Ayer and De Beers, buying gem diamonds actually furthered the war effort. Gem diamonds were mined in the same mines as industrial diamonds, so diamond engagement ring sales actually helped to defray mining costs.¹¹⁷ Another of these industrial diamond advertisements asked if diamonds were

¹¹⁵ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 51; Zoellner, *The Heartless Stone*; 138; Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 9.

¹¹⁶ Quoted from N. W. Ayer & Son, "Grind it to Powder," advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

“For Brides-Or Bombers?” and answered that they were for both. Diamond engagement rings thus appeared central to the war effort.¹¹⁸



Figure 2.4. “Grind it to Powder” was one of the advertisements the agency used to make diamonds appear to be central to the war effort. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Grind it to Powder,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

The temporary hold on national diamond engagement ring advertisements did not prevent Ayer’s Diamond Information Center from gathering information that it could use to generate

¹¹⁸ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 51.

positive interest in diamond engagement rings for the time when it could resume promotions. Any information, from locating popular places for marriage proposals to reporting about the first person to whom a newly-minted fiancée announced her engagement, could provide the agency with the ammunition it needed to boost future engagement ring sales. On 1 December 1942, J. Vance Babb, the co-director of Ayer's New York Public Relations office received a memo from Florence L. Seiders, one of the agency's Plans and Merchandizing department employees. The memo provided details of an in-office survey Seiders conducted of recently engaged women regarding their diamond engagement rings. She explained that while she canvassed the entire N.W. Ayer & Son New York office, she managed to only find twenty-nine women to complete an engagement ring questionnaire. All of the other engaged women in the office at the time intended to get married quickly and left their jobs before Seiders could survey them.

From this small sample, Seiders discovered that twenty-eight of the participants had a diamond engagement ring, while the one remaining participant received a sapphire engagement ring instead. More importantly, the survey revealed how much these women valued owning an engagement ring and detailed the factors influencing the type of ring they received. For example, the majority of the women surveyed knew what type of engagement ring they wanted because they saw the ring while they were window shopping. Twenty of the women said that they would never take their ring off under any circumstances and only two women surveyed stated that they once became so mad at their fiancé that they threw their engagement ring at him. Seiders' results suggested that the Ayer women surveyed already subscribed to the belief that a

diamond engagement ring was an essential part of the courtship process and that the ring itself symbolized a couple's love.¹¹⁹

An August 1943 report from the agency's Research Department generated statistical predictions of marriage rates during and after the war. Using data on U.S. marriage rates between 1910 and 1942, Ayer's Research Department attempted to predict marriage patterns from 1943 to 1949. They predicted that marriage rates would mirror marriage rates seen during World War I; meaning that the marriage rate would spike during the first few years of the war and decline slightly at the end of the war. The main difference between the number of marriages during World War I and World War II was that the total number of marriages in a given year had risen considerably by the 1940s. In 1942 1.8 million Americans tied the knot. The Research Department's report predicted that 1943 would see an additional 1.3 million Americans walking down the aisle. If these estimates were accurate, the United States would continue to see an average of 1.5 million individuals married annually over the next seven years. Assuming that N.W. Ayer maintained its success record with De Beers, they could expect steady or rising diamond sales in the coming years.¹²⁰ Armed with this encouraging information, the agency prepared to resume national De Beers advertising as soon as possible.

¹¹⁹ Florence L. Seiders to J. Vance Babb, 1 December 1942, box 1, folder 111.1, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1.

¹²⁰ N.W. Ayer & Son, "War and Postwar Marriages," (1942), box 9, folder 122.2, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1.

Getting Back on Track: Diamond Engagement Ring Promotions during the Remainder of the War

Once the heat had died down over the issue of industrial diamonds, N.W. Ayer & Son organized public relations and advertising campaigns to maintain public interest regarding diamond engagement rings. The agency began working on advertising campaigns for De Beers that focused not on where the diamonds came from, but on the promise of a happy married life for couples separated by war. Dorothy Dignam and the Diamond Information Center also organized promotion campaigns that sometimes subtly and, more often than not, blatantly inserted diamond engagement rings into everyday life. More importantly, these advertisements both reflected and prescribed changing gender roles within American marriages. The overall success of these campaigns hinged on N.W. Ayer & Son's ability to make diamond engagement rings an essential component of the ideal marriage.

Beginning in the fall of 1943, N.W. Ayer & Son released two new advertising campaigns for De Beers. The first series was geared towards couples rushing to the altar before their soldier was sent to fight overseas. Featuring images of famous churches around the United States, this series was designed to link the diamond engagement ring to the sacred marriage ceremony. The second series targeted couples choosing to become and remain engaged until the end of the war. This series features images of soldiers' sweethearts separated from their fiancés by the war. The diamond engagement ring in these advertisements served as a link connecting couples while they lived thousands of miles apart.¹²¹ One advertisement from the famous churches series titled, "Spires of the Spirit," featured a painting of St. Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York. The

¹²¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "New Campaigns," *Ayer News File* (February 28, 1944), series 16, box 6, folder 9, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 3; Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 10.

text stated that, like the high towers of the church itself, a couples' spirits would be lifted by the covenant of their marriage. The bride's diamond engagement ring would "hold ever so bright a promise—of life grown richer for all the work and waiting and believing that must intervene before the world that can be."¹²² Another advertisement from the series titled, "O'er Eden," suggested that a woman's diamond engagement ring would remind her of her marriage ceremony and comfort her when her husband went off to war.¹²³ Still aware of the public's concern regarding the need for diamonds for the war effort, the bottom right corner of the advertisements featured a special section on industrial diamonds. Similar to the trade advertisements Ayer had run on behalf of De Beers during its industrial diamond crisis, the ad assured customers that their gem diamonds helped defray mining costs for the industrial diamonds needed for the war effort.¹²⁴

Years later, at a luncheon for women in the advertising industry, an Ayer executive implied that the agency's famous churches series did more than merely sell diamond engagement rings to the masses. He claimed that the series actually provided a social service by "stressing the importance of a religious ceremony, and paying tribute to various faiths, while it associated the diamond with the spiritual values as the guardian of future happy homes."¹²⁵ Attaching the diamond engagement ring to a marriage ceremony solidified the growing public perception that giving and receiving a diamond engagement ring was an essential step on the road to marriage. Like the famous churches series, the De Beers separated sweethearts advertisements intended to

¹²² N.W. Ayer & Son, "Spires of the Spirit," advertising tear sheet, 1944, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹²³ N.W. Ayer & Son, "O'er Eden," advertising tear sheet, 1943, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹²⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Spires of the Spirit;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "O'er Eden."

¹²⁵ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 10.

pull at consumers' heartstrings and strengthen their association of diamonds with love. The advertisements from this campaign featured images of lovely young women waiting longingly and patiently for their fiancés to return home safe from the war. In each of these advertisements her diamond engagement ring sits prominently on her left hand. One such advertisement, titled "Of absence and fond heart," featured a young woman sitting quietly on a couch gazing off into the distance. Its text implies that her diamond engagement ring is a star that guides her fiancée's thoughts to her while he is away.¹²⁶ For this series, the diamond engagement ring acted as a constant reminder of the couple's vow to remain faithful until they could marry and to hold strong to the promise of a better life together after the war.¹²⁷ While magazines featured advertisements with images of famous churches and separated sweethearts, the Diamond Information Center worked to insert the diamond engagement ring into everyday conversation.

¹²⁶ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Of absence and fond heart," advertising tear sheet, 1945, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹²⁷ Slifer, "The Story of the De Beers Campaign," 10.

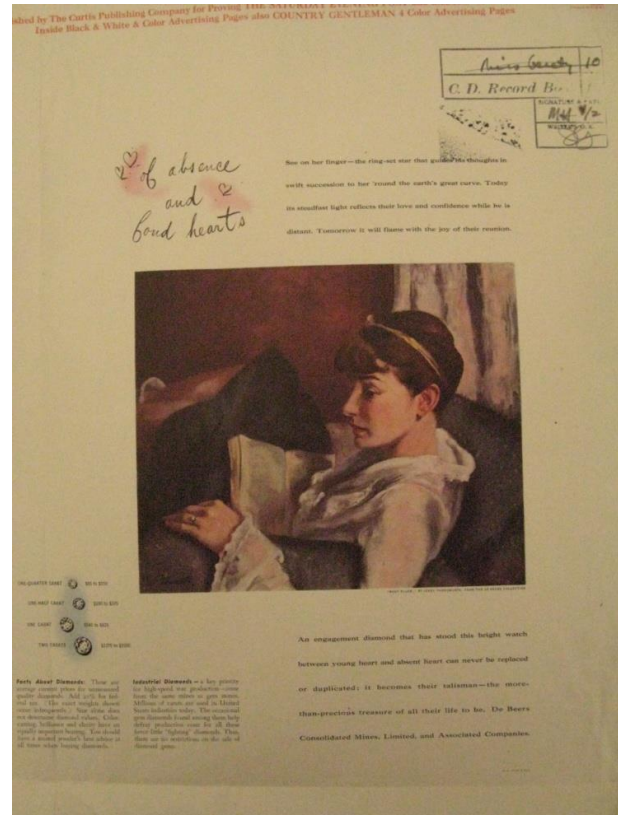
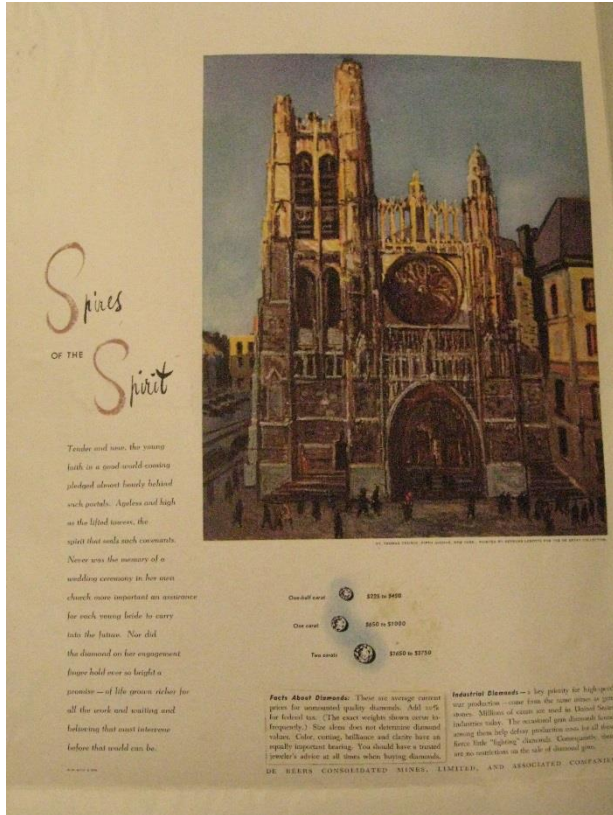


Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6. “Spires of the Spirit” and “Of absence and fond heart” were two examples of the advertisements Ayer used to sell diamonds after the industrial diamond crisis ended in 1943. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Spires of the Spirit,” advertising tear sheet, 1944, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Of absence and fond heart,” advertising tear sheet, 1945, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

In honor of one of the busiest months for weddings, on 1 June 1944, Dorothy Dignam sent fifty letters to newspaper editors across the country. Enclosed with each letter was a blue handkerchief with a hand-painted pink rose and a large diamond engagement ring on the corner. The letter jokingly stated that Dignam sent the handkerchief along just in case the editor cried at weddings. In reality, both the letter and the handkerchief were sent to remind newspapers to mention a bride or fiancée’s diamond engagement ring in their wedding news coverage. By encouraging newspapers to mention diamond engagement rings without having to mention Ayer’s client, De Beers, the agency created the illusion that information on a bride’s diamond

engagement ring was a topic of genuine public interest. Like the De Beers church advertisements, this press coverage conveyed the sense that diamond engagement rings were a standard part of the marriage ceremony.¹²⁸

Just as it had done before the war, the Diamond Information Center branch of N.W. Ayer's Public Relations Department organized events that allowed the public to see and interact with diamonds beyond the pages in magazines and jewelry store windows. In 1943 it hosted a diamond fashion show at the Ambassador Hotel in New York City. Named "Diamond, Bride and Bugle Call," the fashion show featured twelve brides and grooms modeling popular wedding fashions of seven wars, including World War II. To ensure that diamonds remained the focal point of the fashion show, before each of the brides took to the runway they would display an eleven foot tall projection of the diamond jewelry set the bride wore as part of her ensemble.¹²⁹

The largest promotional campaigns organized by the Diamond Information Center during the last two years of the war merged diamond engagement rings with the most unlikely of subjects, china dolls. In the spring of 1944 Dorothy Dignam asked Mary E. Lewis, an antique doll collector, to assemble a collection of dolls dressed as brides for a diamond engagement ring display. Together, she and Dignam researched two hundred years of popular American wedding trends, including popular diamond ring styles that may have been used as engagement rings in the past. With the help of an expert dolls' dressmaker, Lewis assembled twenty-four dolls dressed in bridal gowns from the 1750s to the 1940s.¹³⁰ In August 1944 the Diamond

¹²⁸ Dorothy Dignam to Editor, 1 June 1944, box 62, folder 730, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1.

¹²⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Public Relations Dept. Notes," *Ayer News File* (October 8, 1943), series 16, box 6, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 4.

¹³⁰ Mary E. Lewis and Dorothy Dignam, *The Marriage of Diamonds and Dolls* (New York: H.L. Lindquist Publications, 1947), xiii-xiv.

Information Center organized a two-day event at the Park Lane Hotel in New York City that placed these dolls and a selection of antique diamond rings on display for the public. Called “A Gallery of Diamonds and Dolls,” the event was so popular that N.W. Ayer sent Mrs. Lewis on a national tour with her dolls, a collection of antique diamond rings on loan from Hammer Galleries in New York, and some modern rings from Black, Starr & Gorham. The agency even used the dolls for charity events sponsoring the Red Cross, war bond drives, and the Girl Scouts of America. Due to the nationwide success of Mrs. Lewis’s dolls, in 1947 she and Dorothy Dignam published a book titled *A Marriage of Diamonds and Dolls*. The book featured photographs and the history surrounding each doll’s wedding dress and engagement ring, as well as advice on how to buy and care for a diamond engagement ring. Consumers who could not visit the display could still view the collection from the comfort of their own homes.¹³¹ By displaying a collection of dolls in bridal gowns next to diamond engagement rings N.W. Ayer created an event that attracted consumers of all ages and instilled in them the perception that the diamond engagement ring tradition had been popular for all brides over the last two centuries and that it would continue for future generations to come.

Before American and Allied Forces declared Victory in Europe in 1945, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers declared their victory in raising diamond sales during the war. In a 1944 press release Ayer claimed that three out of every four brides in the United States received a diamond engagement ring. The agency’s most significant victory in this regard was the fact that 93 percent of women surveyed stated that they would rather have a diamond ring over any other

¹³¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Catalogue: A Galley of Diamonds and Dolls,” (August, 1944), box 40, folder 255, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1; Lewis and Dignam, *Marriage of Diamonds and Dolls*, xiv-xv, 190-94.

object because “the diamond means romance and romance is first in their lives.”¹³² When American gem diamond sales reached over a staggering \$278 million in 1943, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers readied themselves to push for even higher diamond sales in the future.¹³³

A Glimpse of the Future: Perceptions of Gender Roles in Postwar Marriages

Although much of N.W. Ayer’s success with De Beers advertising and promotional campaigns can be attributed to the creativity and artistry of the agency’s employees, the overall success of the advertisements themselves hinged on Ayer’s ability to reach a variety of consumers. N.W. Ayer subscribed to the philosophy that advertisements work most effectively when they present a vision of an “ideal” life that all consumers can access by purchasing and consuming a particular item. N.W. Ayer & Son’s De Beers campaigns were successful precisely because they linked ideal postwar social constructions of gender, courtship, and marriage with American consumerism. The agency’s engagement ring advertisements both reflected and shaped wartime and postwar social perceptions of an ideal American marriage as one that was built upon the foundation of a male provider and a female dependent consumer.¹³⁴ By adapting to changes in American consumerism and courtship, De Beers wartime diamond engagement ring

¹³² N.W. Ayer & Son, “Three Out of Four Brides Get Diamond Rings,” (1944), box 40, folder 255, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1.

¹³³ Those sales figures would equal roughly \$4.13 billion in 2018. *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁴ As previously stated in the introduction, while the concept of the provider role for men has been discussed in a number of works relating to marriage in the United States, these works tend to define women’s roles as dependents of their husbands. Although this study agrees that in the idealized model of marriage women would have to depend on their husbands for financial support, the role of dependent overlooks the agency that women expressed through their consumption of everyday materials. Because women were responsible for the purchasing of food, clothing, and other necessities for the family they were able to exercise their authority as consumers while still maintaining their status as dependents; thus making them into dependent consumers. This study defines dependent consumerism as the socially accepted practices and customs of 20th century America expected women to make or directly influence household purchases but only with the allowance that their husbands were willing to provide for the maintenance of the household.

advertisements were projections of the roles both men and women should perform within their marriages and households once the war was over.

As detailed in chapter one, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited originally turned to N.W. Ayer & Son to stimulate consumer demand for diamonds in order to counteract the losses the company had suffered during the Great Depression. Inspired by the Diamond Market Investigation Survey that the agency conducted in 1939, N.W. Ayer & Son created the successful formula of equating diamonds with love in order to sell them to American consumer.¹³⁵ By the turn of the twentieth century many Americans believed that spending money on luxury items was essential for the well-being of their families. Despite the nation's economic hardships and the deprivations suffered by millions of people world-wide, men and women across the U.S. still desired the consumer goods and luxury items that had been introduced to them in advertisements throughout the 1920s. Middle-class women were especially targeted in these advertisements, as well as other media outlets, to believe that it was the responsibility of their husbands to provide them with a life of security and material comforts such as their own home, household appliances, and a car. Increasingly, Americans reinforced the link between financial security, material comfort, and masculinity. A husband who could not maintain his wife in the lifestyle that society expected was a failure as a man.¹³⁶ The expectation that men would serve as the sole financial providers for their families persisted well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

¹³⁵ Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63.; Elizabeth Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 219; S.A. Springbett to N.W. Ayer & Son, 1.

¹³⁶ May, *Great Expectations*, 137-39; Leach, *Land of Desire*, 295-96; Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 73-74; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 188; Peter R. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3 ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 167.

The Great Depression restructured the way that Americans purchased goods and turned Americans into what historian Lizabeth Cohen described as one of two types of consumers: citizen consumers and purchaser consumers. Citizen consumers believed that it was their responsibility to safeguard the wellbeing of the public by censuring unscrupulous businesses and manufacturers. They especially believed that it was their duty to demand greater governmental protection of the rights, safety, and fair treatment of American consumers within the marketplace. Purchaser consumers believed that consumers could generate changes within society by exercising their purchasing power. Their spending would not only stimulate the economy, but also reward honest businesses and manufacturers with their continued patronage. This conscientious consumer spending in turn would encourage businesses to keep the needs of the consumer in mind or risk losing their customer base.¹³⁷

The goal of New Deal programs such as the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration sought to enhance consumer's purchasing power as a means to stimulate the economy. Despite their best efforts, the successes of the New Deal programs were crippled by new economic downturns in 1937 and 1938. Towards the end of 1938, government policy makers began to reexamine the work of British economist John Maynard Keynes and his 1936 book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Keynesian economic theory stipulated that increased purchasing power stimulates and stabilizes the economy.¹³⁸ According to Keynes, conscientious deficit spending on the part of the government would end the depression. Deficit spending, Keynes argued, would offset the downturn of the business cycle and stimulate the economy.¹³⁹ New Deal reformers quickly

¹³⁷ Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 18-19.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-56.

¹³⁹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, The Oxford History of the United States, V. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79.

started work on a new government spending program aimed at expanding mass consumption to stabilize the economy. Keynes and many of the New Deal government officials, including President Roosevelt, felt that under-consumption was one of the primary causes of the economic depression. Theoretically, Keynesianism would bring about greater economic egalitarianism because higher wages (made possible through deficit spending in government programs like the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps) would facilitate a broader distribution of purchasing power and stimulate consumer demand.¹⁴⁰ This theory was especially appealing to Roosevelt New Dealers because it justified their goal of correcting the vast income disparity that had resulted in 1 percent of the U.S. population controlling 44.2 percent of the wealth.¹⁴¹

As the 1930s drew to a close, American manufacturers viewed Keynes's economic theory as an opportunity to increase profits. They began to recognize the purchasing power of the American consumer. Their new focus was to make consumers forget about the economic hardships of the times and enjoy buying products again.¹⁴² N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers quickly recognized the potential in encouraging consumers to spend instead of save. The first De Beers advertisements by the agency featured a highlight at the bottom of the page with different sized diamonds with price ranges for each stone. The different sizes and price ranges told consumers that diamond engagement rings were available for individuals with different budgets.¹⁴³ Later advertisements, such as the one featuring the West Point cadet and his fiancée,

¹⁴⁰Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 54-56.

¹⁴¹G. William Domhoff, "Power in America: Wealth, Income, and Power," *Who Rules America?*, September 2005, <http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html> (accessed June 12, 2010).

¹⁴²Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 56-60.

¹⁴³ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A Certain Pride in Heritage," advertising tear sheet, 1939, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

suggested that jewelers were often willing to offer payment plans for engagement rings.¹⁴⁴

While De Beers continued to target a middle class audience, these advertisements acknowledged the need to develop mass consumer appeal.¹⁴⁵ These options would allow all men, regardless of class, the opportunity to present an image of themselves—even if was an illusion—as a suitable provider for their future family.

When Europe became engulfed in World War II, after 1939 the American economy experienced an impressive upswing. Following the same Keynesian economic principals of deficit spending that they had used during the Great Depression, the United States government pulled the country out of the Depression as it prepared for war. Before the United States had officially entered the war, Congress appropriated more funding for armaments than it had during World War I. This focus on war production filled factories with workers who began to have a more stable living than they had in years. With this regained prosperity, Americans were eager to once again spend more of their income on consumer products. Department store sales in 1941 reached an all-time high, while cars sales were up by 55 percent. When the United States officially entered the war, the War Production Board reallocated many of the materials used to produce consumer goods toward the production of armaments. Due to these shortages, many Americans began to show their support for the war effort by practicing responsible consumption.

Established by President Roosevelt in 1941, the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply, or OPA, was responsible for rationing all commodities needed for the war effort. In order to show their patriotism, Americans would adhere to OPA pricing and rationing regulations, participate in scrap drives, and grow their own vegetables in Victory Gardens. These

¹⁴⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, “If we could only keep it this way always.”

¹⁴⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Diamonds,” *Ayer News File* (March 31, 1941), 2.

acts of collective effort and sacrifice helped many Americans live much more comfortably than they had during the Great Depression. By 1944, the average factory worker's wages had increased by 80 percent from 1939, while the cost of living had only increased by 24 percent. Larger incomes meant that Americans once again had more money to spend on luxuries. Many Americans increased their spending on entertainment, clothing, and restaurants during the war. This pattern of consuming luxury goods and services continued long after the war ended.¹⁴⁶ As previously stated, N.W. Ayer & Son redesigned its De Beers advertisements during the war to present the diamond cartel as a supporter of the war effort. By informing the public that the gem diamonds in their engagement rings helped defray mining costs of industrial diamonds for the war, the agency successfully created the perception that each new diamond engagement ring aided in securing an Allied victory.¹⁴⁷

In addition to addressing consumers' hesitancy to purchase luxury items, N.W. Ayer & Son also had to weave the diamond engagement ring into the complex world of dating. The notion that a young man needed to spend money on a diamond engagement ring to secure a woman's love and affection resonated with turn-of-the-century American courtship practices. During this period, a system of courtship centered on men "calling" on women at home had slowly given way to a new concept of "dating" in which young couples met and interacted outside of the home. The word *date* did not enter into American middle-class vocabulary until the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, dating became popular among middle-class Americans, although it originally began as a working-class practice. The practice of dating for working class Americans was a response to the rise of the urban-industrial setting. Families that

¹⁴⁶ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 63, 65-67, 69-70.

¹⁴⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Spires of the Spirit."

could not afford the luxury of entertaining and supervising male callers had to adapt by allowing their daughters to meet suitors outside the home.¹⁴⁸

One of the most significant changes brought about by the transition from calling to dating was the couple leaving the young woman's home to socialize in public. This change removed the supervisory role of a young woman's parents and allowed the couple to interact in restaurants, movie theaters, and dance halls. Away from the watchful eyes of parents, courting in the public sphere also offered couples new freedoms and opportunities for sexual experimentation. This new-found freedom came with a (literal) price. All of these public activities cost money. For middle-class Americans this change in setting caused a major shift in the power structure of American courtship to favor men.¹⁴⁹ When young men called on their sweethearts at home, a young woman, or her parents, controlled the location and duration of the interaction. This type of courtship allowed women to control the amount of time that the couple spent together and how long the relationship continued. Dating shifted courtship out of the home—an environment that was dominated by other women—into public spaces where a young woman had less power. Within the calling system, women had taken the initiative by asking a man to call on them. Dating, though it did not necessarily bar women from making the first move, made it a custom for men to take initiative by inviting a women outside of the home. This change in gender dynamics had a profound effect on the way American men and women initiated courtship. The transition from courtship to dating shaped interaction between single

¹⁴⁸ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 16-17; John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 87, 89; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 199-200.

¹⁴⁹ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 13; Modell, *Into One's Own*, 87.

men and women into a system that favored men. Dating therefore became a vehicle by which women became dependent on men to provide for them.¹⁵⁰

By taking courtship out of the home and into public, money became an important factor in American courtship practices. The entertainment offered by movie theaters, restaurants, and dance halls all cost money. Funding for these activities became the responsibility of the man and a man's money took center stage in the dating system. Not only did money transform men from guests to hosts, but men began to understand dating as a system of economic exchange.¹⁵¹ Working class single women in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s also understood dating as a system of economic exchange. They allowed—and even sought out—men to “treat” them to a night of dining and entertainment at restaurants, movie theaters, dance halls, cabarets, or amusement parks in exchange for their company.¹⁵² Dating made men's access to women directly dependent on money. Women in the dating system were not viewed as financially responsible; their contribution was their company. By including money in the dating system, men were not only gaining companionship, but also power to control important aspects of the relationship. Men were ultimately the ones to decide where a couple would go on a date, how much money would be spent on that date, and how long the relationship was “worth” continuing.¹⁵³ As historian Beth Bailey states, “money purchased obligation; money purchased inequality; money purchased control,” as men usually expected sexual favors in return for the money they spent on their dates.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 20-21, 23; Modell, *Into One's Own*, 87-89; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 199-200.

¹⁵¹ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 22-23.

¹⁵² Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 102-03.

¹⁵³ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 22-23; Modell, *Into One's Own*, 92.

¹⁵⁴ Beth L. Bailey as quoted in *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 23.

De Beers ads mirrored this new romantic form of economic exchange and prescribed a method by which men could secure a woman's attentions for life: the diamond engagement ring. By purchasing diamond engagement rings men were also purchasing women's obligation to them both sexually and emotionally. In a culture that discouraged premarital sex, a woman's diamond engagement ring served as a "down payment" for her virginity. By wearing the engagement ring, she would be able to hold off other men's advances and preserve her virtue for her fiancé.¹⁵⁵

More importantly, the type of economic exchange practiced within the world of dating prepared men and women for the roles they were expected to play should they marry. As providers, men would be expected to determine the household budget based on their income. Women, as dependent consumers, would be expected to purchase goods for the family based on the budget provided by her husband. As the diamond engagement ring itself was an item desired by women but acquired via a man's purchasing power, the marriage proposal and subsequent engagement period served as an early proving ground for establishing an ideal marriage centered on dependent consumerism.¹⁵⁶

While N.W. Ayer & Son successfully managed to project the diamond engagement ring as a necessity within America's courtship practices, the advertisements it created on behalf of De Beers also appealed to consumers by offering the recipe for a blissful marriage. In doing so, these diamond engagement ring advertisements reflected the promise of a happy married life and prescribed gender roles for a postwar United States and prescribed the means by which men and women could perform their gender roles. Giving and receiving diamond engagement rings

¹⁵⁵ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 36; May, *Homeward Bound*, 69.

¹⁵⁶ Pequignot, "Creating an Engaging Tradition," 41.

continued to play an important role in the performance of heterosexual gender roles. Men were expected to buy a ring in order to prove their affection and financial stability. By accepting the ring, a young woman agreed to be the man's partner and act in a manner that supported her future husband's goals and decisions. Being engaged indicated that she was no longer expected to act as an individual, but rather as half of a couple. Furthermore, by wearing a diamond engagement ring a woman demonstrated that she belonged to someone. The ring became a signifier that a woman was no longer sexually available to other men, often long before a couple was officially married.¹⁵⁷

With millions of young servicemen fighting across the globe during World War II, women were left at home to keep maintain home, business, and factory production levels. Between 1940 and 1945, 37 percent of American women entered the wage labor force, which represented an increase of 50 percent. In addition to the financial rewards, the opportunity for employment gave more women a taste for work outside of the home. Although women were laid off from manufacturing jobs after the war, this push towards domesticity did not deter them from seeking employment in offices across the country. By 1947, 31 percent of American women remained employed outside the home. While 75 percent of working women during the war were married, there was a general sense of concern in American culture for the unmarried women left at home.¹⁵⁸ Worried that the freedoms of single life would tempt women to lose their morals, the media urged women to remain "pure" for the time soldiers would return home. Movie star Bette Davis urged young women not to be afraid of protecting their reputations. In an issue of *Photoplay*, she told fans that "good sports get plenty of rings on the telephone, but prudes get

¹⁵⁷Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 104-5.

¹⁵⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 67; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 222; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 159-60.

them on the finger,” a ubiquitous reminder of the increasing importance of diamond engagement rings and female virtue in American culture.¹⁵⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son reflected this cultural expectation for female virtue in its early wartime advertisements for De Beers. Advertisements produced between 1943 and 1945 featured fiancées staring off into the distance with a diamond engagement ring to remind them of their husband-to-be. The separated sweethearts advertisements reinforced the cultural expectation that single women would remain pure and faithful until their love returned from war.¹⁶⁰

One such example of these separated sweethearts advertisements, titled “Until Tomorrow,” premiered in 1943 and features a woman looking out into the distance, holding a letter in her left hand with her diamond engagement ring twinkling on it. Her expression conveys a sense of longing for her love. The text states, “So carefully gay, so brief the hours you spent together. How can you know she understands ... the things you will only be able to say when years once more become more calm and tranquil? The steadfast flame of your diamond engagement ring brings deep assurance— a tireless light to the threshold of your life to be.”¹⁶¹ The text makes clear allusions to the ongoing war and the separations that it caused for many young couples. The image in the advertisement is of a young woman who is pretty, thin, and elegantly dressed in a skirt, blouse and heels. She is leaning against a wall in a relaxed pose, daydreaming as she holds a letter that is presumably from her fiancé. Reflective and passive, she appears lost in thought with nowhere to go and nothing to do. This image conveys the idea that without her fiancé, this young woman is incomplete. She is performing the role of a loyal and

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in May, *Homeward Bound*, 65.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-69.

¹⁶¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Until Tomorrow,” advertising tear sheet, 1943, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

devoted woman waiting for her love to return home. This image personifies the cultural expectation that once a woman is part of a couple she could no longer act independently. Portraying the woman at home and not in public conveys the expectation of fidelity. Alone, not interacting with other men, her purity and loyalty to her fiancé remains firm and intact until the “tomorrow” when he will return from war.¹⁶²

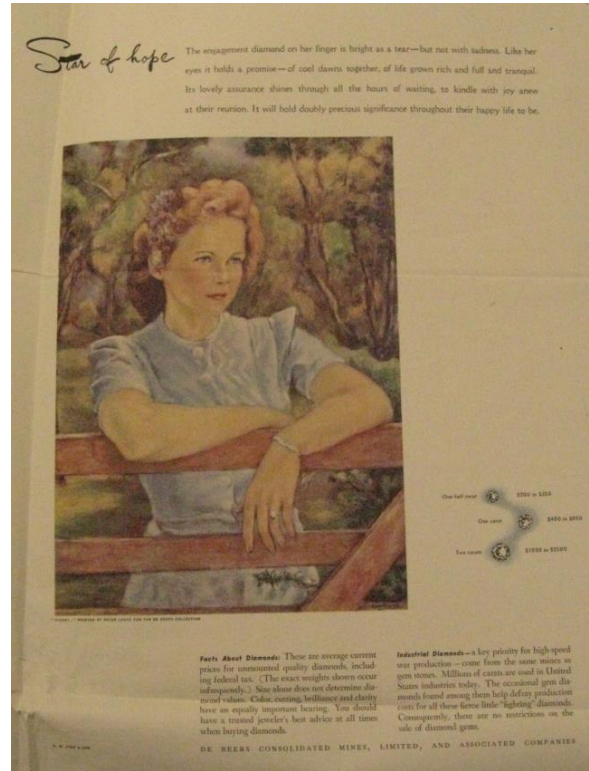


Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.8. “Until Tomorrow” and “Star of Hope” are examples of fiancées faithfully waiting for their man to return from war. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Until Tomorrow,” advertising tear sheet, 1943, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Star of Hope,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Another example from this series is titled “Star of Hope.” Similar to “Until Tomorrow” and “Of Absence and Fond Heart,” “Star of Hope” features a woman staring off into the distance

¹⁶² Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; May, *Homeward Bound*, 69; Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” *The Journal of Consumer Research* 26, no.3(June 1999): 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

with her diamond engagement ring prominently displayed on her left hand. The text states, “The diamond engagement ring on her finger is bright as a tear— but not with sadness. Like her eyes it holds a promise— of cool dawns together, of life grown rich and full and tranquil. Its lovely assurance shines through all the hours of waiting, to kindle joy anew at their reunion.”¹⁶³ The text conveys the sense that with the act of wearing her diamond engagement ring she will remain faithful to her fiancé even if he is absent for years. The diamond on her engagement ring is intended to shine as a reminder of her fiancé’s love for her. Standing outdoors, but behind a fence, she appears corralled or “fenced in.” Separation from the company of others, especially other men, ensures that her virtue will remain intact.¹⁶⁴

These advertisements encouraged young women to dream of—and wait for—a diamond engagement ring and the promise of future marital bliss that it embodied. De Beers advertisements also demonstrated the need for young men to purchase their fiancées’ fidelity with a diamond ring. As a result, these advertisements did far more than sell diamond engagement rings; they manipulated female gender norms to emphasize loyalty and dependence on a man, even when he was absent, and promoted the ideal of sexual purity before marriage.¹⁶⁵

While the separated sweetheart campaign emphasized a cultural expectation for young women to maintain their virtue until marriage, the location of the women in all three of these advertisements also visually positioned women within their proper “place” in American society. Although millions of American women joined the workforce to help in the war effort, all three of

¹⁶³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Star of Hope,” advertising tear sheet, 1943, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer & Son Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; May, *Homeward Bound*, 69; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

¹⁶⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; May, *Homeward Bound*, 63-69; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

the separated sweethearts featured in the De Beers advertisements were depicted at home and not in a workplace. While the labor shortage created by sending millions of American men overseas to fight required record numbers of women to enter the wage labor force during WWII, the image presented in these advertisements reflected Americans' perception that a woman's ideal place remained within the home.¹⁶⁶

Though its early successes before the war suggested that N.W. Ayer & Son revived the diamond engagement ring tradition, it was its efforts during World War II that ensured that the tradition continued to gain a foothold in American courtship and marriage. Presented with considerable difficulties regarding De Beers's questionable public image in the United States, the agency managed to reinvent and safeguard the cartel's good name with the American public. By providing information on industrial diamonds in its diamond engagement ring and trade advertisements, the agency ensured that its client appeared as an active supporter of the Allied war effort. Furthermore, the ads linked diamond consumption and patriotism by asserting that every diamond purchased brought Americans one step closer to winning the war and seeing their soldiers return home safely. Whether it was through direct means of persuasion, as found in its diamond engagement ring advertisements, or through more covert means, such as encouraging newspaper editors to include mentions of diamond engagement rings in their wedding editorials, Ayer eventually far surpassed the promotional gains it had made for De Beers since before the war.

Successfully aligning American social and cultural perceptions of gender roles with the consumption of diamond engagement rings, De Beers World War II ads further reinforced the

¹⁶⁶N.W. Ayer & Son, "Of Absence and Fond Heart;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Until Tomorrow;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Star of Hope;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

notion that marriages within a postwar United States would require men to act as providers and women to act as dependent consumers. As the United States and Allied Forces declared victory in both Europe and the Pacific on 2 September 1945, Americans prepared for millions of servicemen to return home to their families. The influx of young soldiers returning home to resume their lives as both civilians and consumers offered N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers another golden opportunity to expand diamond engagement ring sales. With one out of three brides receiving a diamond engagement ring during World War II, both Ayer and De Beers anticipated an increasingly high profit margin in peacetime.

Chapter 3: Success: Diamond Engagement Rings become an American Tradition (1945-1960)

On a clear day in 1945 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, Sergeant Theodore Whittelsey Jr. and his bride, Alice Edgar, were married at the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Chapel. The young couple exited the chapel as husband and wife, surrounded by family and friends. What is unique about the Whittelsey wedding is that there was one additional guest in attendance that day, Gladys Rockmore Davis, an illustrator and artist hired by N.W. Ayer & Son to sketch their wedding for a new De Beers engagement ring advertisement. Davis' rendition of the Whittelsey wedding became the advertisement titled "Sunny Wedding."¹⁶⁷ This advertisement and others produced by N.W. Ayer & Son for De Beers during the early postwar years continued the narrative the agency constructed for its client during the war. The diamond engagement ring that served as a constant reminder of the promises of love and fidelity made between a man and woman separated by war could at last be fulfilled with their long-awaited marriage.

During the early postwar years, the comforts of a thriving capitalist economy combined with the threat of the Cold War fostered an environment in which marriage became a central part of American life and a symbol of a free and democratic society. The end of World War II also ended the perception that both men and women needed to work outside of the home to contribute to the war effort. Peacetime generated the feeling that Americans should revert to a more "natural" organization of the sexes both within and outside the home. With the return of millions

¹⁶⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Sunny Wedding," advertising tear sheet, 1946, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

of servicemen from overseas, there was a literal rush to the altar by Americans eager to start their married lives. The nuclear family quickly became the domestic ideal of mid-twentieth century America. Within the context of the nuclear family men and women were once again expected to conform themselves to the roles of male provider and female dependent consumer.

It was during these early postwar years that N.W. Ayer & Son decided to continue this male provider and female dependent consumer narrative for its client, the De Beers Consolidated Mines, Limited. While the agency's De Beers ads during the war made the promise of a better life as a married couple, the advertisements Ayer created during the early postwar period presented images of that hope becoming a reality. Throughout the early postwar years and the 1950s, Ayer fully invested in using the idea of a happy marriage based on the male provider/female dependent consumer narrative in its De Beers advertisements to sell more diamond engagement rings to American consumers. Social anxieties during the Cold War over the potential spread of communism within the United States combined with the period's rising employment rates, marriage rates, increased consumer spending, and the popularization of the "white wedding" created the perfect environment in which N.W. Ayer solidified the diamond engagement ring's role as the symbol of love and commitment in American marriages. Advertising for De Beers during this period projected an image of an ideal marriage based on the male producer/female dependent consumer model, even though many American marriages did not conform to that imagined ideal. Rather than demonstrate the consumer's perceived shortcomings as either a provider or dependent consumer, De Beers advertisements during this period emphasized creating the illusion of the ideal marriage through the consumption of diamond engagement rings. Diamond engagement ring consumption, in turn, further reinforced

the notion that the male provider/female dependent consumer model represented the “ideal” marriage in American society.

Fulfilling a Promise: The Postwar Economic Boom and the Rise of the White Wedding

For many Americans the autumn of 1945 signaled the beginning of a better tomorrow in the United States. They and their allies won World War II and with their victory came a general sense of optimism that offered the promise of a better future for all Americans. At the end of World War II a number of important elements came together to form the perfect environment in which the diamond engagement ring tradition could continue to thrive in the United States. Cold War politics, the GI Bill, rising employment rates, an increase in consumer spending, rising marriage rates, and increased social pressure to conform to American society all contributed to create an environment in which consumer spending on weddings thrived. This environment generated an increase in the more lavish “white weddings” and placed an even greater emphasis on marriage in American society. The popularity of white weddings, in turn, provided N.W. Ayer & Son the means to expand its De Beers diamond engagement ring advertising to American consumers.

One factor that is responsible for generating the social and economic environments in which N.W. Ayer promoted diamond engagement rings in the postwar years is the rise of the Cold War at the end of World War II. After the defeat of the Nazis, the new threat to the United States was its former ally the Soviet Union. Cold War politics shaped how the United States government wanted to present itself and its people to the rest of the world. Throughout the Cold War the United States declared itself to be a beacon of hope for the rest of the world against the looming darkness of the Soviet Union. The dichotomy of the capitalist, democratic society of

the United States versus the evils of communism in the Soviet Union came to define Americans' image of the two nations for generations to come. The continual fear that the United States and the rest of the world could fall to communism prompted the U.S. government to take measures to ensure that the American people would have no reason to be swayed towards a communist form of government.¹⁶⁸

The first step to protecting Americans from the spread of communism at the end of World War II was to ensure that returning veterans would not overturn the economic gains made by the United States during the war. An Allied victory presented the U.S. government with the challenge of how best to transition millions of able-bodied servicemen back home and into the workforce. The solution to this problem became known as the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or GI Bill of Rights, which was designed to offer veterans financial benefits as compensation for military service. The GI Bill offered servicemen a full year of unemployment compensation, subsidies for veterans' medical care, award pensions, employment preference in civil service jobs, loans for homeownership, and payments for college or job training. This offer of government funds for veterans was done all in an effort to keep as many veterans as possible from immediately seeking employment upon their return home. Many veterans took advantage of the one year of unemployment benefits as they began to readjust to civilian life. Nearly eight million veterans elected to use the GI Bill's education benefits, which offered a stipend of up to five hundred dollars a year for tuition and books as well as an additional sixty-five dollars a month for living expenses for single veterans and ninety dollars a month for veterans with

¹⁶⁸ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 118, 121.

dependents. With the extended financial benefits offered to veterans and their families, the GI Bill aided a quarter of the US population after the war.¹⁶⁹

The staggered reentrance of veterans into the workforce generated by the GI Bill successfully contributed to the U.S. economy's continued recovery following the Great Depression. Another important factor that allowed the postwar economy to prosper was the Employment Act of 1946, which was in essence a blueprint for creating a thriving postwar economy. The Employment Act emphasized the government's role in promoting increased levels of employment, production, and purchasing power for Americans through methods such as supplying American businesses with government contracts to increase the demand for jobs. At the same time the American labor movement argued that the best way to ensure continued economic growth was to maintain high wages through union contracts, increase the market for high-volume goods manufactured in the U.S., lower the unit cost of producing goods, and allow the government to regulate the economy and mediate between capital and labor when necessary. To help guarantee continual economic growth, the United States government also emphasized an increase in consumer spending as an increased consumption of goods would, in turn, create a demand for manufacturing jobs to keep up with market demand.¹⁷⁰

After years of economic hardship during the Great Depression, Americans were eager to spend their income on consumer goods. In the first five years after World War II, consumer spending in the United States increased by 60 percent. Within the first four years following the war Americans purchased over 21 million automobiles, 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million stoves, 11.6 million television sets, and over 1 million new homes each year.¹⁷¹ The years after

¹⁶⁹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, The Oxford History of the United States, v. 10 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8, 14, 68; Cott, *Public Vows*, 190-91.

¹⁷⁰ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 116, 118, 121.

¹⁷¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 157-58.

World War II witnessed unprecedented economic prosperity for Americans as both the median and mean family income doubled between 1949 and 1973.¹⁷² Between the years of 1947 and 1952 alone, the median household income increased from \$3,301 a year to \$3,890 a year.¹⁷³ Rising incomes and consumer spending also reinforced anticommunist sentiment among Americans. The rising rates of homeownership, the increased availability and variety of consumer goods, and an overall higher living standard stood in stark contrast to the well-publicized evils of communism. This emphasis on spending and the freedom to choose more luxury goods as a way to defeating the spread of communism was exemplified during Vice President Richard Nixon’s “kitchen debate” with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the American Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. The American exhibit proudly displayed the latest designs in American homes, appliances, cars, and clothing. Nixon emphasized that increased home ownership and purchase of luxury items such as cars and television sets made the United States a more egalitarian society. Furthermore, the right of American citizens to choose what items and brands to purchase instead of having their government choosing for them demonstrated the personal freedom that a capitalist society provided to its citizens.¹⁷⁴

Cold War politics combined with the return of millions of young servicemen, a robust economy, and a strong desire to return to a sense of “normalcy” created the perfect recipe for a marriage boom in postwar America. Throughout the early postwar years, the number of marriages skyrocketed. Under the context of the Cold War, the nuclear family—centered on a married couple and their children—became the embodiment of the United States’ superiority

¹⁷² Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 121.

¹⁷³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “No. HS-25. Money Income of Families—Median Income in Current and Constant (2001) Dollars by Race and Type of Family: 1947 to 2001,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001, <http://www.census.gov/statab/hist/HS-25.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2010).

¹⁷⁴ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 124-27.

over the Soviet Union. The rise of the nuclear family also marked an attempted return to more “traditional” gender roles within American households with men acting as providers and women as homemakers.¹⁷⁵ The generation of young men and women that came of age during World War II married at unprecedentedly high rates with 96.4 percent of women and 94.1 percent of men entering into married life.¹⁷⁶ This emphasis on marriage encouraged Americans to marry at a younger age than generations of the previous fifty years. By the end of the 1950s almost half of American women were married by the age of nineteen, and 70 percent were married before the age of twenty-four.¹⁷⁷

America’s postwar marriage boom and rise in consumer spending also led to the rise of the white wedding, which also aided N.W. Ayer’s efforts to promote the diamond engagement ring tradition. While Americans’ increasing acceptance of spending more and more money on wedding ceremonies and receptions can be traced to the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the Cold War era Americans’ desire for a lavish wedding increased exponentially. From the immediate postwar period to the beginning of the Cold War, the rise of the formal “white wedding” became a powerful symbol of domestic life with its emphasis on consumerism, gender norms, and the nuclear family.¹⁷⁸ The large white wedding became the couple’s day to assert their independence from their parents and establish their own nuclear family. The American white wedding became a sendoff for the couple into the world as husband and wife, provider and dependent consumer, ready to begin their own life together and to start their own family.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ May, *Homeward Bound*, 3, 23, 74, 87; Cott, *Public Vows*, 197.

¹⁷⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 23.

¹⁷⁷ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 225.

¹⁷⁸ Howard, *Brides Inc.*, 24-31; Karen M. Dunak, *As Long as We Both Shall Love: The White Wedding in Postwar America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 26.

¹⁷⁹ Jellison, *It’s Our Day It’s Our Day: America’s Love Affair With the White Wedding, 1945-2005* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2008), 10-22; Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 168; See also Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*.

Perhaps the most important aspect of postwar American society that encouraged N.W. Ayer & Son to expand its diamond engagement ring advertising was the strong social pressure to conform within American society. Americans who did not conform to societal standards were likely to be marginalized and stigmatized by their peers; placing them at a disadvantage to thrive within Cold War American society. Many Americans during this period thus faced the challenge to conform or appear to conform to new societal standards.¹⁸⁰ This pressure to conform provided N.W. Ayer with the platform to promote diamond engagement rings to the masses as both the purchase and consumption of diamond engagement rings conveyed the sense that the engaged couple that purchased the ring accepted and actively participated in enforcing gender roles within Cold War American society.

It was within this vortex of rising economic conditions, rising marriage rates, and consumer spending that N.W. Ayer & Son entered into a new era of its work for the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. Over the next fifteen years the agency continued to promote the diamond engagement ring to couples looking to marry in the immediate future, but Ayer also set its sights on cultivating a need for diamond engagement rings for future generations. Feeding off Americans' Cold War anxieties and the importance of the nuclear family, N.W. Ayer & Son generated advertisements for De Beers that emphasized the importance of marriage, as well as reinforced gender roles for both men and women. Once again the diamond engagement ring featured in its advertisements embodied all of the promises of a happy and successful marriage within the context of the provider/dependent consumer model.

Keeping Their Promises: Early Postwar De Beers Ads

¹⁸⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 15; Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 76.

With the desire to maintain increased diamond sales after the war, De Beers expanded its advertising budget, allowing N.W. Ayer & Son to escalate its efforts to promote the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States.¹⁸¹ While De Beers advertisements during World War II emphasized the promise that diamond engagement rings would make for a happy marriage in peacetime, early postwar advertisements for De Beers showed images of the fulfillment of that promise with a church wedding. Beginning in 1945 N.W. Ayer produced a series of advertisements for De Beers that featured paintings of couples on their wedding day. What was unique about this series was that it featured a fair amount of religious diversity, with couples being married in Protestant, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish ceremonies. All of the grooms in the advertisements were represented in military uniform—a common theme in advertising during this period. Instead of referring to the engagement itself, as previous De Beers advertisements had done, the text of the advertisements linked the importance of the diamond engagement ring to the wedding ceremony itself. The advertisements boasted at the bottom of the page that the paintings for the advertisements were of actual couples on their wedding day and that the paintings were presented to the bride, such as Mrs. Whittelsey in “Sunny Wedding,” as a wedding present.¹⁸² These advertisements helped to further reinforce the male provider/dependent consumer model that Cold War politics and the rise of the nuclear family promoted as the ideal in American domestic life.

One of N.W. Ayer & Son’s 1946 wedding advertisements for De Beers titled, “Bridal Ritual,” features a young soldier named Sergeant Norman Germain with his bride Gertrude

¹⁸¹ Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 126.

¹⁸² N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual,” advertising tear sheet, 1946, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Great Moment,” advertising tear sheet, 1946, Author’s personal collection; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding”; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Smiling Bride,” advertising tear sheet, 1946, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Kramer during a Jewish wedding ceremony. The text states, “At last they meet beneath the canopy to part no more. And in long awaited vows young hearts find surcease from all the loneliness past and hope postponed... To light the tenderness of such a day, a diamond ring must flame with special purity and joy.”¹⁸³ The “Sunny Wedding” described at the beginning of the chapter features the new Mrs. Whittelsey smiling as she stands behind her husband, she in her white wedding dress and he in his military uniform. The text below states that “whatever care or crisis now betides throughout their lifetime they will meet always together.”¹⁸⁴

Unlike its series of separated sweethearts during World War II, the wedding series that N.W. Ayer & Son produced during these early postwar years emphasized couples reuniting after their long separation. The text of these advertisements, combined with the images of couples on their wedding day, reinforced the male provider/female dependent consumer model within American marriages. In both “Sunny Wedding” and “Bridal Ritual,” the bride stands slightly behind the groom, implying that he is responsible for protecting her. As the text of both advertisements suggest, now that the couples are married they will remain so, falling in line with Cold War America’s promotion of the nuclear family.¹⁸⁵ While N.W. Ayer’s images of reunited couples on their wedding day helped to further reinforce the diamond engagement ring as the symbol of a true love and devotion, the agency certainly did not limit itself to only using images of happy couples. As N.W. Ayer proceeded with the De Beers account in the 1940s it would use an old selling tactic to further the sale of diamonds, using images of wealthy women wearing diamonds to convince other women to want diamonds as well.

¹⁸³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual.”

¹⁸⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding.”

¹⁸⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; May, *Homeward Bound*, 1; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

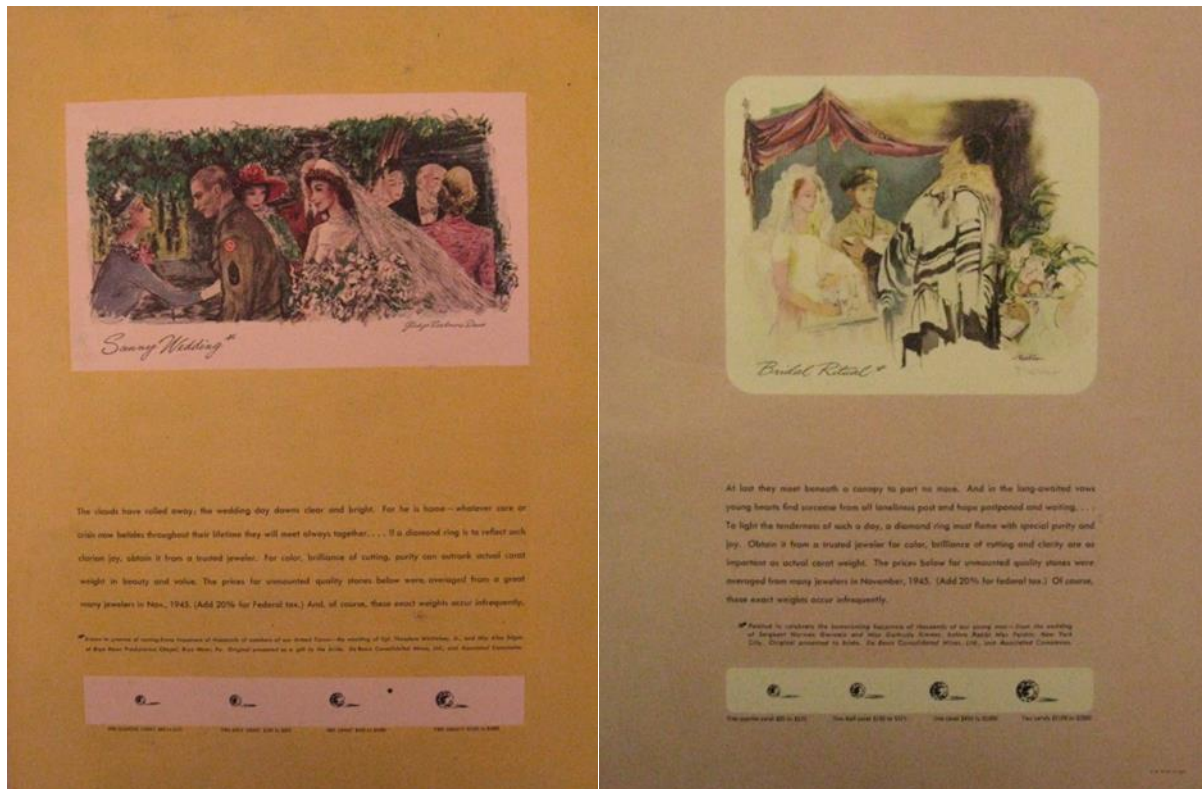


Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 “Sunny Wedding” and “Bridal Ritual” both project ideals about traditional marriage and the white wedding. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding,” advertising tear sheet, 1946, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual,” advertising tear sheet, 1946, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Keeping Up with the Joneses: Engaged Socialites and the Illusion of Upward Mobility

In conjunction with its wedding couples series, in 1947 N.W. Ayer & Son produced a series of advertisements for De Beers that featured paintings of wealthy engaged socialites wearing their diamond engagement rings. Using wealthy socialites to sell products was not a new selling tactic for the agency. During the early years of the Great Depression, N.W. Ayer & Son had used the same concept to sell Pond’s Cold Cream to young unmarried women. The premise of the advertisements was to make consumers feel that by buying and consuming this product they, too,

could be like these wealthy women.¹⁸⁶ Examining these engaged socialites advertisements demonstrates how these advertisements not only promoted gender performativity based on the roles of male provider and female dependent consumer, but class-specific performativity as well.

One of the advertisements from the engaged socialites series featured the recently married Mrs. William Budge of San Francisco in 1948. N.W. Ayer commissioned Danish painter Ejnar Hansen to paint a formal portrait of the former Miss Willa McNear for the advertisement. The image of Mrs. Budge shows her sitting in a calm, almost regal position with her diamond engagement ring displayed on her outstretched left hand resting on the table in front of her. The text states, “With starlike splendor, the engagement diamond shines its blessing on life’s most cherished contract. To fulfill this proud tradition your diamond, though it may be modest in cost, should be selected with care.”¹⁸⁷ The text conveys the sense that middle and working class men could and should appear to be good providers like their wealthier counterparts by purchasing diamond engagement rings.

Connecting these gender roles to wealthy socialites conveys the sense that men and women of other social classes could share in a connection to the elite by purchasing and possessing something cherished by wealthy members of society. The diamond engagement ring then becomes a symbol of upward mobility. For men, giving a diamond engagement ring communicates to others that he is financially stable enough to afford such a luxury. He is proving that he can provide for the woman he loves. For women, accepting and wearing a diamond engagement ring serves as a sign that someone believes them to be of worth.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 292-93.

¹⁸⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. William Budge,” advertising tear sheet, 1948, Author’s personal collection.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45; Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 121.



Figure 3.3. “Mrs. William Budge” and other advertisements from the engaged socialites series foster a connection between the elite and the rest of the United States. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. William Budge,” 1948, advertising tear sheet, author’s personal collection.

Another advertisement from the engaged socialites series, titled “Mrs. Richard Knight,” premiered in 1947 and features a painting of the former Miss Ann Philbrick of Greenwich, Connecticut by Peter Lauck. Like “Mrs. William Budge,” the image of the new Mrs. Richard Knight depicts her in a relaxed pose on her couch with her large diamond engagement ring as the focal point of the piece. The text states, “A tradition without change is the proud engagement diamond that gives shining emphasis to life’s most joyous pledge. To be treasured ever, the diamond you choose need not be costly or of many carats, but it should be fine as the earth affords.”¹⁸⁹ Like “Mrs. William Budge,” the text from “Mrs. Richard Knight” alludes to the

¹⁸⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. Richard Knight,” advertising tear sheet, 1947, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

audience that men from a middle- or working-class background could also afford to participate in the diamond engagement ring tradition right alongside their wealthier counterparts.¹⁹⁰

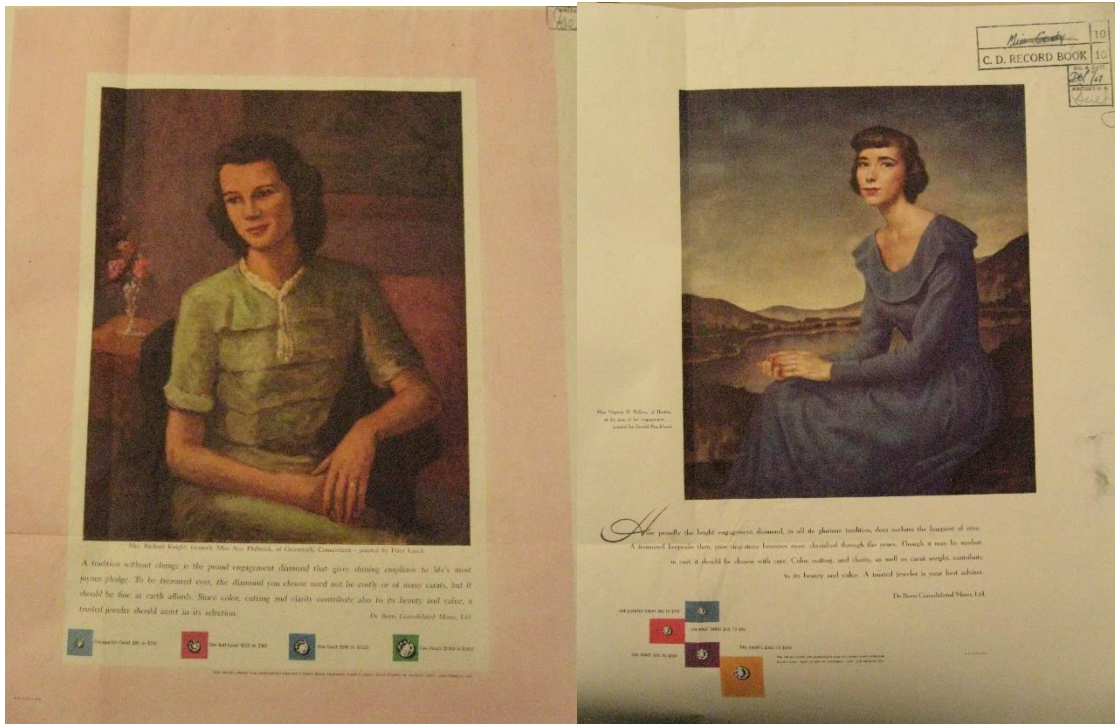


Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5 “Mrs. Richard Knight” and “Miss Virginia H. Palfrey.” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. Richard Knight,” advertising tear sheet, 1947, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Miss Virginia H. Palfrey,” advertising tear sheet, 1947, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

A third advertisement from the engaged socialites series, titled “Miss Virginia H. Palfrey,” features a painting of the Boston socialite at the time of her engagement by the celebrated English portraitist Gerald Brockhurst. Like the other engaged socialites in the series, Miss Palfrey is placed in a seated, relaxed pose with her diamond engagement ring prominently on display. The text states, “How proudly the brightest engagement diamond, in all its glorious tradition, does acclaim the happiest of rites. A treasured keepsake then, your ring-stone becomes

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

more cherished throughout the years. Though it may be modest in cost, it should be chosen with care.”¹⁹¹ Once again, the text from this engaged socialite advertisement suggests that middle- and working-class American men could appear to be good providers for their fiancées by purchasing them a diamond engagement ring. The text also proposes that while they may not be able to afford the same quality of diamond engagement ring as wealthier Americans, middle- and working-class American men could create the illusion of upward mobility by buying a diamond engagement ring for the woman they loved.¹⁹²

Similar to the separated sweethearts series that N.W. Ayer created for De Beers during World War II, the engaged socialites ad series of the early postwar years conveys the message that a woman’s place within American marriages was to act as a dependent consumer. In all three advertisements all the women appear to live a life of comfort as befitting their social class. The images also imply that as a consequence of their elevated social status these women do not need to work as their husbands/future husband provide them with the financial means to have anything their hearts desire. By encouraging middle and working class women to desire diamond engagement rings similar to those owned by their wealthier peers, the engaged socialites series also encourage these same women to adhere to the role of dependent consumer.¹⁹³

While early postwar De Beers advertising used the rise of the white wedding and wealthy socialites to further increase sales of diamond engagement rings to American consumers,

¹⁹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Miss Virginia H. Palfrey,” advertising tear sheet, 1947, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹² Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

¹⁹³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. William Budge;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. Richard Knight;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Miss Virginia H. Palfrey;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

towards the end of the 1940s a copywriter at N.W. Ayer & Son's Philadelphia offices would create a slogan that would solidify the association of De Beers with diamonds and diamond engagement rings. That copywriter's name was Francis Gerety.

A Diamond Means Forever: Francis Gerety and the Birth of the Diamond's Slogan

Throughout the mid-1940s, N.W. Ayer's advertisements for De Beers featured diagrams of four different sized diamonds but with no positioning line.¹⁹⁴ Then, on a late night in 1947, Frances Gerety, a copywriter for N.W. Ayer & Son for the last four years, was finishing an advertisement for De Beers that needed a slogan. Gerety said that at the time, "[I] asked for help from above."¹⁹⁵ She then scribbled down "something, not sure if it was right or not, and went to bed."¹⁹⁶ The line that she happened to scribble down was "a diamond is forever."¹⁹⁷ This line perfectly encapsulated both the lasting asset value of a diamond and the romantic aspirations of couples entering into marriage.¹⁹⁸ This slogan also created the notion that once a diamond is received, it should not be resold, thus keeping the secondhand diamond market, and potential price erosion, to a minimum.¹⁹⁹ The agency immediately incorporated the slogan into all of its advertisements for De Beers and within a year "A Diamond is Forever" became the official slogan of De Beers.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ A positioning line is a phrase that is meant to draw the consumer's attention to the product. It is also designed to ensure that the consumer knows what brand of product the advertisement is selling.

¹⁹⁵ Frances Gerety, interview by N.W. Ayer Oral History Program, 1998, series 19, box 7, folder 7, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Frances Gerety as quoted in *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 66.

¹⁹⁹ Bergenstock and Maskulka, "The De Beers Story," 40.

²⁰⁰ Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 128.

Born on 17 November 1915 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Francis Gerety had spent much of her life and her career in the city of her birth. After graduating from high school Gerety attended night courses in English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania in the hopes that she might someday write the great American novel. A gifted writer at a young age, Gerety began her career writing advertising copy for retail stores. She then joined a small advertising agency in Wilmington, Delaware where she developed her skills as a copywriter; learning to create persuasive advertising copy against tight deadlines. In 1943 she decided to move back to Philadelphia and try her luck at landing a job as a copywriter at N.W. Ayer & Son's Philadelphia office where she would remain through the end of her career.²⁰¹

Fifty years after the introduction of "a diamond is forever," Gerety participated in an interview for the agency's Oral History Program. During the interview, Gerety gave details about her employment with the agency. She mentioned that she was one of only three female copywriters when she started working for N.W. Ayer & Son in 1943.²⁰² When the interview turned to the subject of her famous slogan, she said that it was actually her boss's, Gerold Lauck, idea to incorporate a line that appeared in nearly all future De Beer advertisements.²⁰³ She admitted that the slogan was a nice line, but at the time she did not believe it was in any way extraordinary. When Gerety initially showed the line to her colleagues, they too felt that the line was good, but not anything significant or groundbreaking.²⁰⁴ After her success with "a diamond is forever," Gerety continued to work for N.W. Ayer & Son for another twenty-three years before her retirement in 1970.²⁰⁵ Despite Gerety's reluctance to take credit for the significance

²⁰¹ Patrice Phillips to Peter Johnson, 23 August 1988, series 19, box 7, folder 7, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

²⁰² Gerety, interview by N.W. Ayer Oral History Program, 4.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

of this powerful slogan, consumers still associate her words with De Beers in the twenty-first century.

As the 1940s drew to a close and the United States entered into the 1950s, N.W. Ayer & Son continued to use Francis Gererty's slogan and the diamond engagement ring to sell diamonds to American consumers. But by the middle of the 1950s, N.W. Ayer & Son received a new challenge to their work at fostering the diamond engagement ring tradition. Instead of trying to convince American consumers to buy diamonds, the agency would have to work to convince American consumers to purchase the right type of diamonds.

Real Diamonds for Real Love: The Issue of Synthetic Diamonds

The year 1955 marked the beginning of the first real crisis N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers faced since the industrial diamond debacle during World War II. Two years prior, a Swedish laboratory, Allamanna Svenska Elektriska Akteibolaget (ASEA), had successfully developed a process that created synthetic diamonds that possessed all of the same characteristics as natural diamonds. De Beers and the diamond industry did not initially see the development of synthetic diamonds as a threat to their business due to their poor color and small size. ASEA's decision to not publicize their lab's findings only seemed to confirm De Beers's earlier assessment that these synthetic diamonds did not pose a serious threat to the diamond industry. The scientists at ASEA were not the only ones seeking to create synthetic diamonds however. Scientists working for an American corporation known as the General Electric Company (GE) were also working to develop artificial diamonds. In January 1955 GE scientists successfully developed a process that created synthetic diamonds that could be manufactured at a cost that was competitive with mined natural diamonds. On 15 February 1955 General Electric issued a press release announcing its

success. Diamonds could now be created in a lab as easily—if not more easily—as they could be mined from the earth.²⁰⁶

For Harry Oppenheimer, the development of synthetic diamonds was his first real challenge as chairman of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. On 25 November 1957, Harry's father, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer passed away at the age of 78, leaving his son in control of 80 percent of the world's diamonds.²⁰⁷ That same month the General Electric Company began to sell its "Man-Made Diamonds" in the United States.²⁰⁸ Recognizing that synthetic diamonds could cripple the price of industrial diamonds and eventually impact the gem diamond market, Harry Oppenheimer ordered one of his own research teams to develop a process for creating synthetic diamonds. Pouring vast amounts of money into the project, De Beers successfully produced its first synthetic diamonds in 1958. While the production cost for these diamonds was twice the market price of natural industrial diamonds, De Beers's process for synthetic diamonds provided the cartel with the leverage it needed to negotiate with ASEA and General Electric. After a long series of negotiations, De Beers reached an agreement with General Electric to pay GE \$8 million plus royalties to use GE's patented process for creating synthetic diamonds. Oppenheimer then moved to purchase ASEA for an undisclosed amount. By 1960 De Beers created its own artificial diamond division, Ultra High Pressure Units Inc. More importantly, by acquiring ASEA and becoming partners with GE, Oppenheimer succeeded in neutralizing the threat of synthetic diamonds and continued De Beers's hold on the diamond market.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Epstein, *The Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 162-63; Hocking, *Oppenheimer & Son*, 340; Kanfer, *The Last Empire*, 272; Robert M. Hazen, *The Diamond Makers: A Compelling Drama of Scientific Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 132.

²⁰⁷ Hocking, *Oppenheimer & Son*, 336-37.

²⁰⁸ Hazen, *The Diamond Makers*, 143.

²⁰⁹ Kanfer, *The Last Empire*, 273.

While Harry Oppenheimer and De Beers managed to gain control of the synthetic diamond market, the cartel could not control public interest regarding man-made diamonds. With the arrival of the synthetic industrial diamond it became N.W. Ayer & Son's task to keep the American public interested in natural diamonds. More importantly, the agency needed to ensure that natural diamonds maintained their reputation as the only appropriate stone for an engagement ring. For its part, the Diamond Information Center issued press releases dismissing and belittling the potential for synthetic gem-quality diamonds onto the market.²¹⁰ A 1958 press release titled, "How to Get a Diamond that Talks for You: A Dozen Questions and Answers about Your Engagement Ring," served both to disparage consumers from considering synthetic diamonds and to reinforce the gendered symbolism the diamond engagement ring held for both men and women.²¹¹ It stated that, "A diamond, once skillfully faceted and polished, is always bright, always true, always radiant. You are pledging your genuine love – not with any imitation but with the best you can buy. And that's a good beginning for marriage."²¹² The press release clearly told readers that giving your loved one a synthetic diamond would convey to others that your love was false as well.²¹³

After General Electric's push into the diamond market in November 1957, it was no coincidence that the De Beers advertisements produced for its 1958 campaign drew clear allusions to the romantic supremacy of natural diamonds. This series of advertisements featured paintings of young women relaxing in a natural setting. The images in these advertisements also featured a large diamond in the background that was made to represent some form of natural

²¹⁰ Epstein, *Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 163.

²¹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "How to Get a Diamond that Talks for You: A Dozen Questions and Answers about Your Engagement Ring," (1958), box 35, folder 232, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-2.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

element; water, a flower, a star, and so on. In all of these advertisements the text stressed the importance of the natural diamond as the traditional symbol of love and devotion.²¹⁴ One such advertisement, titled “Nature’s Triumph... Telling Your Joy,” features a young woman reclining in a garden while all around her diamonds fall like rain drops from the heavens. The text suggests that the diamond engagement ring is the natural symbol of love and devotion and that this symbol comes from nature itself; stating that “...nature reflects the greatness of your world of love, the grandeur of your dreams. And to you, too, she brings another matchless masterwork, the engagement diamond, wrought in earth to shine in triumph, tell your joy.”²¹⁵ Another advertisement from the series, titled “Lovely Miracle... Just for You,” features a woman standing in a grove admiring a tree in bloom. Naturally, the flower that the woman reaches for also happens to be a large diamond. Similar to “Nature’s Triumph,” the ad’s text suggests that the diamond is one of nature’s masterpieces whose purity and beauty shows the world the depth of a couple’s love throughout their lifetime.²¹⁶ While none of the advertisements mention synthetic diamonds, all of the ads from this series consistently stressed that diamonds come from nature alone.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ N. W. Ayer & Son, “Nature’s Triumph... Telling Your Joy,” advertising tear sheet, 1958, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Lovely Miracle... Just for You,” advertising tear sheet, 1958, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Joyous Talisman,” advertising tear sheet, 1958, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Nature’s Triumph;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

²¹⁶ N. W. Ayer & Son, “Lovely Miracle;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

²¹⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Nature’s Triumph;” N. W. Ayer & Son, “Lovely Miracle;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Joyous Talisman.”



Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7 “Nature’s Triumph... Telling Your Joy” and “Lovely Miracle... Just for You” both alluded to natural diamonds being the only true symbol of love and devotion between a man and his future bride. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Nature’s Triumph... Telling Your Joy,” advertising tear sheet, 1958, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Lovely Miracle... Just for You,” advertising tear sheet, 1958, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Despite the fact that the main purpose for these advertisements was to turn the public’s interest away from synthetic diamonds, this series also helped to reinforce Cold War sentiments regarding the importance of marriage. The text from all of the advertisements from this series also conveys the sense that, like the diamond engagement ring itself, marriage is something natural, desired, and lasting. These sentiments fall directly in line with Cold War notions that marriage was something sacred to and desirable for all Americans.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Nature’s Triumph;” N. W. Ayer & Son, “Lovely Miracle;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Joyous Talisman;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; May, *Homeward Bound*, 3, 23, 74, 87; Cott, *Public Vows*, 197; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

Showing How Much He Cares: Anniversary Gifts to Wives

While the majority of N.W. Ayer & Son's previous advertisements for De Beers were designed to appeal to both men and women, beginning in 1956 the agency produced a series of advertisements that directly targeted older men earning \$10,000 a year or more in income. These ads were specifically designed to appeal to their role as providers. Titled "Most valued symbol of your devotion," the series featured images of real-life business executives of various ages sitting at their desks. Each of the executives in these ads is shown admiring a piece of high-end diamond jewelry, which he had purchased presumably for his wife. What is unique about this series of advertisements is that the text does not allude to love and romance as the motives behind the man's recent purchase. Instead, the piece of diamond jewelry that the man bestows on his loved one is a visible reflection of himself and his personal success as a businessman and provider. Another interesting feature of this series is that some of the executives in these advertisements appear to have purchased large diamond rings for their wives.²¹⁹

The first of the "Most valued symbol of your devotion" series to feature a diamond ring ran in *Town & Country* from 1956 to 1957. The ad depicts an older gentleman, possibly in his early sixties, admiring a large diamond ring still in its box. The text states:

A diamond, most valued of gems, steadfastly suggests the measure of your devotion. **Its matchless excellence demonstrates**, as no other gift can, the quality of your discernment. **In a diamond**, the soundness of your judgement is proven; for regardless of size or price, it has enduring value. **Most welcomed**, most cherished of gifts, a diamond testifies to your achievement.²²⁰

²¹⁹N.W. Ayer & Son, "De Beers," *Ayer News File*, August 13, 1956, series 16, box 10, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1; N. W. Ayer & Son, "Most valued symbol of your devotion (1)," advertising tear sheet, 1956, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, "Most valued symbol of your devotion (2)," advertising tear sheet, 1957, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, "Most valued symbol of your devotion (3)," advertising tear sheet, 1957, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

²²⁰ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Most valued symbol of your devotion (1)."

The text conveys the sense that the diamond ring the executive purchased serves two purposes: it will demonstrate to his wife how much he still loves her and demonstrate to others that he is a successful provider because he can afford to buy his wife such an extravagant gift. While the ad suggests that the diamond remained a symbol of love, it also suggests that the gift is a personal reflection of the giver's worthiness as both a husband and provider.²²¹

Another example from the "Most valued symbol of your devotion" series features a younger man, possibly in his late twenties or early thirties, leaning back at his desk as he examines a large diamond ring in his hand. Because his left hand is obscured from the audience one can assume that he is also unmarried and therefore the diamond ring in his hand could actually be a diamond engagement ring. Like the other advertisement from this series, this ad encourages the consumer to use the gift of diamond jewelry for their significant other as a means of projecting a positive impression of the giver to others. It states that "a diamond's matchless quality most confirms **the excellence of your discernment.** Its purity reflects, as no other precious stone, **the depth of your devotion.** In a diamond, **the soundness of your judgement** is affirmed... a diamond is **a mark of your achievement.**"²²² Once again notions of love and romance take a backseat to the importance of appearing to be a good provider for one's wife and family.²²³

²²¹ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

²²² N. W. Ayer & Son, "Most valued symbol of your devotion (2).

²²³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.



Figure 3.8 and Figure 3.9 “Most valued symbol of your devotion (1)” and “Most valued symbol of your devotion (2)” projected the notion that diamonds are not only a symbol of devotion, they serve as a reminder of the personal financial successes of the giver. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Most valued symbol of your devotion (1),” advertising tear sheet, 1956, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son, “Most valued symbol of your devotion (2),” advertising tear sheet, 1957, series 3, box 148, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N. W. Ayer & Son.

Just as the “Most valued symbol of your devotion” series convinced American men that purchasing a piece of diamond jewelry for their wife or fiancée was an effective means to project their personal achievement to others, these De Beers advertisements perfectly encapsulated the new expectations of American men following World War II. A man whose wife was seen wearing a large diamond ring appeared to have no difficulties in performing the role of a good provider.²²⁴

²²⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184-88.

The Diamond Lady: Gladys Babson Hannaford

While N.W. Ayer & Son's advertising for De Beers during the postwar years offered consumers the roadmap to marital bliss and means to present themselves as good providers and dependent consumers, the agency's Diamond Information Center placed a greater emphasis on cultivating the next generation of diamond engagement ring consumers. In Ayer's 1947 strategy plan for the De Beers account, the agency proposed utilizing a more psychological approach to developing new diamond consumers. It stated that "We are dealing with a problem in mass psychology. We seek to... strengthen the tradition of the diamond engagement ring—to make it a psychological necessity capable of competing successfully at the retail level with utility goods and services."²²⁵ With this new marketing approach N.W. Ayer hoped to influence some seventy million Americans over the course of the next fifteen years to become diamond consumers.²²⁶

One of the key ways that Ayer managed to reach future diamond customers was through the use of educational films which it offered to distribute free to jewelers who wanted show them to local audiences across the nation. The agency hoped that by showing these films in schools and churches, jewelers would gain a whole generation of young consumers wanting diamond engagement rings. The first of these films, titled *The Eternal Gem*, detailed the history of diamonds, the story behind famous diamonds, and information on the diamond cutting process. The film also featured a scene in which a Marine proposed to his girlfriend with a diamond engagement ring. *The Eternal Gem* aired in church and school functions across the United States from 1945 to 1953. By 1947 the film had aired in 3900 theaters to an estimated 15 million viewers.²²⁷ The agency's next short film for De Beers, *The Magic Stone*, aired in 1946 in all

²²⁵ As quoted in Epstein, *Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 127.

²²⁶ Epstein, *Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 127.

²²⁷ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 58; N. W. Ayer & Son, "A movie short on diamonds Use it FREE," advertising tear sheet, 1947, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National

Loew's theaters nationwide and by 1 April of that year the agency received a request to show the film in an additional 500 theaters across the country.²²⁸ In 1953 the Diamond Information Center produced a 27 minute full Technicolor film titled *A Diamond is Forever*. The film opened with recently engaged young woman staring at her diamond engagement ring. After a series of flashbacks to all of the romantic moments that led to her fiancé buying her a ring, the film traveled to South Africa to show how much manpower and effort went into the small gem on her finger. The film ended with the young woman writing a single word in her diary: "Forever."²²⁹ After its initial distribution by Columbia Pictures to some 3500 theaters during its first year, Ayer distributed *A Diamond is Forever* to an additional 14,000 showings to clubs, schools and churches. After the film aired on national television on 23 January 1955, the agency claimed that the film had reached an audience of over 23 million Americans.²³⁰ Disguised as a form of educational entertainment, Ayer's films on diamonds promoted the diamond engagement ring tradition to a large segment of the population over the course of only a few years. The repeated requests by jewelers made to the Diamond Information Center over the years to air these films across the country helped to ensure that millions of Americans learned about the diamond engagement ring tradition. These films, in turn, helped spread the desire for diamond engagement rings among American consumers.

Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, Photograph of scene from *The Eternal Gem* (1945), J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

²²⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Ayer Filmmakers Report," *Ayer News File* (April 15, 1946), series 16, box 7, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 3.

²²⁹ N. W. Ayer & Son, "De Beers," *Ayer News File* (August 3, 1953), series 16, box 9, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

²³⁰ N. W. Ayer & Son, "De Beers," *Ayer News File* (January 31, 1955), series 16, box 9, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 4.

In addition to using educational films to generate new diamond consumers, the Diamond Information Center also used the influence of celebrities to sell diamonds. Shortly before N.W. Ayer began its engaged socialites series, the Diamond Information Center began a weekly service entitled “Hollywood Personalities,” which provided the leading newspapers in the country with descriptions of the diamonds worn by celebrities at public events. The agency even went as far as to work directly with fashion designers and celebrities to ensure that female celebrities were seen wearing diamonds on the red carpet.²³¹ By flooding American consumers with images of wealthy socialites and famous actresses dripping with diamonds, N.W. Ayer attempted to convince consumers to emulate these women by purchasing and wearing diamonds of their own; specifically diamond engagement rings. The agency’s 1948 strategy paper specifically referred to the exact purpose of using the rich and famous wearing diamond jewelry to sell diamonds to American consumers. It stated that “We spread the word of diamonds worn by stars of screen and stage, by wives and daughters of political leaders, by any woman who can make the grocer’s wife and the mechanic’s sweetheart say, ‘I wish I had what she has.’”²³² Like its advertisements of wealthy socialites, N.W. Ayer’s Diamond Information Center used the hypnotic draw of celebrity to encourage more humble consumers to purchase diamonds.

While Dorothy Dignam and her colleagues in the Diamond Information Center worked to organize and promote the agency’s diamond educational films and the “Hollywood Personalities” feature, N.W. Ayer also relied on one employee in particular to promote diamond engagement rings across the United States. The agency’s secret weapon to lure new consumers toward the diamond engagement ring tradition came in the guise of a charming middle-aged

²³¹ Epstein, *Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 127; N.W. Ayer & Son, “De Beers,” *Ayer News File* (May 11, 1953), series 16, box 9, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

²³² Quoted in Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 127.

woman. Mrs. Gladys Babson Hannaford was N.W. Ayer's one-woman promotional campaign for De Beers. Throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, Hannaford, known as "the diamond lady," frequently toured the United States giving lectures on diamonds.²³³ Widowed shortly after her marriage and left alone with a young daughter to support, Hannaford started her career in sales at a book concern in Boston, Massachusetts. A history of acting in amateur theatre productions gave Hannaford the verbal skills and stage presence necessary to speak to large audiences.²³⁴ Although Hannaford was neither a trained gemologist nor a jeweler, N.W. Ayer and De Beers provided her with access to enough information on diamonds for her lectures so that over the years she became something of a diamond expert as well as a spokeswoman for the agency. Both N.W. Ayer and De Beers supported Hannaford's persona as a diamond expert. De Beers and the agency even sent Hannaford on a tour of the diamond mines in South Africa in July 1949 to learn firsthand about the diamond mining process for future lectures.²³⁵

During the course of her career as a diamond lecturer for N.W. Ayer & Son, Gladys Babson Hannaford spent the majority of the year on the road and often had a grueling schedule of multiple bookings over a short span of time. In 1954 she wrote a press release that described her hectic schedule giving thousands of diamond lectures across the United States each year. Starting from the Ayer offices in New York City, Hannaford spent the next five months traveling to Florida, back to New York, Denver, back to New York once again, and then on to San Francisco. With only her Pontiac, which she affectionately referred to as "Baby," as her traveling companion, she often traveled hundreds of miles in a day to reach her next booking.

²³³ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 57.

²³⁴ Edyth Thornton McLeod, "Beauty after Forty," (1951), box 64, folder 737, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1.

²³⁵ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Gladys Hannaford," *Ayer News File* (July 19, 1949), series 16, box 8, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 3.

On her trip from New York to California that year she traveled an average of 250 miles a day, making lecture stops along the way.²³⁶

A 1963 pamphlet promoting Hannaford's lectures stated that audiences would be entertained by her message while learning a great deal of information relating to the diamond industry and the history of diamonds. The pamphlet promised audiences that Hannaford's lectures would include visual aids of real diamonds and replicas of famous diamonds throughout history. The pamphlet also suggested that Hannaford's lectures were suitable for university and high school assemblies, various college courses, and club meetings; all venues that would have young people of marriage age.²³⁷ Fashionably dressed and armed with \$10,000 worth of diamonds for her outfits and visual aids, Gladys Babson Hannaford sold the idea of the diamond engagement ring to a new generation of consumers during the course of her career.²³⁸ The organizers hoped that after attending the lectures on college campuses and high school gymnasiums, when the young women and men in the audience came of age and decided to marry they would seek out a diamond engagement ring to solidify their union.

Cold Realities: Married Life during the Baby Boom (Realities and Anxieties)

The images presented in De Beers advertisements during the late 1940s and 1950s provide a detailed account of the expectations placed on American men and women during this period.

The images of happy newlyweds on their wedding day, wealthy engaged socialites, and successful businessmen reflected Americans' expectations for married life in postwar America.

²³⁶ Gladys Babson Hannaford, "Solo Driver from Coast to Coast," (1954), box 64, folder 737, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-5.

²³⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, *Diamond Lectures* (New York: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1963), box 64, folder 737, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 1-4.

²³⁸ Hannaford, "Solo Driver from Coast to Coast," 2.

These images combined with the purchase and consumption of diamond engagement rings provided American consumers with the means in which they too could fit into this new American domestic life as good providers and dependent consumers. While the images presented in De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements reflected the ideal married life for Americans, these images did not always reflect the realities of everyday life for many couples. The Cold War produced an era in which conformity was the best means of demonstrating one's loyalty to the nation. Because the U.S. government promoted a form of domestic life centered on capitalism, rising consumer spending, and rigid gender roles, it also generated considerable anxiety for those who attempted, but ultimately failed to measure up to these rising expectations.

Because Americans were encouraged to conform to societal expectations, it is difficult to perceive how average Americans genuinely felt about their lives and their marriages. Throughout the course of the Cold War two longitudinal studies sought to gather information that would provide insight into this most private of institutions. One such study was the Kelly Longitudinal Study. Organized by E. Lowell Kelly, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, the Kelly Longitudinal Study sought to analyze long-term personality development amongst married couples. Kelly's sample consisted of some three hundred couples who were contacted through the mail after their engagements had been announced in local New England newspapers in the late 1930s. These couples were all white, well-educated, affluent, heterosexual, and Protestant and represented those who were most likely to succeed in a postwar America. Kelly sent his respondents questionnaires every few years and in 1955 he sent them his most extensive survey to date. By 1955 most of the couples in the study had been married for at least ten years and were well on their way to raising families of their own. Pages upon pages

of the respondents' answers offer a detailed portrayal of the state of their marriages as well as providing insight into the gendered expectations the respondents held for both their spouses and themselves.²³⁹

The responses to the KLS 1955 survey revealed that the participants felt a deep commitment to marriage and family life. When asked about what they gained because of their marriages, the typical responses were family, children, love, and companionship. But it is also important to note that other common answers to this question were a sense of purpose, success, and security. One female participant reported that life as a mother and homemaker was more fulfilling than any career she could have outside of the home. Male participants commonly reported that marriage gave them a purpose and the motivation that they needed to be successful as providers. All of these sentiments reported in the KLS fall in line with the image of the ideal marriage promoted in De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements. Both male and female participants reported that marriage, and their roles within the marriage, were beneficial to their lives.²⁴⁰ However, responses from the KLS study also indicate that the realities and challenges of everyday life often came into conflict with the domestic ideal promoted within postwar America.

One glaring difference between the ideal family life promoted by De Beers advertisements and the realities of daily married life reported in the KLS were wives' discontentment with their role as dependent consumers. Most of the female participants of the KLS were educated and had worked intermittently outside of the home. By 1955, 40 percent of them were employed outside the home in some capacity. Some of the female participants of the KLS disclosed that after nearly a decade of marriage homemaking did not challenge them

²³⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 14-15.

²⁴⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 32-33.

enough mentally. Many of the employed women in the KLS reported feeling stressed over their dual roles as both workers and homemakers. Others reported that their married lives were more beneficial to their wellbeing as they believed that they could not attain personal and financial security without their husbands and their husbands' incomes.²⁴¹

KLS reporting on men's roles as providers revealed another significant difference between the myths and realities of the idealized version of married life in the postwar United States. In an era where husbands were expected to provide the financial means to keep their families in material comfort, men whose incomes proved insufficient often felt inadequate as providers. One KLS couple's experience perfectly encapsulated these feelings of inadequacy and disappointment, as the wife reported that she worried about the type of people her eldest daughter might associate with because her father could not provide their family with enough income to live in a better neighborhood. The wife also reported that her husband was frequently upset by his inability to adequately provide for his family.²⁴² As the Kelly Longitudinal Study suggested, conforming to societal standards of marriage and family life was not always easy nor did it guarantee a happy marriage. For some respondents, the benefits of married life also went hand in hand with managing their personal frustrations and feelings of inadequacy for not always meeting societal expectations.

Around the same period as the 1955 KLS's survey, the Institute of Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley conducted two other longitudinal studies that mirror some of the same sentiments of the participants of the KLS. In the 1930s, researchers at the IHD created the Berkeley Guidance Study and the Oakland Longitudinal Study to follow participants throughout the course of their lives from childhood to late middle age. Like the respondents

²⁴¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 81-85.

²⁴² May, *Homeward Bound*, 168-69.

from the KLS, the participants in the IHD studies had been married for a little over a decade by the end of the 1950s. Another similarity between IHD and KLS participants was that the respondents in the IHD studies were also largely well-educated and reasonably financially stable.²⁴³ Like the KLS participants, the male participants in the IHD studies reported feeling pressure to provide for their families. One man reported that an economic recession in 1954 put his family in a tight financial situation and often left him feeling inadequate and worried about how he would be able to provide for his family. Female participants in the IHD also shared many similarities with the women in the KLS. For many of them, motherhood marked their retreat from the workforce for a time. This led some of the female respondents to feel depressed and trapped in their roles as mothers. In keeping with the provider/dependent consumer model, only 20 percent of the couples in the IHD reported that the husband, as the provider, made many of the large financial decisions for the family.²⁴⁴ As the KLS and IHD show, the image of a perfect married life presented in De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements was not easy to achieve. For some couples, they would simply have to fake it in order to appear that they had in fact made it.

Solidifying the Diamond Engagement Ring Tradition

During the Cold War era of rising marriage rates and consumer spending N.W. Ayer & Son managed to solidify the diamond engagement ring tradition in American culture. Throughout the early 1950s, N.W. Ayer & Son kept its employees abreast of the latest developments within the De Beers account through company memos. In one work

²⁴³ This information is based on a 100 couple sample from the Institute of Human Development archives featured in Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom & Social Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2-3, 9-10.

²⁴⁴ Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, 36-40.

communication dated 23 April 1951, the agency mentioned the results of a recent survey of American jewelers regarding diamond engagement rings. The survey stated that 88 percent of jewelers within the United States felt that the tradition of diamond engagement rings was stronger than it had been during World War II.²⁴⁵ A memo dated 12 May 1952 concluded that the sale of diamond engagement rings was intricately linked to the number of marriages within the United States. Nearly 85 percent of recorded marriages in the United States in 1952 resulted in the purchase of a diamond engagement ring. Jewelers that year reported that 60 percent of their annual diamond sales were dependent on engagement ring sales with another 10 percent of their sales being attributed to deferred payments on engagement rings. The memo went as far as to say that the connection between diamonds and marriages was so strong that the 7 percent drop in marriages in 1951 was consistent with the slight drop in diamond sales that year.²⁴⁶

As the decade drew to a close it appeared that the diamond engagement ring tradition remained firmly rooted in American culture. A 1959 special report from the jewelry trade publication, *Jeweler's Circular Keystone*, reported that diamond sales that year were higher than ever before. Jewelers surveyed in the article reported that diamond engagement rings made up more than half of their total diamond sales that year. At least a third of these same jewelers believed that the diamond engagement ring tradition was stronger in 1959 than it had been in 1958.²⁴⁷ The steady increase of diamond sales and diamond engagement ring sales over the course of the 1950s implies that N.W. Ayer & Son's continued strategy of linking diamonds to

²⁴⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Diamonds," *Ayer News File* (April 23, 1951), series 16, box 8, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

²⁴⁶ N. W. Ayer & Son, "De Beers," *Ayer News File* (May 12, 1952), series 16, box 6, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

²⁴⁷ George Switzer, "35th Annual Report on the Diamond Industry, 1959: An Industry Service of the *Jeweler's Circular Keystone*," *Jeweler's Circular Keystone* (1959), box 9, folder 122, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University 1-2.

love and marriage was an overall success. The successes of the De Beers advertising campaigns in turn further promoted and reinforced gendered notions of men and women's roles within their marriages.

From the end of World War II through the 1950s N.W. Ayer & Son worked to solidify and expand the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States. Using images of newly married couples, engaged socialites, and one touring diamond expert, the agency succeeded in this goal. With the diamond engagement ring tradition soundly linked with American marriages, the challenge for N.W. Ayer & Son in next two decades would be what to do if fewer and fewer Americans chose to get married at all. While the early postwar years placed the nuclear family at the epicenter of American society, in the following decades this societal norm would be continually challenged by the realities of an ever-changing society.

Chapter 4:
Selling Something Old as Something New:
De Beers Advertising during the 1960s and 1970s

On 24 July 1959 at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev spent time viewing a wide variety of the latest American consumer goods and appliances in a full-scale model of a ranch style home. During the course of this event, the two world leaders exchanged a variety of differing opinions regarding life in their respective countries and the merits and shortcomings of capitalist democratic societies and communist societies that would later become known as the “Kitchen Debate.” As previously mentioned in chapter three, the exhibit’s wide variety of American goods emphasized the superiority of capitalism and the American standard of living over communism, but Nixon’s comments to Khrushchev also referenced the superiority of American marriages and homelife. The wide variety of consumer goods purchased with funds from their husbands’ incomes allowed American housewives to live in comfort and ease.²⁴⁸ Nixon’s comments emphasized the image of the male provider and female dependent consumer within American domestic life that N.W. Ayer & Son had incorporated and promoted in its advertisements for De Beers since World War II. But as the United States transitioned into the 1960s and 1970s, different factions within American society repeatedly challenged the image of the male provider and female dependent consumer. In order to protect the diamond engagement ring tradition, N.W. Ayer & Son had to somehow convince consumers that their decision to

²⁴⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 19-23; Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 243-45, 276, 280-81.

consume diamond engagement rings was a break from the tradition of years past. In other words, N.W. Ayer & Son had to spend the next two decades convincing American consumers that the continued consumption of an established tradition was somehow new.

Trouble in Paradise: De Beers Seeks the Services of a New Advertising Agency

Since their relationship had begun in 1939, N.W. Ayer & Son had produced and distributed advertisements and marketing materials on behalf of De Beers throughout the United States. Ayer's continued success with promoting the diamond engagement tradition within the United States prompted De Beers to consider how the agency might continue to promote the diamond engagement ring tradition outside of the United States. By 1962 De Beers specifically requested that N.W. Ayer begin a campaign to expand its advertising to foreign markets. De Beers's request presented something of a problem for N.W. Ayer as the agency restricted itself to advertising and marketing within the United States. In order to keep one of their largest and most loyal customers happy, N.W. Ayer sought the assistance of other trusted advertising agencies outside of the United States to manage diamond engagement ring advertisements in their respective countries.

On 15 October 1962, N.W. Ayer & Son approached the British advertising agency Everetts Advertising Limited of London to manage all De Beers advertisements distributed within the United Kingdom. The agency offered Everetts a 17.65 percent commission for all media and a 15 percent commission for all sales promotion and public relations events produced and hosted for De Beers on N.W. Ayer's behalf. Ayer's offer did not mean, however, that Everetts could take complete creative license with its De Beers advertisements. N.W. Ayer clearly stated that all De Beer advertisements and promotions generated by Everetts would have

to have prior approval from both N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers before it could move forward with any new projects. These restrictions would help to ensure that all of its previous accomplishments with cementing the perceived emotional and fiscal value of diamonds would not be decimated with one unauthorized advertising campaign by another agency.²⁴⁹

In a letter dated 23 October 1962 to Warner Shelly, Ayer's Chairman of the Board, A. Everett Jones, the chairman of Everetts outlined some of the terms for his agency's role in future De Beers advertisements within the United Kingdom. Everetts agreed to produce and distribute all print advertisements for De Beers within the U.K., but it would limit its De Beers advertisements to mostly print media; citing that the issue of copyright within the United Kingdom would make television and cinema advertisements more difficult to produce. Jones also mentioned that his agency would bill De Beers's London Office for any public relations events that his agency hosted on behalf of De Beers.²⁵⁰ Ayer also approached two other advertising agencies, Brose in West Germany, and Dupoy in France to manage De Beers diamond engagement ring advertising campaigns on Ayer's behalf in their respective countries.²⁵¹

In another letter addressed to Hans Haberfeld of Brose, Warner Shelly claimed that the advertising agency was not soliciting their agency's services to make a profit. Shelly simply stated that the responsibility of managing an international De Beers campaign required the agency to seek other agencies operating outside of the United States that it could trust with the

²⁴⁹ Warner S. Shelly to A. Everett Jones, 15 October 1962, series 18, box 1, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1-2.

²⁵⁰ A. Everett Jones to Warner S. Shelly, 23 October 1962, series 18, box 1, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1-2.

²⁵¹ N. W. Ayer & Son, Miscellaneous envelope outlining timeline of contracts between N.W. Ayer & Son and Everetts, Brose, and Dupoy, undated, series 18, box 1, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

responsibility of promoting diamonds in foreign markets.²⁵² Ayer wanted to secure reliable advertising agencies to manage De Beers's overseas advertising campaigns to ensure that their client remained content with their work and, more importantly, would not seek out other agencies to manage their account.

This system of N.W. Ayer overseeing foreign advertising agencies' work on future De Beers campaigns kept De Beers satisfied for a time, but the cartel eventually sought a more efficient option for advertising outside of the United States. After a little over two years subcontracting out their international De Beers advertising campaigns to other agencies, De Beers decided to take their international advertising business in another direction. Instead of allowing N.W. Ayer to continue to manage other advertising agencies handling its De Beers advertising campaigns in their respective countries, De Beers hired one agency with offices in various countries all over the world to oversee all of its future advertising campaigns outside the United States. The agency in question was the American advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, which already had offices in many major cities in both Europe and Asia.²⁵³ De Beers's decision to take their international advertising business elsewhere left N.W. Ayer & Son with the rather awkward task of terminating all of their contracts with Everetts, Brose, and Dupoy.²⁵⁴ The termination of N.W. Ayer's international advertising campaigns also marked the first time that De Beers had shown dissatisfaction with the advertising agency. Perhaps this was the first time Ayer and De Beers realized that this perfect match was not so perfect after all.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Warner S. Shelly to Hans Haberfeld, 15 October 1962, series 18, box 1, folder 5, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

²⁵³ Ontes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 68.

²⁵⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, Miscellaneous envelope.

²⁵⁵ As this dissertation pertains to De Beers advertisements within the United States, I will not examine J. Walter Thompson's De Beers advertisements during the period that N.W. Ayer & Son managed their United States advertising campaigns.

Weddings and Marriage in the Age of Aquarius

While N.W. Ayer & Son recovered from losing De Beers's international account, Americans in the 1960s and 1970s underwent a period of reevaluating their perception of marriage within their own culture. In many ways the 1960s and 1970s represented a period of tremendous change within American society. Many Americans born directly after World War II came of age and sought to break away from the traditions and social norms of their parents. This baby boom generation saw themselves as different from their parents. They often rejected the domestic and sexual mores that their parents adhered to after the war.²⁵⁶ Americans in the 1960s and 1970s also bore witness to the rise of a number of social movements that challenged the meaning of the white wedding as well as the institution of marriage itself.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the coming of age for the children born during the marriage boom of the early postwar United States. Unlike their parents, who suffered the hardships of both the Great Depression and World War II, the baby boom generation grew up in an era of economic prosperity and greater material comfort.²⁵⁷ Unlike their parents, who often focused on spending their income on goods and items that benefited the family, teens and young adults of the baby boom generation were used to spending their money on personal items and recreational activities. By the mid-1960s, the average teen girl was spending approximately 10 percent of her family's income on personal items such as makeup and clothing. Teens in the

²⁵⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 6; Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, 7-8.

²⁵⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, 6.

1960s also accounted for 20 percent of the United States' new and used car sales. Spending for the baby boomer generation was therefore less about the family and more about the individual.²⁵⁸

Sexual mores also separated the baby boom generation from their parents. Unlike their parents, who largely adhered to the notion that sex was reserved for marriage, this generation of Americans were more likely to engage in premarital sex.²⁵⁹ One of the reasons why baby boomers were more likely to engage in premarital sex was easier access to safe and effective birth control. In 1960 the FDA approved the use of the birth control pill. By 1965, the pill became legally available to all American women. That same year, more than six million women were prescribed birth control pills. By 1970, 60 percent of all adult women were using some form of birth control.²⁶⁰ The number of Americans who disapproved of premarital sex dropped considerably by the mid-1970s. In 1968, 68 percent of Americans disapproved of premarital sex. By 1973, that number dropped to just 48 percent of Americans. By openly admitting to engaging in premarital sex, baby boomers challenged the belief held by their parents' generation that women needed to remain pure before marriage.²⁶¹

Baby boomers diverged further from their parents by choosing to live with their significant other before marriage. In the late 1960s the *New York Times* asserted that the increasing number of American couples choosing to live together before marriage was limited to a small minority of Americans that were intellectual, politically liberal, from middle and upper-middle-class backgrounds, anti-materialistic, and anti-Establishment.²⁶² In 1966, *Look* reported that 45 percent of American teenagers believed that it was all right for a couple to live together if

²⁵⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 211; Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 27.

²⁵⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 211; Cott, *Public Vows*, 202.

²⁶⁰ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 254.

²⁶¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 65, 211.

²⁶² May, *Homeward Bound*, 211-12.

they believed they were in love.²⁶³ By the 1970s cohabitation amongst unmarried couples became far more common. During the 1970s the number of unmarried couples living together tripled; especially amongst Americans under the age of twenty-five with no children.²⁶⁴

Although baby boomers did not adhere to the same sexual and domestic mores as their parents, that does not mean that they completely abandoned all traditions. At the beginning of the 1960s, the white wedding, and subsequently, the American wedding industry, continued its economic boom from the previous decade. In 1960, when the median family income was \$4,970, the average American wedding cost approximately \$3,300. The average diamond engagement ring cost \$398.79. Although the families of newly married couples spent a considerable amount of their annual income on weddings, their guests also spent heavily on gifts for the new couple. In 1960 American newlyweds received \$1,003 worth of gifts from guests to start off their new life together. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, newly married couples contributed \$23 billion a year to the American economy.²⁶⁵

The popularity of the formal white wedding lasted into the mid-1960s. The wedding industry estimated that 84 percent of American brides from 1960 to 1970 chose to walk down the aisle in a formal white wedding gown. Seventy-three percent of couples in 1967 opted for a formal white wedding and some form of religious service. By 1971, that percentage rose to 80 percent.²⁶⁶ This rise of the formal white wedding indicates that while young American couples rejected some of the mores of their parents, they were still willing to embrace the tradition of the white wedding.

²⁶³ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 82.

²⁶⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*, 212.

²⁶⁵ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 26; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 75-76.

²⁶⁶ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 26, 28.

One significant change to the wedding industry in the 1960s and 1970s was the increased purchasing power of African American consumers. From as early as the 1920s, African Americans expressed their demand for full citizenship rights through their consumption of material goods. By the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s African American consumers demonstrated their activism through sit-ins, picketing, selective buying, and boycotting businesses that refused to cater to African American consumers.²⁶⁷ By the late 1960s, bridal magazines in the United States began to include African American consumers by occasionally featuring African American models.²⁶⁸ Bridal magazines in the 1960s and 1970s reported African American readership numbers that were equal to their portion of the American population.²⁶⁹ By the 1970s some smaller venue bridal shows featured African American models in white wedding gowns; demonstrating a greater acceptance of African Americans as consumers in America's wedding industry.²⁷⁰ While wealthy and upper-middle-class African Americans had participated in the white wedding tradition since the late 1800s, the 1970s witnessed significant growth in white wedding participation among middle-class African Americans. And the majority of African American couples that chose to wed in a formal ceremony in the 1970s elected also to adopt the same products and stylistic elements of their white counterparts.²⁷¹

It is important to note that during the course of my archival research for this dissertation I did not find a single example of African Americans represented in any De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements. In fact, the only example of De Beers ads featuring African

²⁶⁷ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 370; Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 26.

²⁶⁸ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 26.

²⁶⁹ Ontes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 45.

²⁷⁰ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 114.

²⁷¹ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 45-46..

American models that I was able to find were from 1990. These ads promoted other diamond jewelry, not diamond engagement rings.²⁷²

The limited presence of African Americans and other peoples of color in advertisements is neither surprising nor uncommon. For most of the twentieth century images of consumers in advertisements were white.²⁷³ Advertising images that featured minorities often portrayed them as servants, not as individuals with the purchasing power to buy the product promoted in the ad. Images of African Americans in ads during this period depicted them as servants or some other form of racially stereotyped caricature.²⁷⁴ Two of the most prominent examples of racially stereotyping African Americans in ads were the Gold Dust twins for Gold Dust Washing Powder and Aunt Jemima for Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.²⁷⁵ It was not until after World War II that some advertising agencies and their clients recognized the potential purchasing power of African American consumers and began to search for ways to appeal to this market demographic.²⁷⁶ The 1960s and 1970s experienced an increase of ads in African American periodicals and broadcast media to appeal to this market, but these products were often alcohol and tobacco, not luxury items. It was not until the 1980s with the popularity of the *Cosby Show*, that an African

²⁷² N.W. Ayer & Son, "You have a flair for delivering brilliance off the cuff," advertising tear sheet, 1990, series 4, box 46, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁷³ Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 125, Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 64.

²⁷⁴ Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 6; Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 29; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 193-4.

²⁷⁵ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 163; Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 6.

²⁷⁶ Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 120-22; Dana Saewitz and Edward Lama Wonkeryor, "History of the Regulation of Ethnic Diversity in Advertising Agency Employment," in *Dimensions of Racism in Advertising: From Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edward Lama Wonkeryor (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 26-29.

American man became the long-term face of a mainstream advertising campaign for Jell-O pudding products.²⁷⁷

The fact that N.W. Ayer & Son chose not to feature African Americans in its diamond engagement rings advertisements is not surprising when one considers the overall character of the advertising agency that managed the account. Throughout its long history, N.W. Ayer & Son was known as a conservative advertising agency. This meant that the agency generally did not create advertisements meant to change social perception of potentially controversial issues such as race. Ayer would certainly be reluctant to jeopardize its De Beers account by creating ads that challenged the status quo of whites as the accepted image of the consumer.²⁷⁸

Yet the 1960s and 1970s were a period when some Americans openly questioned the institution of marriage within the United States. One of the ways in which Americans in this period challenged the institution of marriage was with an increased social acceptance of divorce. In 1966 New York lawmakers voted to expand the state's grounds for divorce. While in the past New Yorkers could only divorce on the grounds of adultery, the new law also included cruel and inhuman treatment, abandonment for two years, imprisonment for three years, and living apart for two after a formal separation. On 1 January 1970, the state of California became the first U.S. state to grant divorces on nonadversarial grounds or "no-fault" divorces. By the early 1970s, many Americans were in favor of "no-fault" divorces. By 1977 all but three U.S. states adopted their own version of no-fault divorce.²⁷⁹ Consequently, growing social acceptance and the easier legal access to divorce assisted in raising the divorce rate in the United States.

²⁷⁷ Saewitz and Wonkeryor, "History of the Regulation of Ethnic Diversity in Advertising Agency Employment," 29.

²⁷⁸ *Advertising Age*, "N.W. Ayer & Son (N.W. Ayer & Partners)," *Advertising Age*, <https://adage.com/article/adage-encyclopedia/n-w-ayer-son-n-w-ayer-partners/98334/> (accessed September 13, 2018); Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 160.

²⁷⁹ Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 120-21; Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 30-31.

Between 1965 and 1976 divorce rates doubled from 2.5 to 5 people per 1,000 of the population.²⁸⁰ More importantly, increased social acceptance of and access to divorce challenged earlier Cold War beliefs, promoted by N.W. Ayer's diamond engagement ring ads, that marriage was a life-long institution.

The civil rights climate of the 1960s and 1970s encouraged many Americans to view marriage as a basic human right. This belief was continually reaffirmed as Americans began to challenge who could marry whom.²⁸¹ In 1923 the U.S. Supreme Court had declared marriage as one of the privileges of citizenship, but it did not state that marriage was a fundamental right.²⁸² By the late 1920s, forty-two states continued to ban interracial marriages. It was not until the 1950s that state legislatures began to repeal their "anti-miscegenation" laws. By 1965 only the South continued to enforce laws banning interracial marriage.²⁸³

The constitutionality of the United States' anti-miscegenation laws officially came to a head in 1967 with the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia*. Almost a decade prior, in June 1958, childhood sweethearts Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving traveled from their home state of Virginia to Washington, D.C., where they married. Because Mildred was of African American and Native American descent and Richard was white, the couple's marriage was in direct violation of Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924. After the Lovings returned to their home in Virginia, the local sheriff and his deputies barged into their home, removed the couple from their bedroom, and arrested them for violating the Racial Integrity Act. The couple pleaded guilty to cohabitating as man and wife and were sentenced to a year in prison, which the judge

²⁸⁰ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giants: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*, The Oxford History of the United States, v. 11 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50-51.

²⁸¹ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 256.

²⁸² *Meyer v. Nebraska* 262 U.S. 390 (1923).

²⁸³ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 256.

offered to suspend for twenty-five years if the couple agreed to move out of Virginia. To avoid their prison sentence, the couple chose to move back to Washington D.C. After years of living apart from their families, Mildred made a written legal complaint to then Attorney General Robert Kennedy in 1963. Mildred's actions set in motion a legal battle that ended in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967. In the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Lovings' convictions and declared unconstitutional any remaining state anti-miscegenation laws in the United States.²⁸⁴ Chief Justice Earl Warren declared in the majority decision that "Marriage is one of the 'basic civil rights of man,' fundamental to our very existence and survival."²⁸⁵ *Loving v. Virginia* officially redefined marriage in terms of race within the United States. Interracial couples were no longer forced to live in secret or risk prosecution. The Lovings' case was just one step towards true egalitarian marriage within the United States.

While civil rights activists challenged who could marry whom based on the color of their skin, activists from the second-wave-feminist movement challenged the meaning and relevance of the institution of marriage itself. In 1963 Betty Freidan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that described housewives as suffering from a problem that had no name. Their lives as housewives left them feeling lonely and alienated from the rest of society.²⁸⁶ Some argue that Freidan's work was the match that lit the bonfire of the second-wave-feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Feminists during this period characterized traditional marriage as harmful to women. They also repeatedly criticized the formal white wedding as the symbol of everything wrong with previously held notions of marriage in American society. Feminists argued that the idea that the father gives away a virgin bride all in white to an eager groom perpetuated socially

²⁸⁴ Abbott, *A History of Marriage*, 330-31.

²⁸⁵ *Loving v. Virginia* 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

²⁸⁶ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 251.

constructed differences between men and women. To make a statement against this form of female subjugation, some radical feminists performed acts of guerrilla theatre at bridal fairs. The most famous example of these took place in 1969 at a bridal fair at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Members from the New York-based Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) and women affiliated with the Brooklyn branch of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) released a batch of white mice into a crowd of unsuspecting brides-to-be. Declaring that marriage was oppressive for everyone, but especially for women, protestors donned black veils and carried signs that read "Always a Bride, Never a Person," and sang "Here Comes the Slave, Off to Her Grave." The 1970s saw a number of feminist texts that argued for the end to the sexual double-standard as well as the end of marriages based around the male provider/female dependent consumer model. News programs in the early 1970s frequently featured feminist authors and spokespersons that claimed that men were the only real beneficiaries of traditional marriage. After providing her husband with children, sexual favors, meals, and a cleaning service, wives only received adequate economic support from their spouses, while at the same time they were denied the right to work outside the home. With the husband's hold on the family finances, feminists argued that the wife had limited decision-making power within the marriage and had few options of surviving on her own outside of the marriage.²⁸⁷

Social challenges to marriage eventually reached a breaking point when factions within American society sought a return to more "traditional" beliefs about marriage. Beginning in the 1970s, the New Right emerged as an influential political force aimed at reviving traditional gender roles in American domestic life. New Right advocates gained political strength by

²⁸⁷ Jellison, *It's our Day*, 1, 29-30.

calling for a more militarily aggressive foreign policy, opposing the Equal Rights Amendment, while simultaneously condemning student radicalism, the counterculture, feminism, and the sexual revolution.²⁸⁸

Although Americans in the 1960s and 1970s witnessed considerable challenges to how people valued marriage, those challenges did not completely break Americans from the male provider/female dependent consumer model. As late as 1968, two-thirds of American women from the ages of fifteen to twenty-four still believed that they would become fulltime homemakers once they married. A 1970 poll reported that more than three-quarters of married women under the age of forty-five said that the best marriage was one which the wife stayed home and the husband was the sole provider for the household.²⁸⁹ A 1974 study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, surveyed eleven thousand students and their parents in Southern Oregon in 1967 to determine how people perceived the family roles of mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Based on the participants' responses, the study concluded that both parents and their children viewed their marriage as an egalitarian partnership where parents discussed all major decisions for the family. While participants viewed marriage as an egalitarian partnership, responsibilities around the household continued to fall along traditional gendered lines. Mothers were expected to be in charge of child care, housework, and meals while husbands were only responsible for odd jobs around the house. The perception that the majority of the couples from the study were in egalitarian marriages while still maintaining strict perceptions of gender roles within the household indicates that the male provider/female dependent consumer model lasted well into the 1970s.²⁹⁰ It is the lasting endurance of the male provider/female dependent

²⁸⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 215.

²⁸⁹ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 249.

²⁹⁰ Lyle E. Larson, "System and Subsystem Perception of Family Roles," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 36, no. 1 (February 1974) doi:10.2307/351002 (accessed December 20, 2013): 126, 128, 134-35.

consumer that allowed N.W. Ayer & Son to promote the sale of diamond engagement rings while at the same time reflecting and prescribing the gendered elements of the male provider/female dependent consumer model to the baby boom generation.

1960s ads and 1970s ads

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed considerable changes to and challenges to marriage in the United States and N.W. Ayer & Son attempted to mold its De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements to fit the times. The agency's De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements during this period reflected many of the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s while simultaneously maintaining and promoting the male provider/female dependent consumer model of years past.

At the beginning of the 1960s, N.W. Ayer & Son produced advertisements for De Beers that followed the same lines as their earlier work during World War II. One such advertisement from 1960, titled "Your new, fair world," featured a woman sitting on a window ledge, staring wistfully at the audience, with a letter in her left hand and her diamond engagement ring prominently on display. The text states, "Sharing a love, sharing carefree, dream-lit days, you find a new, fair world that's yours alone, when you're engaged. And the promise that has wrought this lovely miracle is told in your engagement diamond."²⁹¹ The overall appearance of the advertisement bears a striking resemblance to De Beers's separated sweethearts advertisements from World War II. Like the separated sweethearts, the fiancée in "Your new,

²⁹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your new, fair world," advertising tear sheet, 1960, series 4, box 42, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

fair world,” appears to be reflective and passive, lost in thought as if she is waiting for her life to begin. This image conveys the idea that without her fiancé, this young woman is incomplete. The key difference between the separated sweethearts and the fiancée in this ad is that the audience can see her fiancé walking towards her in the background; suggesting that her new life with the man she loves is about to begin.²⁹²

Another De Beers advertisement, this one from 1961, also mimicked both the tone and appearance of the World War II separated sweethearts series. Titled, “A Girl’s Dream,” the ad featured a blond woman in a white dress sitting at the edge of a pond observing a pair of white swans. The text states, “A girl, hopefully, tenderly, dreams upon a fresh, new miracle, her ‘wakened love. Her heart brims with thoughts of ‘him’ alone. And their engagement diamond, telling their promise, records this dear detail.”²⁹³ Similar to both the separated sweethearts and “Your new, fair world” ads, the young woman depicted in the “Girl’s Dream” ad is alone, lost in thought, and presumably waiting for the start of her married life. Alone and separated from the rest of society, she appears incomplete without the man with whom she is meant to spend the rest of her life.²⁹⁴

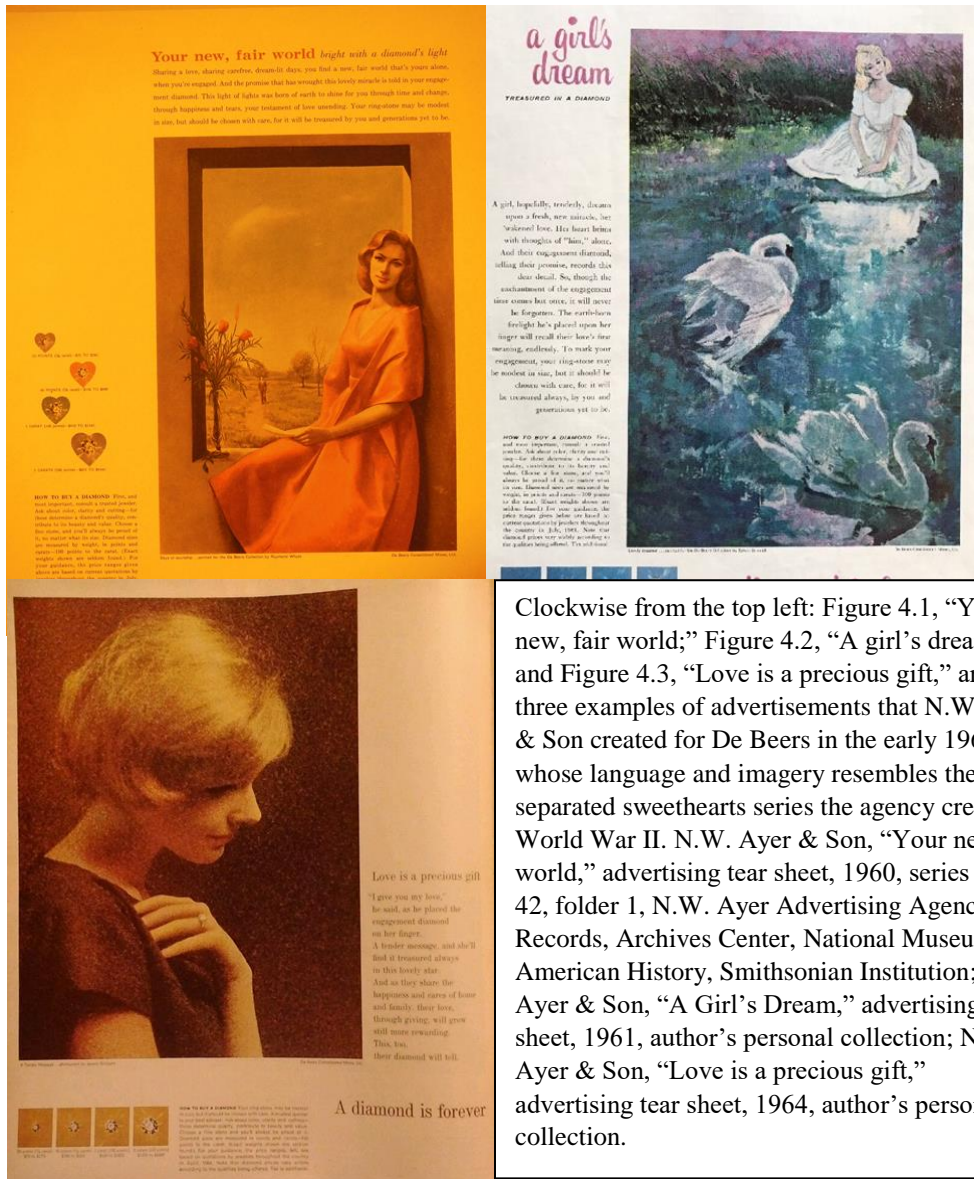
A third early 1960s De Beers advertisement that was parallel to its separated sweethearts ads from World War II was from 1964. Titled “Love is a precious gift,” the advertisement features a blonde-haired woman in a black dress looking down; her left hand placed against her chest, and her diamond engagement ring prominently on display. The text states, “I give you

²⁹² Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Of Absence and Fond Heart;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Until Tomorrow;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Star of Hope;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

²⁹³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “A Girl’s Dream,” advertising tear sheet, 1961, author’s personal collection.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Your new, fair world;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Of Absence and Fond Heart;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Until Tomorrow;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Star of Hope;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

my love,' he said as he placed the engagement diamond on her finger. A tender message, and she'll find it treasured always in this lovely star. And as they share the happiness and cares of home and family, their love, through giving, will grow still more rewarding. This too, their diamond will tell."²⁹⁵ Just like the separated sweethearts, "Love is a precious gift," depicts a woman alone, dreaming of the happy home life she will ultimately have once she is married.²⁹⁶



Clockwise from the top left: Figure 4.1, “Your new, fair world;” Figure 4.2, “A girl’s dream;” and Figure 4.3, “Love is a precious gift,” are three examples of advertisements that N.W. Ayer & Son created for De Beers in the early 1960s whose language and imagery resembles the separated sweethearts series the agency created in World War II. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Your new, fair world,” advertising tear sheet, 1960, series 4, box 42, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “A Girl’s Dream,” advertising tear sheet, 1961, author’s personal collection; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Love is a precious gift,” advertising tear sheet, 1964, author’s personal collection.

²⁹⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Love is a precious gift,” advertising tear sheet, 1964, author’s personal collection.
²⁹⁶ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, “A Girl’s Dream;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Your new, fond world;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Of Absence and Fond Heart;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Until Tomorrow;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Star of Hope;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

Collectively these images suggest that American consumers in the early 1960s were encouraged to adhere to the same male provider/female dependent consumer model promoted to their parents in World War II and the early postwar years. Like the advertisements produced in the separated sweethearts campaign, these ads made a clear statement that a married woman does not belong in an office. The visual representation of women lost in thought and presumably waiting for something to happen combined with the text in each ad emphasized the concept that engaged women are no longer free to act independently as they are now part of a couple. Their collective inaction alludes to the idea that they are waiting for someone to be there to guide them. Without the presence of their fiancés to direct or channel their attention, their lives are on hold until their loved ones return. Just as it was for the separated sweethearts of World War II, marriage represents the true start of their adult life for these baby boomers.²⁹⁷

By 1966, N.W. Ayer's De Beers advertisements shifted from alluding to the promise of a happily married life to explicitly naming the elements that ensure a happy domestic life, encapsulated in the sparkle of a woman's diamond engagement ring. One example of these more explicit De Beers advertisements ran in an October 1966 issue of *Reader's Digest*. Titled, "Love is a world to share," the two-page centerfold ad features a couple in a small boat with the man rowing the couple downstream while his fiancée leans into him, her left hand placed over her right. The text states, "Love is a world to share. Gay with dreams, at first, it soon becomes a widening, changing world. Children, home, mutual achievements will bring new happiness, fulfillment to you who share it with understanding. And always, your engagement diamond will

²⁹⁷ N. W. Ayer & Son, "Love is a precious gift;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A Girl's Dream;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your new, fond world;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Of Absence and Fond Heart;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Until Tomorrow;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Star of Hope;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

tell of your love and its meaning.... a diamond is forever.”²⁹⁸ The image of the woman, relaxing against her fiancé while he paddles downstream conveys the sense that he is in charge of protecting them and guiding them through the twists and turns of married life. This image combined with the text conveys the sense that couples will find happiness in their married lives as long as they accept their roles as male providers and female dependent consumers.²⁹⁹

Another example of De Beers advertisements that made clear allusions to the male provider/female dependent consumer model ran in the 4 November 1966 and 10 January 1967 issues of *Look*. Titled, “Loving and loved,” the ad depicts a young woman in a white eyelet wedding dress resting against a backdrop of floral wedding decorations, her wedding bouquet placed just off to the right, and her diamond engagement ring visible on her left hand. The text states, “Loving and loved, a girl finds new delight in being. Her engagement diamond, telling now of happiness and dreams, will shortly light a world of husband, home and children. Through time and change, it will speak to her, and to him, of their love and its meaning ... a diamond is forever.”³⁰⁰ Calmly waiting with a serene look on her face, the bride depicted in the ad is literally waiting for the moment her married life begins. As she is also inactive, the image of the bride combined with the text suggests that her active role in married life will be as a mother and homemaker, the perfect female dependent consumer.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Love is a world to share,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

³⁰⁰ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Loving and loved,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁰¹ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

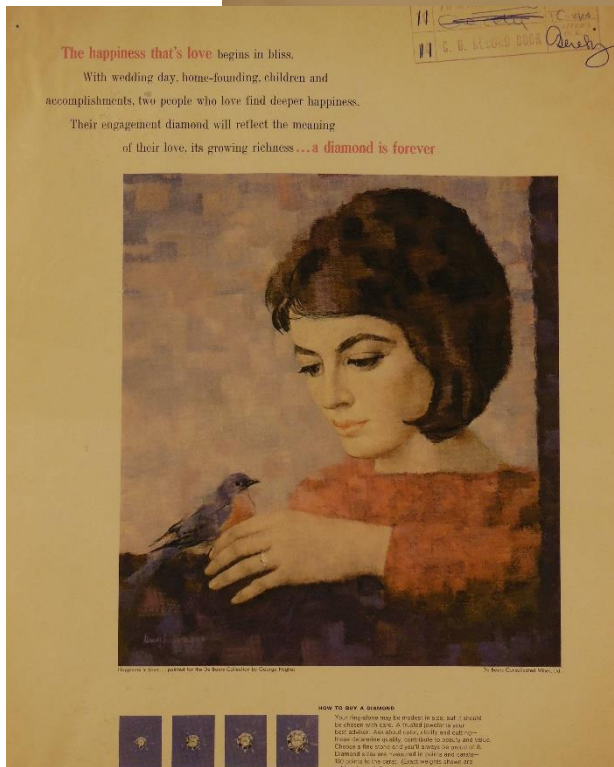
A third example of N.W. Ayer & Son's De Beers advertisements that outright suggested the adaptation of the male provider/female dependent consumer model ran in the 9 December 1966 issue of *Life* and the 11 July 1967 issue of *Look*. Titled, "The happiness that's love," the advertisement features a painting by the famous *Saturday Evening Post* cover artist, George Hughes. The painting depicts a woman petting a bluebird with her left hand; her diamond engagement ring twinkling in front of her. This ad is a continuation of Ayer's "Great Artists" campaign that began in 1940, using the works of famous artists to instill the idea that diamonds are just as valuable and precious as pieces of art. The text states, "The happiness that's love begins in bliss. With wedding day, home-founding, children, and accomplishments, two people who love find deeper happiness. Their engagement diamond will reflect the meaning of their love, its growing richness... a diamond is forever."³⁰² The text combined with the painting of the woman conveys the sense that like the valuable painting, married life is precious. The ad also suggests that both men and women would find a rich and fulfilling life as providers and dependent consumers.³⁰³

Together these three advertisements demonstrate the continual prevalence of the male provider/female dependent consumer model amongst American consumers. By suggesting that married life consists of establishing a home and having children, these ads both reflect and prescribe to both the men and women viewing these ads a married life centered around the male provider/female dependent consumer model.³⁰⁴

³⁰² N.W. Ayer & Son, "The happiness that's love," advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁰³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

³⁰⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Love is a world to share;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Loving and loved;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "The happiness that's love;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.



Clockwise from the top: Figure 4.4, “Love is a world to share;” Figure 4.5, “Loving and loved;” and Figure 4.6, “The happiness that’s love,” are all examples of De Beers advertisements that explicitly prescribed the elements of a happy marriage. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Love is a world to share,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Loving and loved,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “The happiness that’s love,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

In 1969, N.W. Ayer & Son diverted from its usual formula from years past for its De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements. Rather than overtly reflecting and prescribing the male provider/female dependent consumer model, these ads play to the perception that baby boomers were somehow different from their parents; that they chose to deviate from the norm. One example of De Beers ads that appeals to the baby boomer consumer ran in the 28 March 1969 issue of *Life*, the 12 August 1969 issue of *Look*, and the April issue of *Seventeen*. The ad depicts a woman curled up on a sand dune and a man with his hands in his pockets stands at a distance behind her. The text states, “The prince or the cowboy or the somebody you never told anybody about when you were a child is suddenly real. And you’re going to marry him.”³⁰⁵ While the text refers the idea that the woman in the picture is choosing to marry a man that is somehow different than the typical male hero archetypes women dream of marrying, the combed image and text of the ad convey the sense that this woman is not deviating from the norm after all. The vulnerable image of the woman in the ad implies that the woman needs protecting and that the man behind her is in fact her protector. The text’s suggestion that the man this woman is marrying is as appealing to her as prince charming or a cowboy also insinuates that she is going to marry someone who can look out for her. This image taken jointly with the text alludes to the idea that it is a man’s job to protect the women in his life, which fits perfectly into the concept of the male provider. By appearing vulnerable, the woman in the ad appears to be dependent on the man behind her to watch over her, which also fits perfectly into the concept of the female dependent consumer. By marrying the hero and protector she always wanted, the woman in the ad refutes feminist beliefs that a woman does not need a man to take care of her. Essentially,

³⁰⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “The prince or the cowboy,” advertising tear sheet, 1969, series 4, box 42, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

“The prince or the cowboy,” suggested to baby boomer women that they needed a man, even if they did not want to admit it.³⁰⁶

Another example of a De Beers ad that appeals to the illusion of individuality is a “Great Artists” advertisement that appeared in the 5 June 1970 issue of *Life*. The ad features a painting by Doug Johnson of a couple on a motorcycle and a lion in the sidecar. The woman is in a white wedding dress with daisies in her hair, suggesting that the couple recently married. The text states, “A man who is his own man is my love. Strong and proud and sure. And now he’s going to share his life with me.”³⁰⁷ The image of the recently married couple on a motorcycle alludes to the notion that they, like baby boomers, appear to deviate from the norm and do things that please them rather than society as a whole. The combined image and text of the advertisement suggests that the couple are actively fulfilling their roles as a male provider and female dependent consumer. The image of the woman holding onto the man once again alludes to the idea that the woman is in fact the vulnerable one in the relationship as she must literally hold onto the man for support to stay on the motorcycle. She is therefore dependent upon him; making her a dependent consumer. The text’s depiction of the man as both strong and confident, combined with the actual image of a strong man suggests that he is a capable provider for his new wife.³⁰⁸

A third example of N.W. Ayer appealing to the individuality of baby boomers comes from a series of advertisements that featured the personal stories of engaged couples that

³⁰⁶ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

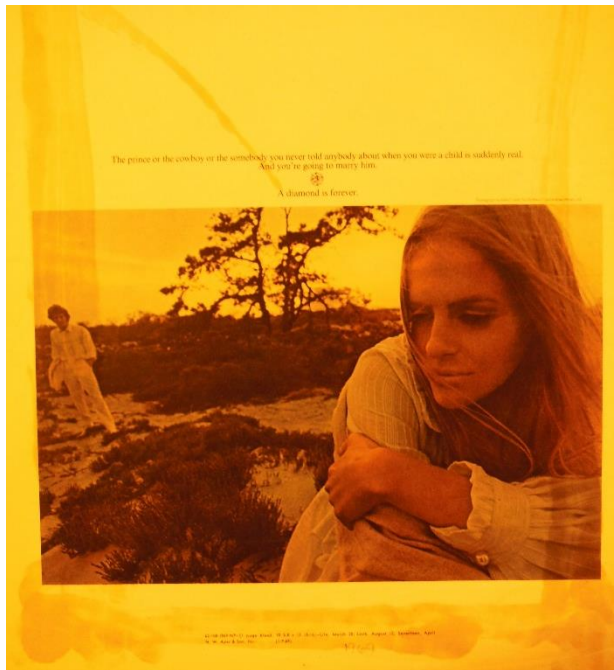
³⁰⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, “A man who is his own man,” advertising tear sheet, 1970, series 4, box 42, folder 9, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

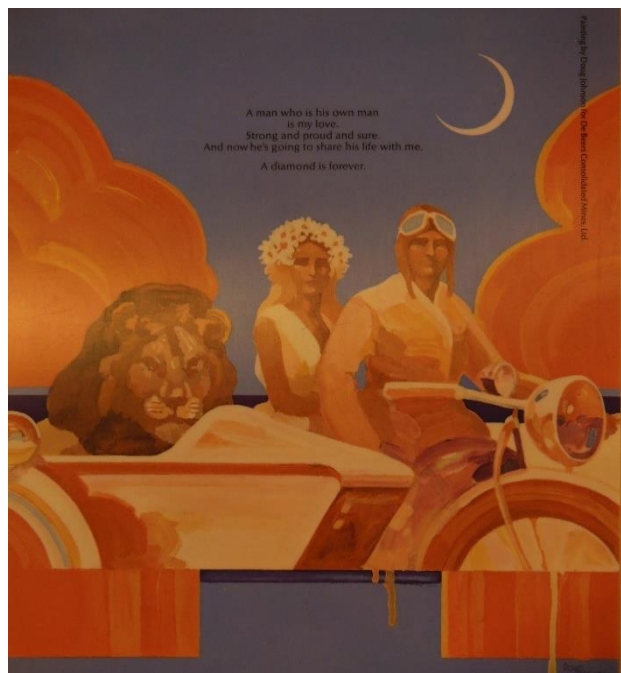
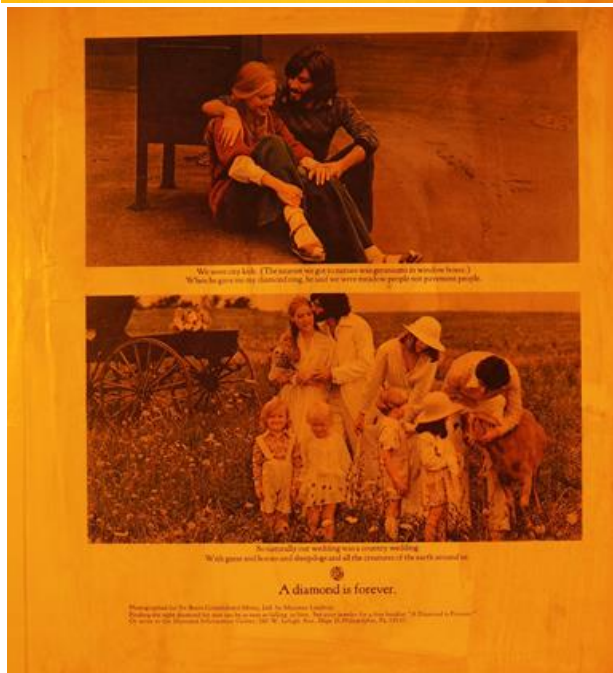
appeared in U.S. magazines from 1973 to 1974. One of these ads, titled “We were city kids,” ran in the May 1973 issues of *Seventeen*, *Teen*, *Glamour*, and *Coed* and the 15 June 1973 issue of *TV Guide*. The ad depicts two sets of images of an engaged couple. At the top the couple is sitting against a mailbox on a street corner presumably at the exact moment after he proposed. The picture below depicts them on their wedding day, surrounded by wildflowers, friends, children, and a goat. The text states, “We were city kids. (The nearest we got to nature was geraniums in window boxes.) When he gave me my diamond ring, he said we were meadow people not pavement people. So naturally our wedding was a country wedding. With geese and horses and sheepdogs and the creatures of the earth around us.”³⁰⁹ The combined image and text of the ad suggests that the couple is choosing to be different from their peers; rejecting the formal white wedding in favor of a more casual and intimate affair. This deviation from the formal white wedding in turn plays to the baby boomer generation’s perception of nonconformity. But the images and text of the ad also reflect and prescribe elements of the male provider/female dependent consumer model. In both images, the man has his arm around the woman and holds her left hand, in essence protecting her from others and essentially controlling her movement at the same time. This image combined with the text’s reference that the groom decided on their country wedding suggests that he is in fact acting in the role of a male provider as all major decisions for the couple will be decided through him. The fact that the bride appears happy in both the images and texts reflected that she is accepting of her husband’s choices and therefore is accepting of her role as a dependent consumer.³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “We were city kids,” advertising tear sheet, 1973, series 4, box 43, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹⁰ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.



Clockwise from the top: Figure 4.7, “The prince or the cowboy;” Figure 4.8, “A man who is his own man;” and Figure 4.9, “We were only city kids,” are three examples of De Beers ads that play to the sense of individuality prized by baby boomers. N.W. Ayer & Son, “The prince or the cowboy,” advertising tear sheet, 1969, series 4, box 42, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “A man who is his own man,” advertising tear sheet, 1970, series 4, box 42, folder 9, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “We were city kids,” advertising tear sheet, 1973, series 4, box 43, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



Collectively these three advertisements play to the notion held by members of the baby boomer generation that they were somehow different from their parents. With all three couples depicted in these advertisements, however, the women appear to rely on the men for support and in making major life choices for the couple. In doing so, these ads demonstrate how the male provider/female dependent consumer model retained its appeal with members of the baby boom

generation by appearing to be different while still maintaining some of the same beliefs about marriage held by their parents.³¹¹

Just as the late 1970s witnessed a call by conservatives to return to more “traditional values,” N.W. Ayer & Son’s advertisements for De Beers encouraged consumers to reign in their “wild child” tendencies and embrace the institution of marriage. One example of these late 1970s De Beers advertisements, first premiered in the early months of 1975 in magazines such as *Senior Scholastic*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, and *TV Guide*. The ad features two pictures of a couple sitting on a beach, the man staring off into the distance, the woman either staring at or leaning against him. The text states, “We seemed to agree on everything that day. How we didn’t want a wedding for hundreds. That my future wouldn’t be with my father’s company. Why our house in the country will be a tent and some sleeping bags. Then we celebrated the years to come with an engagement ring. Because there’s room in every life for a little tradition.”³¹² The text conveys the sense that while this man views himself and his fiancée as different from other couples that they know, they still adhere to the idea of marriage and in turn the idea of the diamond engagement ring.³¹³

Another example of a late 1970s De Beers advertisement that encouraged consumers to embrace the institution of marriage premiered in the June 1976 issue of *Seventeen*. The ad depicts a couple lying down in a grassy field, with the man leaning over the woman and her diamond engagement ring on display. The text states, “Freedom...no strings... live for the

³¹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “The prince or the cowboy;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “A man who is his own man;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “We were city kids;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45..

³¹² N.W. Ayer & Son, “We seemed to agree on everything that day,” advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45..

moment. That was always me. But today this ring says that freedom means being able to be more myself with her than I ever was with me. That no strings means soaring higher and higher together with nothing to tie us down... And that it's time to stop living in the moment.³¹⁴ The text conveys the sense that the man was once a wild and carefree playboy. While he is choosing to give up his wilder ways, he is better for it because the woman he is marrying makes him a better man. The image of the man leaning over his fiancée also conveys the sense that he is protecting her; acting as the male provider.³¹⁵

A third example of De Beers advertisements featuring couples embracing "tradition" is a 1976 ad that depicts a couple sitting on a shoreline, looking off towards a large city in the background. The text states, "It's just a place, over the bridge, but it's a million miles away. Where she can lean on my shoulder and I can lean on hers and we can know a calm that keeps us sane in a noisy, blinking world. That's where I gave her the engagement ring. Because I know our marriage is going to be a place just like that."³¹⁶ The image of the woman looking up to her fiancé conveys the sense that she both adores and relies on him. This image combined with the text suggests to the reader that while the couple may rely on each other for emotional support, the fiancé is still the protector and therefore a male provider looking out for the female dependent consumer.³¹⁷

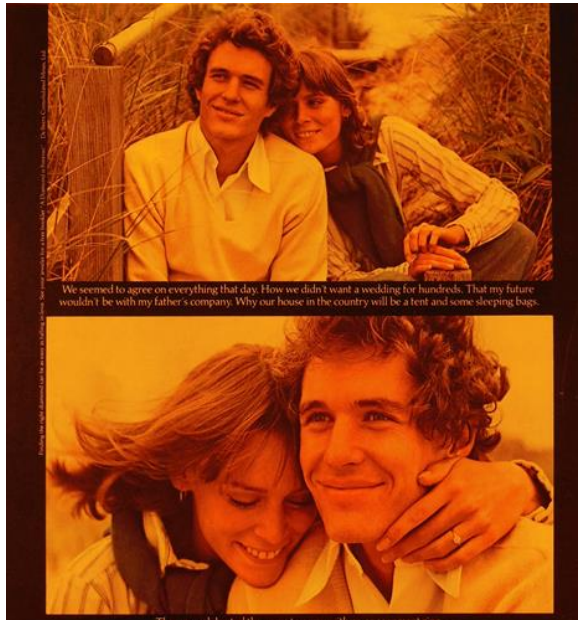
³¹⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Freedom...no strings...live for the moment," advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹⁵ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

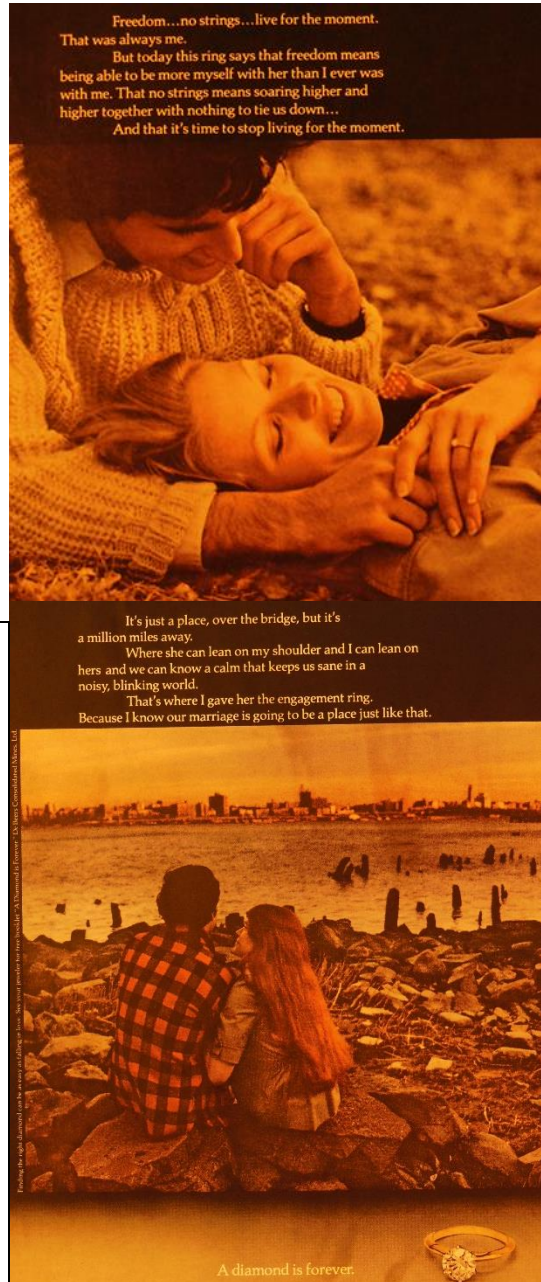
³¹⁶ N.W. Ayer & Son, "It's just a place," advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹⁷ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

Assessed together, images and texts from these three ads represent the new conservative call of the late 1970s to return to more traditional values. In an era of civil rights and second-wave-feminism, these ads reflect and prescribe the male producer/female dependent consumer marriage model popularized in World War II and the early years of the Cold War.³¹⁸



Clockwise from top left: Figure 4.10, “We seemed to agree on everything that day;” Figure 4.11, “Freedom...no strings...live for the moment;” and Figure 4.12, “It’s just a place,” are all examples of De Beers advertisements that play to rising conservatism. N.W. Ayer & Son, “We seemed to agree on everything that day,” advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Freedom...no strings...live for the moment,” advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “It’s just a place,” advertising tear sheet, 1975, series 4, box 43, folder 3, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



³¹⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, “We seemed to agree on everything that day,” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Freedom...no strings...live for the moment;” N.W. Ayer & Son, “It’s just a place;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

Marketing to Baby Boomers

While the copywriters at N.W. Ayer & Son worked to keep the diamond engagement ring as the symbol of love and commitment in the United States, Ayer's Diamond Information Center spent the majority of their time during the 1960s and 1970s trying to train American jewelers to appeal to the growing number of baby boomers that would enter into the marriage market. In 1960 N.W. Ayer & Son's Diamond Information Center issued a report titled "The Gem Diamond Consumer Research: 1960." The report outlined the current state of the diamond market at the beginning of the year and offered predictions about the future of the market. The Diamond Information Center stated that 80 percent of brides from 1959 received a diamond engagement ring and they wanted to keep those sales figures high in coming years. They indicated that much of their success was due to their ability to appeal to teenagers. The Diamond Information Center predicted that if diamond engagement rings continued to hold their appeal with American teens, the jewelry industry could expect more sales from an even larger group of teens that would come of age within the decade. Emphasizing the importance of the diamond engagement ring tradition, the report claimed that of the 20,000 individuals they surveyed, the majority chose to purchase and wear a diamond engagement ring because their parents had as well. More importantly, 63 percent of those individuals whose parents did not own a diamond engagement ring purchased one to conform to the expectations of their peers. The compulsion to purchase and/or wear a diamond engagement ring suggests that while not every member of the baby boom generation grew up with mothers who had a diamond engagement ring, peer pressure would ensure that they would participate in the diamond engagement ring tradition. Armed with this

knowledge, the Diamond Information Center spent the next twenty years ensuring that American jewelers continued to make their diamonds appealing to baby boomers.³¹⁹

One of the ways in which the Diamond Information Center attempted to assist jewelers with generating future sales was with promotional literature. In March 1961, the agency distributed a small educational newsletter titled *Diamonddeas* that was written by the “diamond lady” herself, Gladys Babson Hannaford. In the newsletter, Hannaford outlined all the dos and do-not’s of selling diamond engagement rings to America’s youth. She cautioned jewelers not to ignore or dismiss young couples because of their age; noting they had money and they were willing to spend it on a diamond engagement ring. Hannaford also suggested ways in which to answer common questions that consumers may have had about a diamond. In all instances she stressed the importance of being polite and placing an emphasis on quality over quantity when customers were choosing their diamonds. Hannaford also insisted that jewelers take care in their employees’ appearance as the customer was just as likely to judge their competence based on their appearance as consumers were.³²⁰

Another method that the Diamond Information Center utilized to promote diamond engagement rings to America’s baby boomers was through educational advertisements targeting the very jewelers these young consumers would seek out when buying a diamond engagement ring. One of these advertisements from 1970 features a young man in a trench coat walking out of a jewelry store with a discouraged look on his face. The text explains that while the young

³¹⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “The Gem Diamond Consumer Research: 1960,” (1960), box 32, folder 212, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 2, 4, 7.

³²⁰ Gladys Babson Hannaford, *Diamonddeas* (1961), box 35, folder 232, J. Walter Thompson Company, Diamond Information Center Vertical File, 1930s-1980s, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 1-2.

man had \$350 to spend on an engagement ring, three jewelers talked him out of buying it. What those jewelers did not know was the young man was in fact one of Ayer's advertising copywriters posing undercover with his secretary as a young couple shopping for a diamond engagement ring. The man explained that at each store he visited, the jewelers were either uninformed or dismissed the couple as if they were not worth their time. The ad then suggested that jewelers write to the Diamond Information Center for free educational material on how to sell diamonds to ensure that they did not lose out on actual diamond sales.³²¹ Another ad addressing the issue of catering to young couples ran in the September 1971 issue of *Modern Jeweler*. The ad depicts a couple sitting in a Volkswagen Beetle looking at some educational material about buying a diamond. The text explains that the young couple was overwhelmed by the options in their local jewelry store, but because the jeweler gave them a copy of the Diamond Information Center's educational material, they were better prepared to buy a diamond engagement ring that they could be happy with.³²² Collectively these ads stressed the importance for securing future diamond engagement ring sales of being informed jewelers, having educational materials for customers, and respecting baby boomers as potential customers.³²³

While the Diamond Information Center's main task was to help promote diamond sales with jewelers across the United States, De Beers would, from time to time, task it with addressing unique sales issues. In 1965, De Beers sought the Diamond Information Center's assistance with a diamond supply problem. In the early 1960s the De Beers Consolidated Mines

³²¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "I said I had \$350.00 to spend on a diamond engagement ring. But 3 jewelry salesmen talked me out of buying it," advertising tear sheet, 1970, series 4, box 42, folder 11, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³²² N.W. Ayer & Son, "What cupid didn't tell them was how to buy a diamond," advertising tear sheet, 1971, series 4, box 42, folder 12, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³²³ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, "I said I had \$350.00 to spend on a diamond engagement ring. But 3 jewelry salesmen talked me out of buying it."

Limited struck a deal with the Soviet Union to purchase its overstock of small, high-quality diamonds, to prevent the U.S.S.R. from destabilizing the diamond market. This influx of Russian diamonds meant that De Beers suddenly found itself with large quantities of small diamonds that it might not be able to sell, as its American market tended to purchase diamonds near or over a carat in size. N.W. Ayer's solution to this problem was to encourage American consumers to value the quality of the stone over its overall size. By "educating" consumers on the 4Cs: cut, clarity, carat weight, and color, the Diamond Information Center attempted to convince American consumers to buy smaller, higher quality diamond engagement rings.³²⁴

One way they achieved this goal was through the use of so-called educational advertisements. A September 1966 ad in *Look*, titled "A diamond treasures the meaning of love," which described the 4Cs to readers and explained how consumers should use this information when considering the purchase of a diamond. Overall, the ad stressed that it was better to buy a smaller, higher quality diamond, than a larger one of poorer quality.³²⁵ The Diamond Information Center also produced and distributed a new educational film in 1966 titled, "In a Diamond's Glow." An advertisement promoting the film stated that the twenty-seven-minute film explored the meaning of diamonds over the course of history and provided audiences with information on diamond mining and cutting.³²⁶ Finally, the Diamond Information center used its proven method of distributing educational materials to jewelers to promote the sale of smaller diamonds. In the October 1966 issue of *Jewelers' Circular Keystone*, the Diamond

³²⁴ Epstein, *The Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 134-36.

³²⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A diamond treasures the meaning of love," advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³²⁶ N.W. Ayer & Son, "New Diamond Movie," advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Information Center printed an ad offering free pamphlets for jewelers to give to their customers that provided them with useful information about assessing the quality of a diamond while at the same time emphasizing that diamonds are associated with love. This type of “educational material” was just another way that the Diamond Information Center could gently nudge American consumers to smaller, high quality diamonds.³²⁷ By 1976 Ayer’s effort to promote smaller diamonds was a success, as the average size of a diamond sold that year was just over a quarter carat. Consequently, the popularity of small diamonds caused another supply crisis for De Beers by the late 1970s, as its supply of small diamonds could no longer keep up with demand. As a result, by 1978 N.W. Ayer & Son returned to promoting the sale of larger diamonds.³²⁸

Over the course of two decades, the United States in the 1960s and 1970s challenged the structure and appearance of married life for many Americans. Inspired by the social changes advocated by the second-wave-feminist movement or civil rights, many Americans critiqued the rigidity of the married life promoted and lived by couples during World War II and the early postwar years. While these challenges to marriage caused some to rethink the structures of their own married lives, it did not successfully separate Americans from the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. With the stresses of balancing both work and a home life, many Americans perceived that it was easier to fall back to the marital habits of generations past than to face the consequences of change. As the 1970s ended and Americans began to embrace

³²⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Use these Diamond Gift Folders,” advertising tear sheet, 1966, series 3, box 149, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³²⁸ Epstein, *The Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 135-36.

social conservatism, a call for a return to normalcy meant that ideal notions of marriage as structured by the male provider/female dependent consumer model endured into the next decade.

Chapter 5: Why Bigger is Supposedly Better (The 1980s)

Since the early postwar era, Americans had been encouraged to embrace the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. But from its very inception, this model of the “ideal” American marriage was difficult if not impossible for couples to adhere to and maintain. Rising numbers of single parent homes and the increase of women working outside of the home during the 1980s challenged the male provider/female dependent consumer model. Traces of this imagining of the ideal American marriage dragged on throughout the decade, weakened, but never entirely removed from the American psyche. Americans’ inability to separate this vision of marriage from the reality of their everyday lives serves as a testament to the lasting impact of early Cold War era social norms on American society in the latter half of the twentieth century. N.W. Ayer & Son’s De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements during the 1980s mirror Americans’ continued acceptance of the male provider/female dependent consumer model. The majority of the agency’s 1980s ads reflected and prescribed a slightly more egalitarian male provider/female dependent consumer model; suggesting once again that while Cold War manifestations of this marriage model were becoming obsolete, it continued to shape Americans’ perception of marriage throughout the decade.

Reaganomics: The economic climate of the 1980s

When President Ronald Reagan ran for office in 1980 and again in 1984, he asked his fellow Americans to vote based on their economic interests and financial well-being. Voters were to

ask themselves, “Are you better off now than you were four years ago?” The Reagan administration distinguished itself from previous, post-Depression-era administrations through its complete rejection of Keynesian economic policy. Enacted in 1981, Reagan’s alternative, which would later be known as “Reaganomics,” sought to counter inflation and economic stagnation with a massive tax cut and non-progressive marginal rates to stimulate economic growth. “Reaganomics” also called for cuts in government spending on entitlement programs, an anti-inflationary money policy, and moves toward privatization and deregulation. Instead of an economic policy that sought to include all Americans in an expansive web of mass consumption, supporters of Reagan’s economic policies believed in promoting capital investment, concentration of wealth, tax cuts, and personal savings over consumption. The assumption undergirding the economic plan was that growing prosperity for the rich and corporations would “trickle down” to the average American consumer. In reality, Reaganomics generated greater income inequality over the next two decades.³²⁹

For middle- and lower-income American families, the economic policies of the Reagan administration, especially during the early years of his administration, proved to be catastrophic. In January 1981, the purchasing power of the average American family was \$1,000 less than it had been in the 1970s. By 1983 the nation’s poverty rate reached the highest point in nearly twenty years at 15.2 percent.³³⁰ While inflation had dropped to less than 6 percent by 1983, the nation’s unemployment rate reached an almost a staggering 11 percent by the end of 1982. A strong American dollar led to cheap imports, a decline in exports, and, as a result, a shutdown of some American industries. Fortunately for consumers, by 1983 the economy appeared to turn

³²⁹ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 395-96.

³³⁰ Jellison, *It’s Our Day*, 134.

itself back around. While the recovery was in no way universal, unemployment and inflation declined. As a result, the U.S. automobile industry experienced a surge in revitalization, the housing market boomed, and consumer spending exploded to new heights.³³¹

As previously detailed in chapter four, an increasing number of Americans in the 1960s and 1970s had opted to divorce rather than remain married. By 1980 the divorce rate in the United States stood at 50 percent. After 1981 divorce rates leveled off and began to slowly decline, however, fewer divorced persons in the 1980s opted to remarry.³³² The U.S. marriage rate also decreased throughout the course of the decade.³³³

Apart from the declining marriage rates, young couples in the United States during the 1980s became more accepting of wives having careers. Results from a 1980 survey of teenage girls reported that 75 percent of those not yet in college intended to attend an institution of higher learning following their high school graduation. They cited that their principal motivation for doing so was to better prepare for a high-paying job. Young men during the 1980s also expressed a desire to marry women who were gainfully employed. Mid-1980s surveys of male college students showed that nearly all the participants surveyed expressed a desire to marry a wife with a steady income.³³⁴ During the 1980s wives reduced the average number of hours they devoted to cooking and cleaning each week while their husbands began to help around the home with household chores. By the late 1980s both husbands and wives increased the amount of time they spent with their children.³³⁵

³³¹ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 454.

³³² Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 263.

³³³ May, *Homeward Bound*, 6.

³³⁴ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 43-44.

³³⁵ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 299.

Although couples in the 1980s were more open to the idea of sharing responsibilities at work and at home, both men and women stated that they experienced backlash from their spouses for deviating from the male provider/female dependent consumer model. Historian Stephanie Coontz described a gathering of her parents' friends in 1981 that actually ended in a shouting match over how each other's spouses demeaned their efforts to have a more egalitarian marriage. The men complained that their wives criticized the quality of their housework when they chose to help out around the house. The men whose wives had a job outside of the home complained that their wives would take out all of their frustrations about their workday out on their husbands. The women countered their husbands' complaints by stating that when their husbands offered to do the housework they often bothered them with so many questions on how to do it that it was just easier to do the housework themselves. These wives also complained about their husbands' inability to see their wives' careers as a valuable contribution to the family. One woman claimed that her husband suggested she should be the one to leave work to get the kids because employers were more sympathetic to women asking to leave for family-related reasons. Overall this party-turned-shouting-match demonstrated couples' frustrations when they attempted to move away from the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model and into a more egalitarian marriage.³³⁶

Despite the fact that an increasing number of Americans in the 1980s opted to remain single, for those Americans who chose to marry and remain married, the factors that determined a successful marriage remained elusive. According to a 1980s study of over fifteen hundred married respondents, married women who held nontraditional gender role attitudes were more likely than women who held to more traditional gender roles to be unsatisfied with their

³³⁶ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 260-61.

marriages. The study determined that husbands who became more progressive in their views of gender roles within marriages reported increased marriage quality over time. The study also noted a trend in decreased reports of discord within marriages, such as marital problems and disagreements, that coincided with reports of increasing egalitarianism within the marriages in the study.³³⁷ Another study on perceptions of marriage and family life published in *The Journal of Marriage and Family* in 2001 found that by the middle of the 1980s, the majority of the respondents in the study expressed egalitarian attitudes rooted in the belief that married women should be able to have a career outside of the home. The respondents of this study also indicated, however, that during the 1980s the majority of female respondents believed that their marriages were better if wives stay at home and their husbands worked outside the home.³³⁸

The increased expectation in the 1980s for both husbands and wives to work outside the home while husbands devoted more time to household chores and child rearing is an indicator that Americans during this decade were becoming more egalitarian in their views of marriage. As one of the surveys on perceived marriage quality demonstrated, however, the idea that marriages are happier under the male provider/female dependent consumer model did not go away in the 1980s, it was simply weakened.

³³⁷ Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, "Changes in Gender Role Attitudes and Perceived Marital Quality." *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 1 (February 1995) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096345> (accessed December 20, 2013): 58, 64.

³³⁸ Arland Thornton and Linda Young-DeMarco, "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes toward Family Issues in the United States: The 1960s through the 1990s." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 4 (November 2001), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3599811> (accessed April 15, 2013): 1014-15.

Life of Excess: Consumerism in the 1980s

After the chaos, social change, and social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, Americans in the 1980s desired to live in more stable and affluent times. This desire boosted a wave of excessive consumer spending that would come to define the decade. In the 1980s, the promotion of excessive consumer spending far outweighed any social criticisms of the practice.³³⁹ One of the most visible champions of excessive spending in the 1980s was the First Lady of the United States, Nancy Reagan. Throughout her tenure as First Lady, Mrs. Reagan was known for hosting elaborate and extravagant events for her husband at the White House.³⁴⁰ With a group of friends consisting of fashionable socialites and famous fashion designers, Nancy Reagan made headlines in the early part of the 1980s for her expensive taste in clothing and china. Her wardrobe for her husband's first inauguration in 1981 cost \$25,000 and she nearly doubled that amount for her husband's second inauguration in 1985. While Nancy Reagan helped to make expensive clothing and entertaining fashionable during the 1980s, several popular television shows, *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, and *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* also projected images of wealth and privilege to American audiences.³⁴¹

Although Americans in previous decades in the United States were known for their excessive consumption of commodities, the 1980s became known for its celebration of conspicuous consumption. Baby boomers during this decade were classified as being self-

³³⁹ Lawrence Glickman, "Introduction," *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 6-7.

³⁴⁰ Shelia Golburgh Johnson, "Consumerism," *The 1980s in America* (Hackensack: Salem, 2008), <https://online-salempresscom.spot.lib.auburn.edu><https://online-salempress-com.spot.lib.auburn.edu/articleDetails.do?boo...4>; Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 133.

³⁴¹ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 134

obsessed and required instant gratification for their desire for consumer goods.³⁴² This desire for the best of everything was never more apparent than in America's wedding industry.

Every Bride is a Princess: The White Wedding Boom of the 1980s

In 1981, seven hundred and fifty million television viewers around the world tuned in to watch the marriage of Lady Diana Spencer to the heir of the British throne, Charles Windsor, Prince of Wales.³⁴³ Although Diana Spencer came from an old aristocratic family, she had left school at the age of sixteen and never attended college. Before her marriage to Prince Charles, she worked as a kindergarten aide and shared an apartment with friends. It was when she donned her family tiara and her extravagant Emmanuelle wedding gown that Diana Spencer transformed into a princess. In America, the royal wedding inspired both consumers and the wedding industry to make all brides into princesses.³⁴⁴ Princess Diana's wedding gown became the mold for millions of extremely ornate wedding gowns over the next decade.³⁴⁵ The wedding of Charles and Diana launched the United States into larger, more formal, and most importantly, more expensive weddings. Between 1984 and 1994 the average cost of a wedding in the United States quadrupled from \$4,000 to \$16,000.³⁴⁶ This increased demand for more elaborate and formal weddings lead to the establishment of professional organizations for bridal consultants, such as the Association of Bridal Consultants, to cater to this rising demand.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Johnson, "Consumerism;" Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 274.

³⁴³ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 88.

³⁴⁴ Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 50.

³⁴⁵ Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 133.

³⁴⁶ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 220.

³⁴⁷ Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 51.

While the wedding industry experienced considerable growth in the 1980s, the architects for the supply and demand of diamond engagement rings in the United States, N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, did not fare so well. Between scandals and global markets crises, both companies struggled to maintain their assets and reputations.

A Dark Cloud over the Horizon: The U.S. Army Scandal

For many years N.W. Ayer & Son was regarded as one of the top advertising agencies operating in the United States. Like any other agency aiming to keep its doors open, Ayer relied on its reputation for providing its clients with effective advertising campaigns without overcharging. That all changed in November 1986, when one of Ayer's largest clients, the United States Army, announced publicly that it was suspending N.W. Ayer & Son from bidding for any military contracts for a period of one year. The suspension meant that Ayer lost a \$100 million contract that the agency simply could not afford to lose.³⁴⁸

To understand how N.W. Ayer could go from one of the United States' top advertising agencies to losing one of its largest clients one must go back to the very beginning of Ayer's relationship with the U.S. Army. In 1967 the U.S. Army hired N.W. Ayer & Son to manage all its Army recruitment advertising campaigns and the agency continually beat out other advertising agencies for their business year after year. In 1979 the U.S. Army appointed Major General Maxwell R. Thurman as the commanding officer of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. At the time of General Thurman's appointment, the Army's image was at an all-time low due to the unpopularity of the Vietnam war and the draft. By 1979

³⁴⁸ Janet Meyers, "No Victors, Army vs. Ayer: What Really Happened." *Advertising Age*, May 16, 1988, 24.

annual recruitment had fallen below its goal of 100,000 new recruits a year. Unsatisfied with these numbers, General Thurman and the U.S. Army put considerable pressure on N.W. Ayer & Son to reverse their declining recruitment numbers. In 1981, Ayer pitched three campaigns to the U.S. Army and “Be all you can be” was selected to be the focal point of a massive recruiting campaign the agency and the Army launched that year. That year the Army distributed half a million “Be all you can be” bumper stickers as well as tube socks to high school students who wrote to the Army for information about the Army College Fund. Ayer also sent the “Be all you can be” music score to over sixteen thousand band directors across the United States. The campaign was an instant hit. Both the total number of recruits and the number of recruits that had graduated from high school increased markedly.³⁴⁹

After its success in 1981 it appeared that N.W. Ayer & Son would continue to enjoy a successful and lucrative relationship with the U.S. Army; however, relations between the two had already begun to fall apart by the time of General Thurman’s appointment in 1979. That year the Army instituted fixed-price contracts for its advertising. Whereas in years past Ayer was used to collecting commission on its \$100 million contract with the Army, the agency was now expected to charge the Army by an hourly rate based on its actual costs, plus profits. These new fixed-price contracts meant that Ayer employees now had to keep detailed records and time cards as evidence of how much time they spent working on the Army’s ad campaigns. Detailed record keeping on an ad campaign was not something Ayer employees were used to doing and as a result, time cards reported by the agency often did not match the required bi-monthly reports it sent to the Army. In 1980, Army auditors discovered that Ayer had overbilled the Army by

³⁴⁹ Meyers, “No Victors.”

more than \$400,000 in 1979. Ayer promised the Army that it would improve its billing and time card records, but the 1980 audit soured relations between Ayer and its client as the Army continued to find infractions. In 1983 a disgruntled former Ayer public relations executive alerted the U.S. Attorney's office for the Southern District of New York of allegations of timecard tampering by senior Ayer employees. As a result, twenty-five current and former employees of the agency appeared before a grand jury between 1983 and 1986.³⁵⁰

The Defense Criminal Investigation Service, a branch of the Department of Defense, began its own investigation on N.W. Ayer & Son in 1983. In December 1985, Army investigators caught Jack Bidus, an Ayer creative vice president, accepting bribes from film producer Sol Leyton of Hurrah Productions. The production company had a long history of creating promotional films for the Army and came to the attention of Army investigators because of the unusually high number of Army contracts it received over a number of years. Investigators discovered that Leyton had bribed Bidus for information on what bids he needed to make on Army projects so that Hurrah Productions would be the lowest bidder. On 21 April 1986 Bidus plead guilty to bribery charges in federal court and was sentenced to a year probation and a \$50 fine in July 1986. Bidus' conviction pushed Army investigators to look further into Ayer's subcontracting procedures. Ayer admitted to investigators that some Ayer employees did discuss with favored suppliers which bids would likely be accepted by the Army for jobs, but the agency claimed that it did so in order to ensure that the Army would use the best suppliers for its advertising campaigns. More importantly, Ayer also claimed that the suppliers used were in fact the lowest bidders, the suppliers did not pay Ayer for the information, and the agency did not benefit financially from providing suppliers with information on Army contracts. The agency

³⁵⁰ Meyers, "No Victors."

also argued that directing jobs to preferred suppliers was a common practice that it used for its other clients. Regardless of this new information, N.W. Ayer & Son agreed to institute new procedures to eliminate favoritism among suppliers.³⁵¹

In May 1986, the day before N.W. Ayer & Son was scheduled to present its 1987 advertising campaign to the U.S. Army, the Army informed Ayer's chairman, Louis T. Hagopian, that the contract would be put out to an open bid that month.³⁵² In September 1986 Ayer pitched its 1987 advertising campaign to Army officials. The pitch apparently went so well that the agency believed that it still stood a chance to keep the account. Two months later, however, the Army announced that Ayer was suspended from consideration for any Army contracts for a period of one year. The Army cited Bidus' conviction, bid rigging for suppliers, and doctored timecards as the reason behind the suspension.³⁵³ On 27 January 1987, the U.S. Army officially announced that the advertising agency Young & Rubicam had won the contract for its 1987 advertising campaign.³⁵⁴ In November 1987, two days before Ayer's Army suspension was set to expire, at the request of the Department of Justice, the Army announced that it was extending the suspension for another six months. The Department of Justice reported that it was also considering filing a civil suit to recover funds overcharged by the agency to the Army.³⁵⁵ In May 1988 N.W. Ayer & Son agreed to pay \$750,000 to the Department of Justice to settle charges of billing and bidding improprieties. Ayer also agreed to drop its lawsuit against

³⁵¹ Meyers, "No Victors."

³⁵² Meyers, "No Victors;" *New York Times*, "Army Account Up for Grabs," *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, May 21, 1986, <http://spot.lib.auburn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/110946970?accountid=8421> (accessed October 31, 2018).

³⁵³ Meyers, "No Victors."

³⁵⁴ Meyers, "No Victors," Daniel Dougherty, "Y&R Gets the Army Account," *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, Jan 28, 1987, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, D20.

³⁵⁵ Meyers, "No Victors."

the Army that claimed it lost \$525,000 in profits after the Army banned Ayer from bidding on Army contracts. After the court settlement Ayer spokesman F. Bradley Lynch maintained that Ayer was innocent of the allegations made by the Army against them, but that the agency was tired of fighting over the issue in court and decided to settle.³⁵⁶ While N.W. Ayer & Son remained one of the top advertising agencies in the United States, citing over \$880 million in advertising revenue in 1985 alone, the loss of the agency's second largest account damaged the agency's reputation.³⁵⁷

Trouble on the Horizon: De Beers Diamond Crisis of the 1980s

While N.W. Ayer & Son experienced an embarrassing public loss of a valuable client in the late 1980s, one of its other valuable clients, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, experienced problems of its own at the beginning of the decade. During the global economic recession of the late 1970s, De Beers was forced to use large portions of its cash reserves to buy stockpiles of diamonds from Russian and African mines outside of its control to prevent those diamonds from collapsing the global diamond market. De Beers also bought back diamonds from wholesale markets in Antwerp in 1980 to further prevent a drop in diamond prices. More trouble for De Beers arrived in the spring of 1981, when Israeli bankers in Tel Aviv threatened to release \$1.5 billion worth of diamonds onto the global market. This stockpile was nearly equal to the annual production amount of all the diamond mines in the world combined. Already cash-strapped, De Beers was in no position to buy even more stockpiles of diamonds at the time, but not acting

³⁵⁶ *New York Times*, "Ayer Settles Army Dispute," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 23, 1988, <http://spot.lib.auburn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/110554328?accountid=8421> (accessed November 1, 2018).

³⁵⁷ *Advertising Age*, "N.W. Ayer & Son (N.W. Ayer & Partners)."

would threaten the stability of the international diamond market. By September 1981 De Beers agreed to buy a small portion of the diamond stockpile held by the Israeli banks, but because it could not afford to buy back all of the \$1.5 billion worth of diamonds, the cartel was faced with the very real possibility that it would no longer have complete control over the global value of diamonds.³⁵⁸

In anticipation of a potential global catastrophe, in August 1981 De Beers reduced the sale of diamonds at its August site, its second largest diamond sale of the year, by 95 percent. The cartel then informed dealers that until at least the middle of 1982, they would be receiving fewer new diamonds of size and quality. Furthermore, it requested that these same dealers reduce the number of cut diamonds that they were selling. Even though De Beers still possessed the authority to reduce the number of diamonds it released from its own stockpiles, with the diamond crisis in Israel, by 1982 it was no longer possible for the cartel to maintain complete control over the global supply of diamonds.³⁵⁹

In the United States, the so-called “investment” diamond market collapsed in the 1981 recession. By January 1982, top-grade diamonds in the United States had lost up to two-thirds of their value from 1980. Even as the prices of these “investment diamonds” continued to fall, few Americans were interested in buying them. Revisions to 1981 tax laws also prevented Americans from buying diamonds for tax-exempt retirement plans. Effectively, the investment diamond market in the United States was finished. Worse still, De Beers could not afford to buy back and remove these investment diamonds from the global diamond market. Once again, De Beers would have to rely on American consumers to save the global diamond market.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Epstein, *Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 260-63.

³⁵⁹ Epstein, *Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 263.

³⁶⁰ Epstein, *Rise & Fall of Diamonds*, 266.

Surviving the Storm: N.W. Ayer's De Beers Diamond Engagement Ring Ads in the 1980s

Despite the hardships suffered by both N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited during the 1980s, the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States remained strong. At the beginning of the decade, the average percentage of American couples that married with a diamond engagement ring remained at a steady 75 percent. This steady customer base encouraged N.W. Ayer & Son over the next decade to experiment in expanding segmentation for its De Beers ads, which involved releasing a variety of advertisements targeted to a particular audience rather than one advertisement meant to appeal to all consumers.³⁶¹ Like the essence of the 1980s itself, N.W. Ayer & Son's advertising campaigns for De Beers during this decade represent a mix of values, symbols, and mores that appear at odds with one another while at the same time reflecting and prescribing the elements of the ideal marriage. The result is a decade of advertising that demonstrates Americans long and protracted drag away from the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model.

While previous decades of De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements fully embraced the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model, one series of De Beers ads from 1980 depict a deviation from years past. Rather than depicting images of young women completely dependent on their fiancés for a diamond engagement ring, these advertisements depicted images of more egalitarian couples. One example from this series features a couple standing in the rain inside a greenhouse. The text of the ad states, "To us, the

³⁶¹ David Federman, "50 Years of Saying Forever," *Modern Jeweler*, April 1997, Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 44-45.

perfect place is wherever we are, together. A diamond is forever.”³⁶² Unlike previous De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements where couples are locked in a tight embrace, with the man seemingly protecting the woman, the image in this ad depicts the couple in an open embrace. The fact that neither the man or the woman is trying to shield the other from the rain and instead are staring into each other’s eyes suggests that the couple regards themselves as equals.³⁶³

Another example from this egalitarian couples series titled, “With this diamond we promise to always be friends,” presents the image of a couple kneeling on the floor.³⁶⁴ The man appears to be rendered speechless as he holds his hand over his mouth while the woman gently strokes his head with her right hand. Her left hand appears to be reaching for his right elbow; her diamond engagement ring on display. The text goes on to state that their ring is a promise to “never stop being sensitive to each other’s needs. And to always be there. Sometimes to give little pep talks. Sometimes just to listen. That’s the part of our love we don’t ever want to lose. And this diamond is our promise that we never will.”³⁶⁵ As with “To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together,” the image of the couple kneeling on the same level, with neither appearing to overtly dominate or protect the other conveys the sense that this couple also regards themselves as equals.³⁶⁶ The image combined with the text suggests that this couple not only

³⁶² N.W. Ayer & Son, “To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁶³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

³⁶⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, “With this diamond we promise to always be friends.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, “To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together.,” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

consider themselves as equals in their relationship, they are promising to continue to treat one another as equal partners in their marriage.³⁶⁷

A third example from De Beers's 1980 egalitarian couples series, titled "Our diamond means we now have the best of both worlds. Yours and mine," presents the image of a couple sharing a milkshake.³⁶⁸ The text states, "I still remember the day you made this near-sighted musician see how exciting a game of football could be. And the time you sat through a concert without falling asleep. Being in love means we want to know what each other is all about. And our diamond says we want to explore those two special worlds for a long, long time."³⁶⁹ Like the previous two advertisements in the series, the couple depicted in the ad appears to regard each other as equal partners in the relationship as neither the man or the woman is attempting to crowd or smother the other. The fact that the woman refers to her diamond engagement ring as their diamond further conveys the sense of an equal partnership. This notion is further encapsulated in the image of the couple sharing the same milkshake, just as they will share everything else in life; equally.³⁷⁰

Collectively, the egalitarian couples series present a startling departure from De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements of years past. Together these three ads portray a transition into a more egalitarian style marriage at the beginning of the 1980s where both partners are regarded and treated equally in the relationship.³⁷¹ This depiction of egalitarian

³⁶⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, "With this diamond we promise to always be friends.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

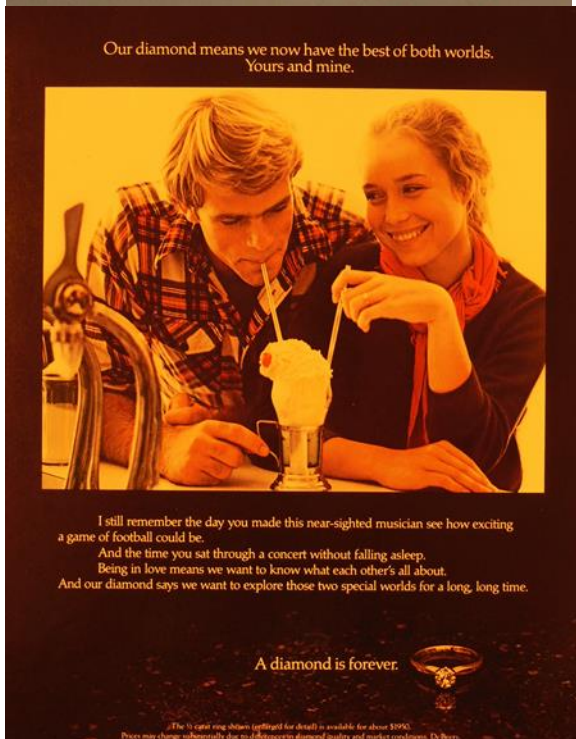
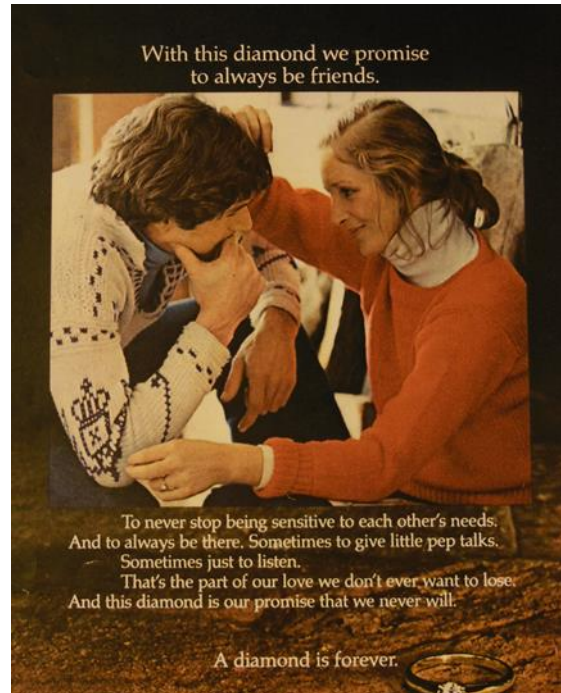
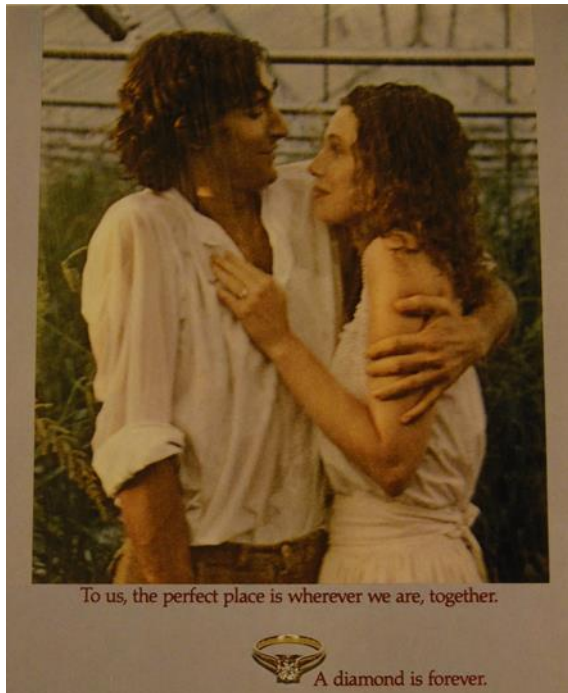
³⁶⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Our diamond means we now have the best of both worlds. Yours and mine.," advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40.

³⁷¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together.," N.W. Ayer & Son, "With this diamond we promise to always be friends.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Our diamond means we now have the best of

couples is reflective of the rising numbers of young men and women during this period that expected both partners to have a career outside of the home.³⁷²



Clockwise from the top left: Figure 5.1, “To us, the perfect place is where we are, together.,” Figure 5.2, “With this diamond we promise to always be friends.,” and Figure 5.3, “Our diamond means we now have the best of both worlds. Yours and mine.,” are all examples of De Beers advertisements that portray couples in egalitarian relationships. N.W. Ayer & Son, “To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “With this diamond we promise to always be friends.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “Our diamond means we now have the best of both worlds. Yours and mine.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

both worlds. Yours and mine.,” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

³⁷² Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 44.

Another series of De Beers ads that alluded to a more egalitarian style marriage also debuted in 1980. Geared towards male business executives, these ads suggest to consumers that buying your wife a diamond is an excellent way to show her how much she means to you. More importantly, these ads stress that the best way to show your wife you care is by buying her a diamond that is a carat or more in size. One example from this series that ran in business magazines such as *Architectural Digest*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Business Week* was titled “Show her she’s the reason it’s never lonely at the top.”³⁷³ The advertisement features the image of a blond woman in a maroon silk dress lounging on a white leather couch and sporting a large diamond ring on her right hand and diamond earrings in her ears. The text claimed that “A carat or more—one in a million. Every diamond is rare. But of all diamonds found, a solitaire of a carat or more is only one in a million. And, like love, becomes more precious with time... Show the world you couldn’t have made it without her.”³⁷⁴ While the image of woman by herself and away from others harkens back to the separated sweethearts ads of World War II, that is where the similarities end. Sitting with her arms crossed looking directly at the reader, the woman in the image conveys the sense that she is not a passive partner in her relationship, rather that she views herself as an equal. This image combined with the text’s assertion that her husband’s success was not possible without her help suggests that this power couple engage in a more egalitarian marriage.³⁷⁵

Another example from this carat or more series, titled, “A full carat or more. Halfway isn’t your style,” features a woman in a lavender silk blouse and cardigan holding a glass of

³⁷³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Show her she’s the reason it’s never been lonely at the top.,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

champagne. The woman is also wearing a diamond engagement ring on her left hand, a diamond solitaire necklace, and diamond earrings.³⁷⁶ The ad's text, identical to "Show her she's the reason it's never lonely at the top," encourages male business executives to show their wives how much they mean to them by buying them diamonds of a carat or more in size.³⁷⁷ Like the previous advertisement in this series, the woman depicted in this ad does not portray the image of a submissive and dependent wife. Her posture, combined with her clothing and glass of champagne, conveys the image of a sophisticated and refined wife, the ideal equal partner to a successful businessman.³⁷⁸

A third example from the carat or more series, titled, "A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions," features a woman in a wine silk camisole and shrug sitting against multi-patterned dark blue pillows. The woman is also wearing a diamond engagement ring on her left hand, a large diamond solitaire necklace around her neck, and diamond studs in her ears.³⁷⁹ The ad's text is identical to the other advertisements in the series; suggesting once again that his wife is at least partly responsible for his success.³⁸⁰ Like all of the other women depicted in this series, the woman in this ad, although sitting, is in no way inactive. Her posture and facial expression almost convey a predatory appearance. This image of an aggressive, powerful

³⁷⁶ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style.," advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her she's the reason it's never been lonely at the top."

³⁷⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

³⁷⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.," advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.; N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her she's the reason it's never been lonely at the top.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style."

woman combined with the text once again suggests that she views herself as an equal with her businessman husband and he agrees with that viewpoint.³⁸¹

Collectively, these three advertisements from the carat or more series demonstrate a slight deviation from the male provider/female dependent consumer model for wealthy American businessmen and their wives at the beginning of the 1980s. The images from these three advertisements suggest that the wives of these wealthy businessmen view themselves as equals with their husbands. The ads' texts insinuate that while these wives are not submissive, they are acting as ideal wives because they nurture and support their husbands; allowing the men in their lives to achieve financial success. Placing each of the women at home and not in an office implies that while the couples viewed themselves as equals, the wives were in fact dependent consumers because they do not work outside of the home. Much like the most valued symbol of your devotion series from the 1950s, the diamond jewelry that the executives gave their wives is both a personal gesture of appreciation and a public display of their financial success as a couple. The multiple pieces of diamond jewelry that each of the wives wore in the ads serves a dual purpose. The jewelry reflected the husbands' success as a provider and suggests that their wives are dependent consumers because each piece of jewelry was supposedly purchased with their husbands' income.³⁸²

³⁸¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

³⁸² N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her she's the reason it's never been lonely at the top.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

Show her she's the reason it's never been lonely at the top.



Your prefer can show you many extraordinary diamond solitaires of a carat or more. This necklace features a 1.67 carat brilliant cut diamond.



A carat or more—one in a million.
 Every diamond is rare.
 But of all diamonds found, a solitaire of a carat or more is only one in a million.
 And, like love, becomes more precious with time.
 A miracle among miracles.
 Born from the earth. Reborn on a woman.
 The extraordinary diamond of a carat or more.
 Show the world you couldn't have made it without her.
 A diamond is forever. De Beers

A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style.



Your prefer can show you many diamond solitaires of a carat or more. This necklace features a 2.65 carat diamond.



A carat or more—one in a million.
 Every diamond is rare.
 But of all diamonds found, a solitaire of a carat or more is only one in a million.
 And, like love, becomes more precious with time.
 A miracle among miracles.
 Born from the earth. Reborn on a woman.
 The extraordinary diamond of a carat or more.
 Show the world you couldn't have made it without her.
 A diamond is forever. De Beers

A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.



Your prefer can show you many diamond solitaires of a carat or more. This necklace features a 1.14 carat diamond.



A carat or more—one in a million.
 Every diamond is rare.
 But of all diamonds found, a solitaire of a carat or more is only one in a million.
 And, like love, becomes more precious with time.
 A miracle among miracles.
 Born from the earth. Reborn on a woman.
 The extraordinary diamond of a carat or more.
 Show the world you couldn't have made it without her.
 A diamond is forever. De Beers

Clockwise from the top left: Figure 5.4, “Show her she’s the reason it’s never lonely at the top.,”” Figure 5.5, “A full carat or more. Halfway isn’t your style.,”” and Figure 5.6, “A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions” are all examples of De Beers advertisements that alluded to an equal partnership between successful business executives and their wives. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Show her she’s the reason it’s never lonely at the top.,”” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “A full carat or more. Halfway isn’t your style.,”” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, “A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.,”” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

As the 1980s progressed, Americans were encouraged to reembrace the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. One series of De Beers diamond engagement advertisements continued to reflect and prescribe the elements of the perfect male provider/female dependent consumer marriage while at the same time advising men on how much to spend on their fiancées' diamond engagement ring. After De Beers sold its surplus of smaller diamonds in the late 1970s, the cartel needed N.W. Ayer to convince the average consumer to purchase larger diamonds once again.³⁸³ The agency's problem was that most men between the ages 18 to 34 expected to purchase a diamond engagement ring that was less than a third of a carat in size for \$600. In order for consumers to purchase larger diamond engagement rings N.W. Ayer and De Beers determined that they needed to spend on average \$1,000 to \$1,200. After extensive testing with consumers, the agency concluded that men needed a concrete spending guide for how much to spend on a diamond engagement ring. Ayer determined that two months' salary was the appropriate baseline to pay for a ring. Once it established new pricing guide, the agency began an advertising campaign that specifically targeted men and encouraged them to spend at least two months' salary on a diamond engagement ring.³⁸⁴ One example from this series from 1980 appeared in issues of male-dominated readership magazines such as *Playboy*, *Omni*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Sports Illustrated*. The advertisement features the picture of a young woman, smiling and biting on one of her pigtail braids which she holds in her left hand with her diamond engagement ring proudly on display. The headline for the ad reads, "I couldn't live without her, so I gave her a big

³⁸³ Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 135-36.

³⁸⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "De Beers Presents a Most Engaging Opportunity," pamphlet, 1981, series 4, box 44, folder 6, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1-4.

incentive to stick around.”³⁸⁵ The text for the ad states, “I wanted to get Beth a diamond engagement ring as big and beautiful as our future together looked. A diamond that told the world that this wonderful woman wasn’t marrying just anyone. She was marrying me.”³⁸⁶ The ad went on to state that two months’ salary was a good example of how much to spend on a diamond engagement ring. Beth’s childlike appearance suggests that she in fact needs to be cared for by her fiancé. This image, combined with the text, infers that by accepting her diamond engagement ring, Beth is accepting a life of financial dependence on her husband. Her desire and consumption of her diamond engagement ring is directly dependent on the amount of money her fiancé earns in two months. The size of Beth’s diamond engagement ring also suggests that her fiancé is financially stable enough to act as a good provider.³⁸⁷

Another example from the two months salary series appeared in 1982 issues of *Playboy* and *Sports Illustrated* and featured a photograph of a beautiful woman in soft focus leaning on her left hand, her diamond engagement ring front and center. The headline for the ad reads, “2 months’ salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future would be like.” The text states, “You can’t look at Jane and tell me she’s not worth 2 months’ salary. I mean just look at her. So I wanted to get her a diamond that said exactly that, ‘Just look.’”³⁸⁸ The ad goes further to state that spending two months’ salary on a diamond engagement ring got Jane’s fiancé the largest diamond that he could afford and as a result, “Now the only thing that other men ask her is,

³⁸⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, “I couldn’t live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around,” advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

³⁸⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, “2 months’ salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future would be like,” advertising tear sheet, 1982, series 4, box 44, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

‘When is the wedding day?’”³⁸⁹ Similar to “I couldn’t live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around,” the image of Jane covering her face in the image, conveys the sense that she needs to be protected, sheltered, and pampered; an ideal candidate for a dependent consumer. The text’s assertion that the size of her diamond engagement ring proves a comfortable future as Mrs. Smith conveys the sense that Mr. Smith is a good male provider. The allusion that the diamond engagement ring serves as a deterrent for other potential suiters also suggests that Mr. Smith is using the diamond engagement ring as payment for Jane’s fidelity.³⁹⁰

A third example from the 2 months’ salary series geared towards men appeared in 1983 issues of *Playboy*, *Omni*, and *Sport* and contained the rather risqué photo of a woman with her hair fanned out behind her, a smirk on her face, and her only item of clothing her diamond engagement ring. The headline for the advertisement reads: “How 2 months’ salary wound up on Julie’s finger.”³⁹¹ Its text states, “Take a look at Julie. No matter where we go, everybody does. So I wanted to get her the biggest diamond I could afford. One that men could see without getting too close.”³⁹² The image of Julie, presumably without clothing, highlights both her sensuality and her physical vulnerability. The language of the ad itself further sexualizes Julie as it implies that men cannot take their eyes off her. The image of Julie’s diamond engagement ring combined with the text’s claim that her fiancé bought the biggest diamond he could afford suggests that her fiancé is financially stable enough to be enough of an attractive provider to Julie to ward off advances from other men. Both Julie’s sensuality and physical vulnerability

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

³⁹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “How 2 months’ salary wound up on Julie’s finger.,” advertising tear sheet, 1983, series 4, box 44, folder 9, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁹² Ibid.

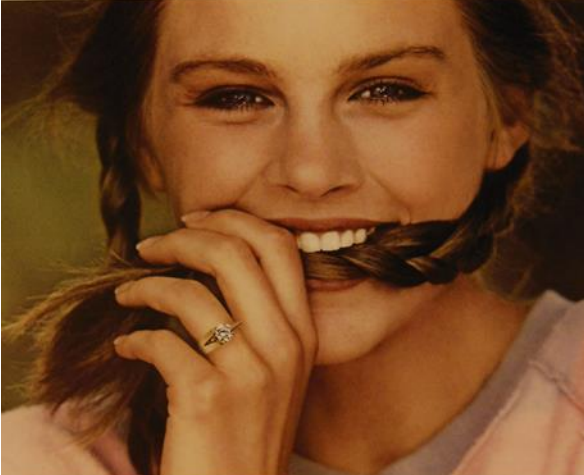
convey the sense that she is an attractive dependent consumer whose fidelity is once again secured through her consumption of her diamond engagement ring.³⁹³

Collectively these diamond engagement ring advertisements set a new standard for how much American men should expect to spend on a diamond engagement ring. The images of Beth, Jane, and Julie as vulnerable females in need of male support suggests that Americans in the early 1980s still viewed the male provider/female dependent consumer model as a viable, even as the ideal, form of marriage in the United States. As the 2 months' salary series is targeted towards men, the implications made in these ads suggest to American men that the biggest diamond engagement ring one can afford will secure you the woman of your dreams.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

³⁹⁴ N.W. Ayer & Son, "I couldn't live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "2 months' salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future would be like.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "How 2 months' salary wound up on Julie's finger.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

"I couldn't live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around."



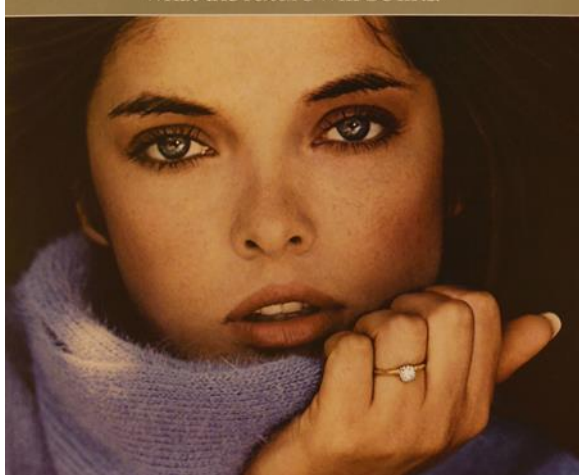
I wanted to get Beth a diamond engagement ring as big and beautiful as our future together looked. A diamond that told the world that this wonderful woman wasn't marrying just anyone. She was marrying me. Now I'd found out that today a good guideline for getting the most beautiful diamond you can afford is to spend about 2 months' salary. So 2 months it was. And as proud of her as I am, she's even prouder of that ring.

1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat
\$600	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,000
\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$4,000

Prices shown are based on retail quotations and may vary. Send for the booklet "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds," just mail \$1.00 to Diamond Information Center, Dept. DPS, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10105.

A diamond is forever. De Beers

"2 months' salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future will be like."



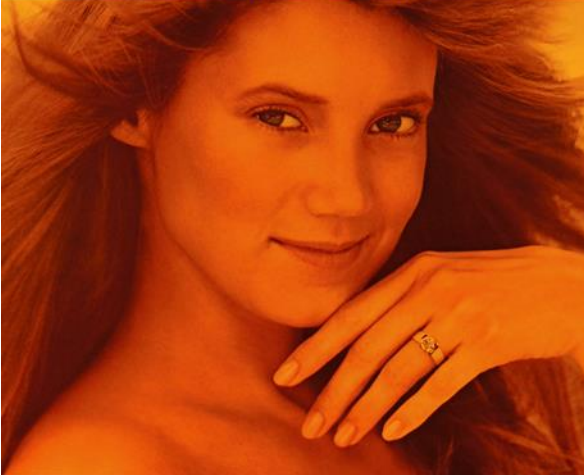
You can't look at Jane and tell me she's not worth 2 months' salary. I mean just look at her. So I wanted to get her a diamond engagement ring that said exactly that. Just look: I'd found out that a good spending guideline today is about 2 months' salary. That got me the biggest and best diamond I could afford, without breaking my budget. Now the only thing that other men ask her is, "When's the wedding day?"

1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat
\$600	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,000
\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$4,000

Prices shown are based on retail quotations and may vary. Send for the booklet "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds," just mail \$1.00 to Diamond Information Center, Dept. DPS, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10105.

A diamond is forever. De Beers

"How 2 months' salary wound up on Julie's finger."



Take a look at Julie. No matter where we go, everyone does. So I wanted to get her the biggest diamond I could afford. One that other men could see without getting too close. Okay, now take a close look at the diamond. Sure, it's big, but it's also beautiful. Just like Julie. Now I'm not rich or anything. But I found out that 2 months' salary is about what a really nice diamond costs nowadays. It comes down to a question of priorities. And what's more important than the woman you love?

1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat	1/2 carat
\$600	\$800	\$1,000	\$1,000
\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$4,000

Prices shown cover diamonds of medium color and clarity ranges based on retail quotations which may vary. Send for the booklet "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds," just mail \$1 to Diamond Information Center, Dept. DPS, Box 1344, N.Y., N.Y. 10101-1344.

A diamond is forever. De Beers

Clockwise from top left: Figure 5.7, "I couldn't live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around.;" Figure 5.8, "2 month's salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future would be like.;" and Figure 5.9, "How 2 month's salary wound up on Julie's finger.;" all demonstrate the persistence of the male provider/female dependent consumer model in the 1980s. N.W. Ayer & Son, "I couldn't live without her, so I gave her a big incentive to stick around.;" advertising tear sheet, 1980, series 4, box 44, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, "2 months' salary showed the future Mrs. Smith what the future would be like.;" advertising tear sheet, 1982, series 4, box 44, folder 8, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, "How 2 months' salary wound up on Julie's finger,;" advertising tear sheet, 1983, series 4, box 44, folder 9, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

In 1986, N.W. Ayer & Son generated a series of national advertisements for De Beers that featured images of couples embracing one another in various settings; possibly moments after the couple became engaged. Like earlier De Beers advertisements from the 1980s directed towards men, these advertisements appeared to reflect and prescribe elements of the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. The first example from this series depicted a couple sitting on a boulder in a forest looking down at the woman's left hand; presumably at her diamond engagement ring. The heading of the ad reads, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice."³⁹⁵ The text states, "Let the world know the love you share will last forever. Give her a fine quality diamond as radiant as she is...Afterall, this is the one thing that will symbolize your love every day of your lives. A diamond is forever."³⁹⁶

The text of the De Beers ad also explains that two months' salary was the appropriate amount to money to spend on a diamond engagement ring. The byline for the ad concluded with the phrase, "Is two months' salary too much to spend on something that lasts forever?"³⁹⁷ The image of the man's arms and legs enveloping the women in front of him conveys the sense that he is protecting her and acting as a good provider. The woman reclining into his embrace suggests that she accepts his role as her protector and her dependence on him for safety and security. This image combined with the text proposes that the couple is both literally and figuratively leaning into their roles as a male provider and a female dependent consumer.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.," advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

A second example from the 1986 recently engaged couples series features a couple looking out over a veranda. The woman is perched on the railing, leaning back into her fiancé with her hands reaching back to hold his shoulders. The man stands directly behind her with his hand around her waist; anchoring her to him. The header for the advertisement reads, “Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.”³⁹⁹ The text of the ad asserts that, “You always want her to have the best of everything. Her diamond engagement ring is a fitting place to begin. So let it be a diamond of the highest quality.”⁴⁰⁰ Just like the ad featuring the couple sitting on a boulder, the text also asserts that one should spend about two months’ salary on a diamond engagement ring. And like the couple sitting on the boulder, this advertisement’s byline asked consumers, “Is 2 months’ salary too much to spend on something that lasts forever?”⁴⁰¹ The image of the woman perched precariously on the rail of the veranda with only the strength of her fiancé keeping her from falling conveys the sense that she is dependent on him to keep her safe from danger. This allusion to female vulnerability and male physical strength also indicates their suitability to the roles of female dependent consumer and male provider. The text combined with the image suggests that the physical symbolism of this moment will transfer into their married life, as her fiancé will strive to provide her with the best of everything.⁴⁰²

A third example of Ayer’s 1986 De Beers campaign featuring recently engaged couples depicted a couple standing at the bottom of a grand staircase. The woman leans her head on the man’s left shoulder while the couple both look down at her left. The header for the advertisement

³⁹⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.” advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

declared, “Give her a diamond to make the moment she’s been waiting for worth the wait.”⁴⁰³

The text proclaims that, “It’s the moment she’s waited a lifetime for. Mark it with a fine quality diamond as beautiful was the way she makes you feel.”⁴⁰⁴ Just as with previous examples from this advertisement series, the ad asserts that one should spend roughly two months’ salary on an engagement ring stating once again that, “After all, this is the one thing that will symbolize your love every day of your lives. A diamond is forever.”⁴⁰⁵ Like the other two images in this series, the image of the woman leaning on her fiancé conveys the sense that she is relying on him for comfort and security. This image combined with the text suggests that not only is the woman willing to become a dependent consumer, she has been patiently waiting for the moment to arrive. Like the other ads in this series, by referring to the two months’ salary as a guide for buying a diamond engagement ring, the ad is also providing the recipe for men to turn themselves into the ideal male provider for their prospective fiancé.⁴⁰⁶

Examined together, the images of the couples depicted in the recently engaged couple series portray a collection of images of couples acting out in roles compatible with the male provider/female consumer marriage model from the first moment of their betrothal. Their recommendation of using two months’ salary as a guideline for purchasing their fiancée’s diamond engagement ring provided men viewing these advertisements with an effective spending guide to appear as a good male provider. Furthermore, the combined text of these three advertisements’ assertion that their diamond engagement rings symbolized their love; cemented

⁴⁰³ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Give her a diamond to make the moment she’s been waiting for worth the wait.,” advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

the idea to consumers that the diamond engagement ring remained the symbol of love and commitment in American culture.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ N.W. Ayer & Son, “Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.,” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.,” N.W. Ayer & Son, “Give her a diamond to make the moment she’s been waiting for worth the wait.,” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

Your promise makes her world stand still.
Her diamond should make the world take notice.



Let the world know the love you share will last forever. Give her a fine quality diamond as radiant as she is. Today, that means spending about 2 months' salary.


So take your time. See a jeweler. Learn about the 4C's that determine a diamond's quality. Cut, color, clarity and carat-weight. And send for our booklet, "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds." Just mail \$1.25 to DIC, Dept. DER-SN,

Box 1344, NY, NY 10101-1344.
After all, this is the one thing that will symbolize your love every day of your lives.
A diamond is forever.



Is 2 months' salary too much to spend on something that lasts forever?


Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.



You always want her to have the best of everything. Her diamond engagement ring is a fitting place to begin. So let it be a diamond of the highest quality. Today, that means spending about 2 months' salary.


So take your time. See a jeweler. Learn about the 4C's that determine a diamond's quality. Cut, color, clarity and carat-weight. And send for our booklet, "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds." Just mail \$1.25 to DIC, Dept. DER-SN, Box 1344, NY, NY 10101-1344.

After all, this is the one thing that will symbolize your love every day of your lives.
A diamond is forever.



Is 2 months' salary too much to spend for something that lasts forever?


Give her a diamond to make the moment she's been waiting for worth the wait.



It's the moment she's waited a lifetime for. Mark it with a fine quality diamond as beautiful as the way she makes you feel. Today, that means spending about 2 months' salary.

So take your time. See a jeweler. Learn about the 4C's that determine a diamond's quality. Cut, color, clarity and carat-weight. And send for our booklet, "Everything You'd Love to Know... About Diamonds." Just mail \$1.25 to DIC, Dept. DER-SN, Box 1344, NY, NY 10101-1344.

After all, this is the one thing that will symbolize your love every day of your lives.
A diamond is forever.



Is 2 months' salary too much to spend on something that lasts forever?

Clockwise from top left: Figure 5.10, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.;" Figure 5.11, "Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.;" and Figure 5.12, "Give her a diamond to make the moment she's been waiting for worth the wait.;" each portray couples engaged in a loving embrace while at the same time embracing the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.," advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.," advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; N.W. Ayer & Son, "Give her a diamond to make the moment she's been waiting for worth the wait.," advertising tear sheet, 1986, series 4, box 45, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Taken as a whole, De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements from the 1980s presented a confusing mix of newer egalitarian sentiments and the more familiar male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model of years past. This collection of advertisements suggests that American consumers at the beginning of the decade were willing to move away from the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model and embrace a more egalitarian marriage. As the decade progressed, the De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements reflect a return to the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. This return to the classic imagery of the male provider/female dependent consumer model reveal 1980s Americans' inability to completely break with the past.⁴⁰⁸ Just as couples in the 1960s and 1970s believed that their relationships were different from the marriages of their parents' generation, couples in the 1980s believed that they were progressive in their views on marriage. In reality, 1980s couples fell back into old perceptions of gender roles when the stress of balancing work and family life became too much to handle. While Americans accepted the need for both spouses to work outside of the home, some longed for the simplicity and certainty offered by images of the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model.⁴⁰⁹ The prevalence male provider/female dependent consumer model in 1980s De Beers ads suggests that

⁴⁰⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son, "To us, the perfect place is wherever we are, together.," N.W. Ayer & Son, "With this diamond we promise to always be friends.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Our diamond means we now have the best of both worlds. Yours and mine.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her she's the reason it's never been lonely at the top.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A full carat or more. Halfway isn't your style.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "A carat or more. Because you were never very good at fractions.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Give her a diamond to make the moment she's been waiting for worth the wait.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Your promise makes her world stand still. Her diamond should make the world take notice.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Show her the kind of forever you want to give her.;" N.W. Ayer & Son, "Give her a diamond to make the moment she's been waiting for worth the wait.;" Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

⁴⁰⁹ Amato and Booth, "Changes in Gender Role Attitudes and Perceived Marriage Quality," 58, 64; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes Towards Family Issues in the United States," 1014-15.

while the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model weakened during the decade, it remained desirable to many American consumers.

Sales figures provided to N.W. Ayer & Son over the course of the 1980s suggest that the diamond engagement ring tradition remained strong with American consumers throughout the decade. The Diamond Information Center's June 1982 presentation to the U.S. Carat Club reported that of the 2.3 million weddings in 1981, 69 percent of brides received a diamond engagement ring. It also reported that the price of diamond engagement rings purchased in the United States rose to \$709 per ring; nearly double the amount spent in 1977. The Diamond Information Center also reported that 65 percent of women between the ages of 18 to 24 in 1982 believed that the diamond engagement tradition should be adhered to compared to only 33 percent of brides in 1976.⁴¹⁰ A 1988 report for N.W. Ayer & Son conducted by National Family Opinion Inc. determined that 81 percent of first-time brides received a diamond engagement ring; an 8 percent increase since 1980. National Family Opinion Inc. also reported that the average price of a diamond engagement ring was \$1,352; a 23 percent increase from the year before. These promising sales figures insinuated to both N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers that the next decade would produce even higher sales of diamond engagement rings.⁴¹¹

For N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, the 1980s was a turbulent era of change and loss. Despite the setbacks both companies experienced, the diamond engagement ring tradition remained relevant with American consumers throughout the decade. But the turbulence of the 1980s also marked the beginning of the end of the relationship between

⁴¹⁰ Diamond Information Center, "Presentation to the U.S. Carat Club," 1982, Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 2-4, 6.

⁴¹¹ N.W. Ayer & Son, "1988 Red Book: The Market for Diamond Jewelry United States," 1988, Jeffery Collection of Diamond Promotional Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 97-98, 105.

N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. Over the next few years these two companies engaged in a long and protracted breakup that effectively ended the fifty-seven-year relationship that had cemented the diamond engagement ring tradition in American culture.

Chapter 6: This Could Be the End of the Line (1990-2018)

In 1999 *Advertising Age* declared “a diamond is forever” the greatest slogan in American advertising history.⁴¹² This moment should have been a moment of crowning achievement for N.W. Ayer & Son’s work for its long-time client, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. After all, the article clearly demonstrated the lasting effect that Ayer’s diamond engagement ring advertisements had on American consumers. Because of its work, the diamond engagement ring had become the symbol of love and commitment in American culture. But this public accolade in some ways rang hollow, as by that time De Beers was no longer a client of N.W. Ayer & Son. The cartel in fact had cut ties with the ad agency three years earlier after more than fifty-seven-years of successful business partnership. As N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited began moving away from each other in the 1990s, they would experience considerable threats to their respective companies and, in the case of one, the future meant the end of their company as they knew it.

While N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers marched toward the new millennium, the institution of marriage within the United States was experiencing its own changes. Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, religious leaders, conservative organizations, and politicians fought to preserve what they believed to be “traditional” marriage. Same-sex marriages advocates challenged the right of the U.S. government to determine who could marry

⁴¹² *Advertising Age*, “Ad Age Advertising Century: Top 10 Slogans,” *Advertising Age*, March 29, 1999, <https://adage.com/article/special-report-the-advertising-century/ad-age-advertising-century-top-10-slogans/140156/>.

whom. As more of the United States' Millennial generation gets older, they struggle to move away from gendered notions of marriage to embrace more egalitarian marriages. But even for this new generation of Americans, nostalgia for the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model looms in the background. In order to appeal to a new generation of engaged couples, De Beers and its associates commissioned a new advertising campaign that celebrates ideals of egalitarian marriage and shapes it to fit the diamond engagement ring tradition. Despite new and continuing debates about marriage, the diamond engagement ring continues to serve as the symbol of love and commitment for American couples.

The Divorce: N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers Split

For over fifty years N.W. Ayer & Son created advertisements for the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited that engrained the diamond engagement ring in American culture as the symbol of love and commitment for couples about to marry. In doing so Ayer helped save De Beers from floundering sales numbers during the Great Depression that threatened to completely collapse the industry. Ayer's work for De Beers in the next decades only increased the demand for diamond engagement rings in the United States. Its almost unprecedented success should have guaranteed that Ayer would continue to hold the De Beers account indefinitely, but the long-term relationship between the two companies did not last.

In August 1995, rumors spread that De Beers was looking to leave Ayer and consolidate all its advertising within the agency that handled its international advertising campaigns, J. Walter Thompson. On 18 August 1995, Derek Palmer, the regional director in the Americas for De Beers issued a public statement that he was committed to maintaining the relationship between De Beers and N.W. Ayer & Son. He further stated that De Beers had profited from

having Ayer manage its advertising in the United States while J. Walter Thompson managed its advertising in other parts of the globe. Palmer assured the press that there was no truth to the rumor that De Beers was considering leaving N.W. Ayer & Son. And yet, a little over a month later, on 4 September 1995, Stephen Lussier, the consumer marketing director for De Beers, announced that the cartel was in fact leaving the agency. According to Lussier, De Beers had actually been taking steps to transition its business from Ayer since 1992. Effective 1 January 1996, De Beers would take its estimated \$47 million-a-year U.S. advertising account and give it to J. Walter Thompson. Lussier further stated that the reason why De Beers was leaving Ayer was simply because De Beers wanted all of its advertising to be consolidated into one company.⁴¹³ J. Walter Thompson already handled the majority of De Beers's advertising abroad since the 1960s and was awarded control of all of De Beers' advertising in East Asia several years prior, so it seemed only natural that the cartel would choose JWT to handle all of its future advertising needs.⁴¹⁴

To add salt to the wound, while De Beers planned to abandon N.W. Ayer & Son, the cartel fully intended to keep using the tagline that Ayer had created for its U.S. advertisements. "A diamond is forever" would remain with De Beers.⁴¹⁵ De Beers's decision to leave Ayer not only hurt the agency financially, it took away the prestige of having one of the largest and longest ongoing advertising accounts in the United States. At least twenty Ayer employees at the time were exclusively devoted to working on the De Beers account and many other agency staffers worked on projects as needed. The twenty Ayer employees assigned to the De Beers account were experts in the jewelry trade and were not well suited to other types of accounts at

⁴¹³ Jennifer Comiteau, "De Beers leaves Ayer, consolidates at JWT," *Adweek*, September 4, 1995, 34.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the agency. Ayer had to reassign these employees or risk losing them to the competition, which is precisely what happened.⁴¹⁶

Shortly after De Beers announced that it was awarding all of its U.S. advertising work to J. Walter Thompson, both the cartel and JWT approached Ayer staffers that worked on the De Beers account to come and work for the rival agency. One of the Ayer employees that took JWT and De Beers up on their offer was Joan Parker, the head of Ayer's Diamond Information Center and client public relations. Parker's departure meant that all of the information and connections she had formed were now in the hands of JWT. American jewelers looking for advice on how to promote diamond engagement rings in their stores would now have to look to JWT for help. In an attempt to prevent further defections, Ayer reportedly had a meeting with all of its De Beers staff members to discuss their future with the agency. Rather than assuring the employees that they would continue to have a job at Ayer, the agency executive in charge of the meeting allegedly chose that precise moment to explain to them that the "non-compete" clauses in their contracts prevented them from going and working for other rival agencies.

A heated debate ensued as the agency argued that it was not fair to its other clients, such as General Motors and Proctor & Gamble, to have their employees leave and work for agencies that had accounts with major competitors. The Ayer staffers from the De Beers account argued that they were exempt from this clause as their expertise with the agency was in jewelry sales and promotion, something none of Ayer's other clients invested in. The bottom line was that Ayer did not want to sustain any additional losses to J. Walter Thompson. This meeting with De

⁴¹⁶ Mark Gleason and Pat Sloan, "Up in the Ayer; Agency Looks to New Creative Director in De Beers Aftermath," *Advertising Age*, September 11, 1995, 1.

Beers account staff did nothing to ensure that they remained with the agency.⁴¹⁷ In the end De Beers emerged unscathed from the rupture of its fifty-seven-year collaboration with Ayer. Ayer did not. The agency lost a longtime client, over \$40 million a year in revenue, and some of its most valuable employees.

End of an Era: N.W. Ayer Closes its Doors

As detailed in chapter five, the 1980s were not kind to N.W. Ayer & Son and the outlook for the agency in the next decade looked bleak. In 1990 Ayer remained as one of the top twenty advertising agencies operating in the United States, but the agency's overall earnings declined over the following few years. Lower earnings combined with frequent management turnover, expensive offices and executive compensation deals, and further client defections left N.W. Ayer & Son in a weakened state.⁴¹⁸ On 26 March 1993, Jerry Siano, a former creative director and the acting CEO of N.W. Ayer & Son, agreed to a \$35 million payment by the South Korean media mogul W.Y. Choi and his partner Richard Humphries for a major stake in the agency. Choi and Humphries believed that their payment and subsequent partnership with Ayer guaranteed them eventual total ownership of the agency.⁴¹⁹ This new infusion of cash did nothing to solve Ayer's problems, as over the next two years Humphries purged the agency of many of its senior executives and hired and replaced two CEOs in as many years. Despite all of the major changes made by Humphries, N.W. Ayer & Son failed to recover.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ Mark Gleason and Pat Sloan, "Ayer won't let De Beers Staff go to JWT," *Advertising Age*, October 2, 1995, 4.

⁴¹⁸ AdAge, "N.W. Ayer & Son (N.W. Ayer & Partners)."

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.; Stuart Elliot, "The Media Business: ADVERTISING -- ADDENDA; Questions Remain On Ayer Deal," *New York Times*, March 29, 1993, D00010.

⁴²⁰ AdAge, "N.W. Ayer & Son (N.W. Ayer & Partners)."

After years of struggle, the loss of De Beers in 1996 hit N.W. Ayer & Son hard. After De Beers left the agency for J. Walter Thompson it failed to attract any other high-profile clients to regenerate the revenue it had lost. That same year Ayer had appointed its first and only female CEO, Mary Lou Quinlan. In 1996 N.W. Ayer & Son and another struggling ad agency, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles, merged to form the MacManus Group. Renamed N.W. Ayer & Partners, the agency was finally able to expand its international operations and begin to compete in a global advertising market. Over the next several years N.W. Ayer & Partners was able to successfully acquire several new, high-profile clients, one of which was Continental Airlines, who hired Ayer to manage all its advertising worldwide. Although Ayer was finally successful in drawing in new clients, the agency could not be saved. In 1999 the MacManus Group partnered with another advertising group, Leo Group of Chicago, Illinois, and Dentsu of Tokyo, Japan to form Bcom3. In 2002, Bcom3 dissolved N.W. Ayer & Partners into another of its advertising agency groups, Kaplan Thaler Group. After over one hundred and thirty-three years of creating advertisements in the United States, N. W. Ayer & Son was officially out of the advertising business.⁴²¹

Just as N.W. Ayer & Son was closing its doors for good, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited was faced with a humanitarian and public relations crisis that threatened to damage public opinion on diamond consumption. De Beers and the rest of the diamond industry's response to that crisis would change the way that the industry operated worldwide forever. That crisis was the issue of conflict diamonds in Angola.

⁴²¹ Advertising Age, "N.W. Ayer & Son (N.W. Ayer & Partners)."

Blood Diamonds

On 10 March 2000, Robert Fowler, the Chairman of the United Nations Security Council Committee assigned to investigate the enforcement of U.N. Resolution 864, released a report concerning the state of the civil war in the African nation of Angola. A U.N. panel of experts assigned to work under the committee was tasked with investigating violations of U.N. Security Council Sanctions against the União Nacional Para a Independência Total de Angola or UNITA. The sanctions specifically prohibited the sale of arms and military equipment to UNITA. In addition, Resolution 864 prohibited the provision of petroleum products to UNITA, required the seizure of UNITA's bank accounts and other known financial assets, mandated the closing of all UNITA representative offices abroad, and placed travel restrictions on senior UNITA officials and adult members of their immediate families. Lastly, Resolution 864 prohibited the purchase of diamonds mined in areas controlled by UNITA.

What became known as the Fowler Report, provided damning evidence that UNITA used illegal diamond sales between 1993 and 1994 to arm its soldiers. It stated that during this period a South African arms dealer named Ronnie De Decker acquired the majority of UNITA's arms and military equipment. UNITA paid De Decker with parcels of diamonds valued at roughly four to five million dollars in U.S. currency. The diamonds were then assessed for their value by Ronnie's brother Joe De Decker, a former De Beers site holder and owner of De Decker Diamonds in South Africa. From 1994 to 1997 UNITA acquired weapons from the government of Zaire under President Mobutu Sese Seko. Once again, UNITA used diamonds to make some of its payments for arms.⁴²²

⁴²² United Nations, "Letter dated 2000/03/10 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Established pursuant to Resolution 864 (1993) concerning the Situation In Angola addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations, March 10, 2000,

The Fowler Report discussed at length how UNITA was able to acquire diamonds to pay for illegal arms. Before the United Nations imposed sanctions on the sale of Angolan diamonds, UNITA auctioned mining permits to foreign companies who would then exploit the mines within its territory. In the wake of U.N. imposed sanctions, UNITA acquired the diamonds by exploiting the diggers that mined for the diamonds in UNITA-controlled territory by requiring them to pay a tax in rough diamonds or cash. UNITA also allowed various diamond buyers to operate for a commission within some of the areas under its control.⁴²³

U.N. officials also uncovered just how easily the diamonds sold by UNITA were then traded in the world's larger diamonds markets, especially Antwerp, Belgium. The officials discovered that Antwerp was a hotbed for selling illegally procured Angolan diamonds. While the market was supposedly regulated by the High Diamond Council, diamond dealers were not required to register with or adhere to its rules or regulations, allowing less scrupulous diamond dealers to operate freely. The Fowler Report also mentioned that De Beers had stopped purchasing diamonds from Angola with the exception of diamonds that the cartel was contractually obligated to purchase. U.N. officials speculated that De Beers's withdrawal from the Angolan diamond trade may have made it more difficult for UNITA to find buyers for its diamonds.⁴²⁴

In reaction to the findings of the Fowler Report, the United Nations passed Resolution 1295, which further reaffirmed previous sanctions made against UNITA. Resolution 1295 also

<http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&menu=search&aspect=subtab124&npp=50&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=bib&ri=&matchopt=0%7C0&index=.TW&term=Security+Council+Committee+established+pursuant+to+resolution+864+%281993%29+concerning+the+situation+in+Angola&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&aspect=subtab124&ind> (accessed November 7, 2018), 1, 6, 10-11.

⁴²³ Ibid., 27.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 28, 32.

proposed further action to prevent the trade of Angolan diamonds on the world diamond market. It proposed that diamond trading countries impose severe penalties for possession of diamonds from countries under sanction. This push for further regulation left the door open for the diamond industry to become actively involved in preventing the sale of conflict diamonds.⁴²⁵

In a mad dash to save its public image, De Beers and the rest of the diamond industry forced itself to create a regulatory system that would make it harder to sell diamonds from sanctioned areas of the globe. Implemented in 2003, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is a certification system that requires any country that exports diamonds to seal them in tamperproof containers and furnish them with documentation that certifies that the diamonds were not mined in areas where diamonds are used as currency to fuel global conflict.⁴²⁶ The Kimberley Process also acts as a trade agreement between participating companies and countries to verify that they are only importing and exporting conflict-free diamonds. While the Kimberley Process is largely a self-regulatory scheme for the diamond industry, it does have a checks and balances system in place with its Civil Society Coalition. The Civil Society Coalition acts as an observer of the participants of the Kimberley Process to ensure they are in fact acting in accordance with the Kimberley Process's rules and regulations.⁴²⁷ Although De Beers and other members of the diamond industry were able to produce a regulatory process that helped to reduce the number of conflict diamonds sold across the globe, the cartel was also devising a scheme that would allow it to finally place a foothold in the U.S. diamond market.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1295," United Nations Security Council, April 10, 2000, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1295> (accessed November 7, 2018).

⁴²⁶ Zoellner, *The Heartless Stone*, 169.

⁴²⁷ Kimberley Process, "What is the Kimberley Process?," Kimberley Process, <https://www.kimberleyprocess.com/en/what-kp> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴²⁸ While public awareness of conflict diamonds has led to a rise of "ethically sourced" diamond retailers, the United States remains the largest consumer of gem diamonds. The issue of conflict diamonds has done nothing to significantly slow diamond engagement ring sales in the U.S.

Burying the Hatchet: De Beers is Allowed to Retail in the United States

In 1999, De Beers retained the services of the U.S. management consultant company, Bain & Co. to assist the cartel with advice on how best to move the forward in the next century. Bain & Co. recommended that De Beers move away from its role as the enforcer of the diamond industry and instead towards the goal of increasing De Beers's cache as a brand. Ultimately, the goal was to work towards retailing its products directly in the United States, as the United States accounted for 50 percent of all global jewelry retail sales. Anti-trust laws up to that point had, however, prevented De Beers from selling its diamonds directly in the United States.⁴²⁹

In 1994 the U.S. Justice Department filed criminal charges against De Beers and General Electric, accusing the two companies of price-fixing. They cited evidence discovered after a three-year long investigation into the companies. De Beers and G.E. were accused of illegally exchanging price information through an intermediary to fix the price on industrial diamonds. At the time the charges were filed, the U.S. Justice Department was unable to prosecute De Beers because all its operations were based overseas and therefore out of U.S. jurisdiction. After a five-week trial, the judge presiding over the case threw out the charges against General Electric, concluding that there was simply not enough evidence against the company to prove a price-fixing scheme had taken place. At the time the lawyers representing De Beers discouraged the cartel from reaching a settlement to the case. Nearly ten years later, in July 2004, De Beers agreed to plead guilty to criminal price fixing and pay a fine of up to \$10 million. In exchange, the United States government allowed De Beers to officially retail its products within the U.S.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ John R. Wilke, "De Beers is in Talks to Settle Price-Fixing Charge; Ending the Diamond Case Could Finally Give Cartel a Retail Presence in U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 2004, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB107758450998137286> (accessed October 31, 2018).

⁴³⁰ Stephen Labaton, "De Beers Agrees to Guilty Plea to Re-enter the U.S. Market," *New York Times*, July 10, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/10/business/de-beers-agrees-to-guilty-plea-to-re-enter-the-us->

The cartel wasted no time in realizing its dream of legally retailing its diamonds in the United States. The very next year it officially opened its first De Beers Jewelry Store in New York City.⁴³¹

After the successfully opening of its first retail store in the United States in 2011 De Beers brought its luxury diamond brand, Forevermark, into the U.S.⁴³² According to De Beers, each Forevermark diamond is one of the top 1 percent of gem-quality stones available worldwide. Each of the stones selected, once they are cut and polished, are laser-inscribed with the Forevermark logo and an individual serial number that is invisible to the naked eye. The Forevermark logo and serial number are meant to act as a guarantee to the consumer that their diamond is one of the rarest in the world and truly one of a kind.⁴³³ Forevermark also utilizes De Beers' "a diamond is forever" slogan. By pairing the De Beers slogan with perceptions of exclusivity and rarity promised by the Forevermark brand, consumers are led to believe that Forevermark diamonds are representative of a love that is both eternal and uniquely their own.⁴³⁴

While De Beers worked to redevelop itself into a luxury brand, its target audience, American consumers, were busy debating and redefining marriage within the United States. Debates over the definition of marriage also evoked questions as to whether or not the intuition was in a state of decline.

market.html; Margaret Webb Pressler, "De Beers Pleads to Price-Fixing," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A48041-2004Jul13.html> (accessed October 31, 2018).

⁴³¹ De Beers Jewellers, "Our Story," De Beers Jewellers, <https://www.debeers.com/the-world-of-de-beers/about-de-beers/story> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴³² De Beers Group, "Forevermark Fact Sheet," De Beers Group, <https://www.debeersgroup.com/media/company-news/2017/forevermark-passes-2000-global-retail-doors> (accessed November 1, 2018).

⁴³³ Forevermark, "The Forevermark Journey," Forevermark, <https://www.forevermark.com/en-us/our-diamonds/the-forevermark-journey/5inscription/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴³⁴ Forevermark, "The Power of 'A Diamond is Forever,'" Forevermark, <https://www.forevermark.com/en-us/now-forever/a-diamond-is-forever/the-power-of-a-diamond-is-forever/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

A Time for Change: The Fight for Marriage Equality

By the last decade of the twentieth century, the male provider/female dependent consumer model that had proved so pervasive in their definition of marriage and family life was dwindling away. The decline of the male provider/female dependent consumer model does not mean, however, that the push for Americans to embrace “traditional” marriage went away. In the 1990s and into the next millennium, conservatives in the U.S. government became heavily invested in promoting and preserving heterosexual marriage. Conservative politicians’ dogged defense of “traditional” marriage stemmed from a variety of factors. One factor contributing to conservatives’ push for more traditional marriages was the rise in the number of couples that chose to cohabitate before marriage or not marry at all. Another factor was the growing public concern with the impact of divorce on the family. The final and perhaps most significant factor was the rise of gay rights advocates petitioning for marriage equality for all Americans.

While marriage rates in the United States continued to decline in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, divorce rates during that same period also decreased.⁴³⁵ Between 2000 and 2016, the marriage rate in the United States dropped from 8.2 per 1,000 to 6.9 per 1,000 of the total population. During that same period, divorce rates went from 4.0 per 1,000 in 2000 to 3.2 per 1,000 in 2016. In other words the number of marriages in the United States that ended in divorce went from nearly 49 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2016, a 6 percent decrease.⁴³⁶

While the United States’ marriage and divorce rates declined since 1990, cohabitation had risen over the same period. By the early 1990s more than half of first marriages within the United

⁴³⁵ May, *Homeward Bound*, 6-7.

⁴³⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Provisional Number of Marriages and Marriage Rate: United States, 2000-2016,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm> (accessed November 9, 2018).

States began as a cohabitating relationship.⁴³⁷ This trend of cohabitation before marriage continued into the twenty-first century as 64 percent of America's twenty and thirty somethings today believe that cohabitating before marriage may help prevent them from getting divorced.⁴³⁸

While divorce rates had declined from the 1980s, American concern over couples choosing divorce rather than staying together bled into the 1990s and into the early 2000s. In 1994, conservative marriage advocate Michael J. McManus, gathered religious leaders from twelve Christian denominations to Kentucky to sign a pledge to strengthen marriage. Two years later he and his wife Harriet established Marriage Savers, a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing church-based community marriage policies, premarital counselling, and marriage mentorship programs. By 2000 McManus and his supporters called on conservative Christian activists to begin looking to the U.S. government for help establishing bigger programs to save marriages.⁴³⁹

One of the more blatant indicators of religious conservatives' influence on public policy regarding marriage in the United States was the establishment of so-called "covenant marriages." First passed by the state of Louisiana in 1997, covenant marriage bills allowed couples marrying in that state the option to volunteer to enter into a marriage contract that forfeited their right to seek a no-fault divorce in the future. All couples who decided to enter into a covenant marriage were required to go through an unspecified period of premarital counseling with either a member of the clergy or a marriage counselor. Covenant marriage couples in Louisiana also vowed to

⁴³⁷ Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 98-99.

⁴³⁸ Shana Lebowitz, "9 Ways Millennials are Approaching Marriage Differently from Their Parents," *Business Insider*, November 19, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-millennials-gen-x-and-baby-boomers-approach-marriage-2017-11> (accessed October 31, 2018).

⁴³⁹ Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1, 236-39.

seek marriage counseling if their relationships weakened. Covenant couples that did choose to divorce could only do so after a two-year waiting period unless one or both spouses committed adultery, abandoned their spouse, was convicted of a felony, separated from their spouse for a considerable length of time, or abused their spouse. Covenant marriage was not popular with Louisiana couples, as less than 2 percent of couples from the state opted to enter into a covenant marriage.⁴⁴⁰

In 2001 the state of Arkansas also introduced the covenant marriage option for its residents. On Valentine's Day in 2005, conservative Republican Governor Mike Huckabee and his wife Janet stood in front of a crowd of over six thousand other couples to convert their marriage into a covenant marriage. Before the ceremony, Huckabee invited other couples to join him and his wife in entering into marriages that held them to a higher standard of marital commitment. At the event, thousands of married couples showed up to witness Mike and Janet Huckabee enter into a covenant marriage. After the Huckabees exchanged their vows they encouraged the couples in attendance to stand and join in a mass recitation of their marriage vows. Despite this large personal display of the conservative governor for covenant marriage, as was the case in Louisiana, few Arkansas residents opted for this form of marriage. In fact, only six hundred couples out of one hundred thousand marriages in Arkansas from 2001 to 2005 were covenant marriages.⁴⁴¹ While covenant marriages failed to gain popularity with American couples, the introduction of covenant marriages demonstrates conservatives' fear over the supposed weakening of the institution of marriage in the United States and their push for government intervention.

⁴⁴⁰ Davis, *More Perfect Unions*, 238-40; Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, 3-4; Cejello, *Making Marriage Work*, 153-54.

⁴⁴¹ Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, 4, 13-14.

Another example of government intervention in marriage advocated by conservatives to “save” the institution of marriage in the United States is the Healthy Marriage Initiative, which was officially started by the George W. Bush administration in 2005. The Healthy Marriage Initiative was a program that provided couples with marriage-skills education in the hope that this information would improve their relationships and reduce the possibility of divorce. That year, Wade Horn, Bush’s appointee as the head of the Administration for Children and Families within the Department of Health and Human Services disbursed \$200 million to support the Healthy Marriage Initiative. Multiyear grants provided through the Healthy Marriage Initiative helped fund local projects to promote positive-thinking education about marriage. For example, in Fayette County, Pennsylvania’s City Action Agency was granted \$40,000 to provide some twenty couples with marriage education and a “Becoming a Family” course to women in their third trimesters. These grants laid the groundwork for a major legislative push by Republican lawmakers to link the promotion of marriage with U.S. government antipoverty programs.⁴⁴²

Grants for “special improvement projects” provided by the Office of Child Support Enforcement supported programs such as the South Baton Rouge Christian Children’s Foundation’s Marriages that Matter project whose goal was to direct so-called healthy marriage services to “underserved ethnically diverse non-married custodial and non-custodial parents.”⁴⁴³ In February 2006, the United States Congress passed legislation that allocated \$100 million per year from 2006 to 2010 to support the Healthy Marriage Initiative and granted another \$50 million a year to establish programs that encouraged “responsible fatherhood.” By the fall of

⁴⁴² Davis, *More Perfect Unions*, 246-47.

⁴⁴³ As quoted in Davis, *More Perfect Unions*, 247.

2006, two hundred programs across the United States received grants under the Healthy Marriage Initiative and Responsible Fatherhood programs.⁴⁴⁴

In recent years the most public battle waged by conservatives to preserve “traditional” marriage was the fight against marriage equality for same-sex couples. The road to marriage equality for same-sex couples dates back to the very beginnings of the gay rights movement in the late 1960s. Almost immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1967 to legalize interracial marriages, several gay and lesbian couples argued that they should also have the right to marry.⁴⁴⁵ On 10 October 1987, nearly seven thousand people witnessed the weddings of over two thousand same-sex couples on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The event, known as “The Wedding,” was a touching symbolic public gesture of the participating couples’ commitment to one another and a public protest of the legal, religious, and social constraints placed against same-sex couples. For same-sex couples, the ban on same-sex marriage was just another institutional marker that helped to distinguish them as second-class citizens.⁴⁴⁶

In response to the perceived threat that same-sex couples posed to the institution of marriage, the Republican-led Congress of the United States in 1996 passed the Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA which was then signed into law by President Bill Clinton. DOMA defined marriage under federal law as a union between one man and one woman. Furthermore, DOMA granted states the right to refuse to recognize civil marriages granted to same-sex couples under the law in other states. As a consequence, twenty states between 2000 and 2012 ratified amendments to their state constitutions banning recognition of all relationship rights for

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.; 250.

⁴⁴⁵ Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, 256.

⁴⁴⁶ Dunak, *As Long as We Both Shall Love*, 134-35.

same-sex couples.⁴⁴⁷ One of the most widely recognized and controversial of these state bans on same-sex marriage was California's Proposition 8. On 16 August 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled that the state's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Shortly after some eighteen thousand gay and lesbian couples in the state quickly rushed to get married in their home state. But this step towards marriage equality in California was short-lived because on 4 November that same year California voters passed Proposition 8, which changed the state's constitution to declare that only marriages between a man and a woman would be legally recognized in the state.⁴⁴⁸

Despite the existence of DOMA and state-generated legislation opposing same-sex marriage, gay rights advocates continued to fight for marriage equality for all Americans. In January 2000, California began registering domestic partners. This allowed same-sex couples health insurance coverage for dependents of government employees covered by the state's retirement system and hospital visitation rights. In July of that same year Vermont became the first state to perform civil unions for same-sex couples. On 27 May 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize and perform same-sex marriage ceremonies. By October 2005, Connecticut joined Vermont in legalizing civil unions for same-sex couples and by 2008 the state legalized same-sex marriage. By April 2009, Iowa became the third state to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. In 2011 President Barack Obama declared that he and his administration would no longer defend DOMA and in 2012 he became the first president in U.S. history to publicly support same-sex marriage. On 31 May 2012, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit of Boston struck down a key part of DOMA that allowed the federal government

⁴⁴⁷ Daniel R. Pinello, *America's War on Same-Sex Couples and Their Families: And How the Courts Rescued Them* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5.

⁴⁴⁸ Abbott, *Marriage*, 267.

to deny spouses of gay and lesbian federal employees from receiving federal benefits. This successful attack against DOMA made way for *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court Case that ultimately decided to legalize same-sex marriages in the United States.⁴⁴⁹

In 2015 the United States Supreme Court agreed to hear the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* to decide whether or not same-sex couples had a constitutional right to marry. The case centered on the marriage of Jim Obergefell and John Arthur. The couple met at a bar called Uncle Woody's, near the University of Cincinnati in the early 1990s and, according to Obergefell, it was not love at first sight. It was not until the couple met for a third time at a mutual friend's party that they developed an attachment to one another. John was Jim's first serious boyfriend. Shortly after they began dating, Jim and John moved in together. They spent years working together in IT consulting and client relations management at a number of different companies. Jim and John also enjoyed spending their spare time together restoring old houses and buying paintings from local artists. In the winter of 2011, Jim noticed that John's left foot slapped the ground as he walked. He then started falling and had a hard time getting into their car. John went to their family doctor who referred him on to a neurosurgeon who later diagnosed him with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, which is classified as a motor neuron disease that attacks the body's motor neurons, causing increased impairment of the body's motor functions and eventual death. The couple was devastated by the diagnosis.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ *The Boston Globe*, "A Timeline of Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S.," *The Boston Globe*, January 9, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2016/01/09/same-sex-marriage-over-time/mbVFMQPyxZCpM2eSQMUzK/story.html> (accessed November 6, 2018).

⁴⁵⁰ Michael S. Rosenwald, "How Jim Obergefell Became the Face of the Supreme Court Gay Marriage Case," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/how-jim-obergefell-became-the-face-of-the-supreme-court-gay-marriage-case/2015/04/06/3740433c-d958-11e4-b3f2-607bd612aeac_story.html?utm_term=.9fa5407c1e69 (accessed October 30, 2018).

In their twenty years together as a couple, Jim Obergefell and John Arthur discussed marriage but up until John's diagnosis of ALS, they had never seriously entertained the idea of getting married. They did not want their marriage to simply be a symbolic gesture; if they decided to marry they wanted it to be legally recognized.⁴⁵¹ Their home state of Ohio's state constitution specifically banned the legal recognition of marriages between same-sex couples.⁴⁵² In 2013, after the U.S. Court of Appeals struck down part of the Defense of Marriage Act, allowing married same-sex couples federal benefits in states where same-sex marriages were legalized, the couple decided to officially marry. By that time John could no longer walk, he was losing his ability to speak, and his overall health was rapidly declining. It was at that time that the couple decided to finally get married. On the morning of 11 July 2013, an ambulance transported the couple to the airport where they boarded a medical jet with a nurse and John's Aunt Paulette, who became an ordained minister online to perform their wedding ceremony. On the tarmac of the Baltimore-Washington International Marshall Airport, Jim Obergefell and John Arthur became husband and husband.⁴⁵³

When the couple returned home to Cincinnati, John's health continued to deteriorate. They had already begun hospice care for him earlier that year as he was now confined to his bed. A few days after Jim and John were married, a former neighbor mentioned the couple's situation to a local civil rights attorney named Al Gerhardstein. When Jim met with Gerhardstein, the lawyer discussed the ways in which they Jim could receive legal recognition as John's spouse on his death certificate. Gerhardstein told him that they would need to file an injunction saying Jim Obergefell should be listed as the surviving spouse on John Arthur's death certificate. They filed

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Pinello, *America's War on Same-Sex Couples and Their Families*, 5.

⁴⁵³ Rosenwald, "How Jim Obergefell Became the Face of the Supreme Court Gay Marriage Case."

a lawsuit a few days later and a federal judge ruled in their favor. John passed away a few months later; just three months and eleven days after they were married. Because of their legal victory, Jim was listed as the surviving spouse on John's death certificate. The State of Ohio appealed to a higher court and won, allowing the state the legal right to remove Jim's name as the surviving spouse on John's death certificate. After the ruling, Jim Obergefell appealed his case to the United States Supreme Court.⁴⁵⁴ On 26 June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution granted same-sex couples the right to a civil marriage, effectively invalidating any state prohibition on recognizing same-sex marriages.⁴⁵⁵

In his assenting opinion of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Justice Anthony Kennedy stated that:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than they once were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.⁴⁵⁶

The case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* is so important because it fundamentally changed the way the United States government viewed same-sex marriage. After June 2015, all same-sex couples and their families were constitutionally protected against government-sponsored discrimination.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Pinello, *America's War on Same-Sex Couples and Their Families*, 224.

⁴⁵⁶ Justice Anthony Kennedy, quoted in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. (2015).

⁴⁵⁷ Pinello, *America's War on Same-Sex Couples and Their Families*, 253.

Perceptions of Marriage in the United States: 1990s to the Present

During the last decade of the twentieth century, American views on marriage continued to follow along the pattern that they had begun back in the 1960s. Fewer and fewer young people were convinced that a traditional marriage centered around the male provider/female dependent consumer model was a realistic form of marriage and, as a result, the notion was gradually losing its appeal. According to sociologist Andrew J. Cherlin, marriage in the 1990s and into the first years of the new millennium was no longer a dominant force in American society. Citing a rising acceptance of cohabitation and same-sex marriage, Cherlin believed that marriage within the United States was becoming deinstitutionalized. Essentially, he claimed, the social norms that once defined American's beliefs and behaviors towards marriage were weakening. Cherlin stated that Americans during this period now had more freedom to choose whether or not they wanted to enter into marriage. Cherlin also believed that Americans during this period desired different goals for their marriages than Americans in the past. He stated that married Americans in the 1990s and early 2000s wanted marriages that would offer them greater personal growth as an individual and greater intimacy and open communication with their spouse. Furthermore, marriage was now less about fulfilling societal expectations and acted as more of a status symbol. Rather than a marker of the beginning of their adult life, Cherlin argued that marriage was the capstone of an American's adulthood after their education and establishment of a career.⁴⁵⁸

While Andrew Cherlin argued that the male provider/female dependent consumer model no longer held the appeal it once had for Americans, other sociological studies suggested that

⁴⁵⁸ Andrew J. Cherlin, "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 4 (November 2004), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3600162> (accessed October 13, 2013): 849-51, 853, 857-8.

this was not always the case. Sociologists from the Institute for Social Research discovered that during the early 1990s, American men and women supported more egalitarian views about gender roles within marriages. The respondents during this period of their study reported more positive attitudes toward married women working outside of the home as well as a belief that employment outside of the home for mothers was not detrimental to the quality of life of their children. By the late 1990s, these egalitarian attitudes appeared to have leveled off. In fact, between 1997 and 1998, 63 percent of male respondents in the study believed that it was better for men to have a career outside of the home while women stay at home to manage the household and children, a 3 percent increase from data collected from 1993 to 1994. Women during this same time period also expressed a small reversal in egalitarian attitudes over employment outside of the home as the number of female respondents in favor of equal wages and household responsibilities for married couples fell from 74 percent to 71 percent. While the study indicated an overall growing support for gender equality in marriage, this small growth in support for more traditionally gendered views on the division of labor within marriage suggested that enduring appeal of the male provider/female dependent consumer model for Americans.⁴⁵⁹

Another study of Americans' perceptions of gender roles within marriage conducted in the 1990s by sociologists Bradford Wilcox and Steven L. Nock uncovered that women who held more traditional views about marriage, women who were not employed outside the home, and women whose husbands earned the majority of their family's income all reported that they were happy in their marriages. Wilcox and Nock also concluded that the stay-at-home wives in their study reported being happier in their marriages because they were operating within a more

⁴⁵⁹ Thornton and Young-DeMarco, "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes Towards Family Issues in the United States: The 1960s Through the 1990s": 1014-15, 1032.

traditional definition of gender roles within marriage. They even went a step further in stating that they believed that these women were also happier in their marriages because their husbands, as providers, were fulfilling their gender role inside of their marriages. Wilcox and Nock's results also indicated, however, that wives reported being happier in their marriages in cases where they felt that their husbands did their fair share of housework and were emotionally engaged with their wives, suggesting a slight shift towards more egalitarian marriages in the 1990s.⁴⁶⁰

As the United States transitioned into the twenty-first century, Generation Y or the Millennial generation—those Americans born between 1981 and 1996—were becoming adults of a marriageable age. Unlike their parents, Millennials had very different perceptions of the significance of marriage in their personal lives. Millennials are more likely than previous generations to postpone getting married.⁴⁶¹ In 2013, only 30 percent of Americans between the ages of twenty and thirty-four were married, compared to 77 percent of Americans of that same age group that were married in 1977. Millennials' low marriage rate does not suggest that America's Millennial generation has no intention of ever getting married. According to a report on the Millennial generation by the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors, 80 percent of America's Millennials believe that they will get married at some point in their lifetime. One reason why Millennials are choosing to get married later in life stems from a lack of economic stability.

⁴⁶⁰ Bradford Wilcox and Steven L. Nock, "'Her' Marriage after the Revolutions." *Sociological Forum* 22, no. 1 (2007) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20110192> (accessed September 1, 2018): 103, 105-07.

⁴⁶¹ Lebowitz, "9 Ways Millennials are Approaching Marriage Differently from Their Parents;" Roni Caryn Rabin, "Put a Ring on It? Millennial Couples Are in No Hurry," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/well/mind/millennials-love-marriage-sex-relationships-dating.html> (accessed September 2, 2018); The Council of Economic Advisors, "15 Economic Facts About Millennials," Office of the President of the United States, October, 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018), 34-35.

Millennials were and currently are the generation most affected economically by the United States' Great Recession of 2008. As of 2014, they are the generation that has made the least improvement economically and are more likely to stay in lower paying or entry-level positions for a longer time than previous generations. Another factor that could possibly explain why Millennials are choosing to marry later is their level of education. As more Millennials pursue higher education, they often delay marriage until after they finish school and get their careers established.⁴⁶² For Millennial Americans, marriage and starting a family will likely be the final step on their path to full adult status in American society.⁴⁶³

Millennial views of gender roles within marriage present a complex battle between the egalitarian values that they as a generation fully embrace and the realities of everyday married life that previous generations also struggled to balance.⁴⁶⁴ One 2011 study for the Families and Work Institute found that only 39 percent of Americans believed that it was better for men to be the primary financial provider and for women to work inside the home and raise their children as compared to over 64 percent of Americans in 1977. The majority of married Millennial men in their study believed that they shared household chores and childcare equally with their spouses. The majority of Millennial women in the same study reported however that they were the ones primarily responsible for childcare and household chores.⁴⁶⁵

Another study published in the *American Sociological Review* in 2015 discovered that the majority of Millennials in the study favored the idea of being in an egalitarian marriage over a

⁴⁶² The Council of Economic Advisors, "15 Economic Facts About Millennials," 24, 29-30, 34-36,

⁴⁶³ Rabin, "Put a Ring on It? Millennial Couples Are in No Hurry."

⁴⁶⁴ Lebowitz, "9 Ways Millennials are Approaching Marriage Differently from Their Parents."

⁴⁶⁵ Ellen Galinsky, Kerstin Aumann, and James T. Bond, "Times Are Changing: Gender and Generation at Work and at Home," Families and Work Institute, 2011, <http://familiesandwork.org/downloads/TimesAreChanging.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2013),16-22.

more traditional marital structure. They were primarily in favor of having marriages where both spouses worked outside of the home and took equal responsibility in maintaining the home and raising their children. The study also discovered, however, that when faced with the possibility of social and economic constraints, over 64 percent of college educated Millennial women tended to favor more traditional gender roles within marriage. The same was true with 43 percent of college educated Millennial men and over 86 percent of Millennial men with a high school degree or lower.⁴⁶⁶

Diamonds for a New Generation: The Real is Rare Campaign

Although Americans since the 1990s were taking more time to get married, when they did choose to walk down the aisle, their weddings were typically more expensive than their parents' and even their grandparents' weddings.⁴⁶⁷ From the 1990s onward, most Americans looking to tie the knot would do so with larger and more elaborate wedding ceremonies and receptions. From 1987 to 1994, the average cost of a wedding in the United States quadrupled from \$4,000 to \$16,000.⁴⁶⁸ Well into the twenty-first century, Americans continued to spend more money on their weddings. According to *The Knot*, Americans in 2007 spent an average of \$27,882 on their weddings; \$32,660 if one added the cost of the honeymoon as well.⁴⁶⁹ After the United States experienced an economic downturn in 2008, the average cost of weddings decreased from

⁴⁶⁶ David S. Pedulla and Sarah Thébaud, "Can We Finish the Revolution? Gender, Work-Family Ideals, and Industrial Constraint," *American Sociological Review*, 80, no. 1 (February 2015): 116, 121, 132-34.

⁴⁶⁷ Lebowitz, "9 Ways Millennials are Approaching Marriage Differently from Their Parents."

⁴⁶⁸ Ontes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 2.

⁴⁶⁹ XO Group, Inc., "The Knot Unveils Annual Real Weddings Survey Results," XO Group, April 17, 2008, <https://xogroupinc.com/press-releases/041708-the-knot-unveils-annual-real-weddings-survey-results/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

\$29,334 in 2008 to \$26,984 in 2010.⁴⁷⁰ By 2011 however, Americans once again increased their wedding spending.⁴⁷¹ In 2017, *The Knot* reported that on average Americans were spending \$33,991 on their weddings.⁴⁷² For De Beers and other members of the diamond jewelry industry, this increased spending on weddings offered potential to increase their diamond engagement ring sales.

While in the past N.W. Ayer & Son had successfully cultivated and maintained the impression that gem diamonds are symbols of love and devotion, by 2014 the international diamond industry experienced a slowdown in annual growth. De Beers feared that this slowdown was a sign of future troubles. The United States' diamond engagement ring market remained the bedrock on which gem diamond companies such as De Beers relied to preserve their profit margins.⁴⁷³ The problem/solution to lagging diamond sales were U.S. Millennials, who in 2015 spent over \$26 billion on diamond engagement rings, more than any other generational group in the country. If De Beers and other companies wanted to maintain and improve their diamonds sales, they would need to convince American Millennials to continue with the diamond engagement ring tradition.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁰ Business Wire, "The Knot Unveils 2008 Real Weddings Survey Results," *Business Wire*, April 8, 2009, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20090408005186/en/Knot-Unveils-2008-Real-Weddings-Survey-Results> (accessed November 3, 2018); Business Wire, "The Knot Unveils 2010 Real Weddings Survey Results," *Business Wire*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110302005388/en/Knot-Unveils-2010-Real-Weddings-Survey-Results> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁷¹ Business Wire, "TheKnot.com and WeddingChannel.com Announce New 2011 Wedding Statistics – Including Average Wedding Budget and Top Wedding Trends," *Business Wire*, March 12, 2012, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20120321006105/en/TheKnot.com-WeddingChannel.com-Announce-New-2011-Wedding-Statistics> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁷² Maggie Seaver, "The National Average Cost of a Wedding Is \$33,391," *The Knot*, 2018, <https://www.theknot.com/content/average-wedding-cost-2017> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁷³ Krystina Gustafson, "Diamond Sales Losing Their Sparkle," CNBC, December 27, 2015, <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/12/24/diamond-sales-losing-their-sparkle.html> (accessed November 4, 2018).

⁴⁷⁴ Emmie Martin, "3 Reasons Millennial Couples are Ditching Diamonds," CNBC, May 20, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/20/millennial-couples-arent-buying-diamonds.html> (accessed November 4, 2018).

In May 2015 De Beers joined with six of the other leading diamond producing companies in the world to form the Diamond Producers Association, or DPA. According to the DPA's own website, its purpose is to "maintain and enhance consumer demand for, and confidence in diamonds."⁴⁷⁵ The Diamond Producers Association's goal to bolster consumer demand for diamonds centers on Millennial consumers.⁴⁷⁶ In 2016 the DPA hired Mother New York to launch a new advertising campaign targeting Millennial couples in the United States. In a stark departure from N.W. Ayer & Son and J. Walter Thompson's work for De Beers, Mother's campaign for the Diamond Producers Association did not seek to reassert the notion that a diamond means forever, it instead sought to resell the diamond engagement ring to a new generation. In October 2016 Mother launched the "Real is Rare" campaign. The "Real is Rare" campaign, rather than emphasizing the idea that diamonds represent everlasting love and marriage, has instead chosen to convince consumers that diamonds represent the genuine love between two people. The campaign features both print and television advertisements that depict couples in intimate and pivotal moments in their relationship.⁴⁷⁷

The first advertisement from the "Real is Rare" campaign, titled "Wild & Kind," launched in October 2016 and featured a one-minute video of a couple in various scenes outdoors, one moment quietly rowing a boat across a lake, then chasing after one another through a cornfield. Sometimes the couple appears to be fighting, while at other times they are smiling or locked in a passionate embrace. The woman in the ad does not have a diamond engagement ring, but she does wear a large diamond pendant. The woman explains that while

⁴⁷⁵ Diamond Producers Association, "Profile," Diamond Producers Association, <https://diamondproducers.com/about-dpa/profile/> (accessed November 1, 2018).

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Patrick Coffee, "Mother New York is Behind the Romantic Ads," *Adweek*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/diamond-industrys-first-campaign-5-years-encourages-millennials-make-real-commitment-173925/> (accessed November 10, 2018).

her relationship with her boyfriend at times made her want to give up, she could never really leave her boyfriend because the love they have together is real. She ends the ad by stating, “Maybe we won’t ever get married and maybe we will. But I will spend my future with you, and I will be honest with you, and it will be wild, and it will be kind, and it will be real.”⁴⁷⁸ The ad then fades to a large sparkling solitaire diamond floating in space and it reads, “Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond.” Unlike the De Beers diamond engagement ring advertisements of years past, this ad does not reflect and prescribe a relationship modeled after the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. The couple instead appear as two independent individuals who are utterly devoted to one another. This is not a relationship of provider and dependent; this is a relationship between equals. This ad perfectly reflects the mores and ideals of Millennial couples who prefer more egalitarian relationships. The woman’s declaration that the couple may not get married right now resonates with American Millennials’ postponement of marriage until a later age. The ad’s declaration that diamonds are as rare as real love prescribes to Millennial couples that the best way to express their love and devotion is through the purchase and consumption of diamonds.⁴⁷⁹

Another video advertisement from the “Real is Rare” campaign features an engaged lesbian couple. Titled “A Girl Like You,” the video shifts from the present where the couple is attending the wedding reception of another couple to various moments over the course of their own relationship. The video shows that the blond woman from the couple also has a large diamond engagement ring on her left ring finger. The female narrator states that both women have their flaws, but that does not make their relationship and their love for each other any less

⁴⁷⁸ Mother, “Wild & Kind,” posted by Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond., October 11, 2016, video, 1:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCf7McWdSCU> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

real or meaningful. She states, “I know that this may not be perfect, but it is ours. It’s messy but also meaningful and you managed to make even a lazy afternoon feel unforgettable. I don’t know what tomorrow is gonna bring but the future is so much more exciting with a girl like you in it.”⁴⁸⁰ Once again the video fades to a large diamond solitaire floating against a black background with the tagline “Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond.” Like “Wild & Kind,” Mother’s “A Girl Like You” ad is a stark departure from the diamond engagement ring advertisements N.W. Ayer & Son produced for De Beers. For Millennials, the ideal marriage is not about emphasizing perfection, but embracing one another’s flaws. The fact that the couple featured in the ad are not heterosexual further emphasizes the point that the ideal relationship for Millennial Americans does not follow the strict gender roles and heteronormative behavior of generations past. Instead it prescribes an ideal marriage based on honesty and love between two equals regardless of their sexual orientation. Like “Wild & Kind,” “A Girl Like You,” conveys to the audience that the best means of expressing a couple’s real love for one another is through a diamond engagement ring.⁴⁸¹

In addition to video advertisements, the “Real is Rare” campaign also launched in the summer of 2017 a variety of print advertisements that were displayed in magazines such as *US Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*, and *Brides*.⁴⁸² This series of print advertisements feature images of real-life couples wearing diamond rings from various jewelry designers. In each ad, the text declares that the diamonds the woman in the ad is wearing spent billions of years under

⁴⁸⁰ Mother, “A Girl Like You,” *Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond*, (July 18, 2017), <https://realisadiamond.com/a-girl-like-you-real-is-rare-watch/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

⁴⁸² Because this is a new advertising campaign and not one sourced from the archives, I do not think I will be able to use images in the dissertation.

the earth before ending up on her finger.⁴⁸³ The first two ads from this real-life couples print series feature a couple named Anke and Gaunchen. While the reader never sees their faces, the first ad of Anke and Gaunchen depicts Anke leaning back against Gaunchen. Gaunchen's arms are wrapped around Anke while both of their left ring fingers are on display. Both Anke and Gaunchen are wearing wedding bands, but rather than wearing a distinctive solitaire diamond engagement ring, Anke is wearing three stacked bands of diamond rings from the jewelry designer Beverly K. The text states, "Anke & Gaunchen have been together for one year. Her diamonds have spent two billion year beneath the earth's surface and a few months on her finger."⁴⁸⁴ The tagline at the bottom of the page reads "Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond."⁴⁸⁵

The second ad depicting Anke and Gaunchen shows Gaunchen's left hand placed on top of Anke's and over her bare skin. In this ad Anke is wearing a diamond engagement ring and diamond wedding band by Danhov. Once again, the ad's text states that the couple has been together for six months while the diamonds on Anke's finger have spent billions of years inside the earth before they ended up as her diamond engagement and wedding band.⁴⁸⁶ In both versions of the "Anke and Gaunchen" ad, the accompanying image of Anke and Gaunchen's hands covering one another conveys a sense of protectiveness and affection between the couple. The text suggests to audiences that their love is not only rare, it is as lasting as their diamond. The combined text and images reflect a more egalitarian marriage, the ideal marriage model for Millennial Americans. The images and text from "Anke & Gaunchen" also prescribe to

⁴⁸³ Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond, "Behind the Scenes of the Real is Rare Print Campaign," Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond., August 31, 2017, <https://realisadiamond.com/behind-scenes-real-rare-diamond-print-campaign/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁸⁴ Mother, "Anke & Gaunchen," Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond., August 17, 2017, <https://realisadiamond.com/behind-scenes-real-rare-diamond-print-campaign/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Mother, "Anke & Gaunchen (2)," Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond., August 17, 2017, <https://realisadiamond.com/behind-scenes-real-rare-diamond-print-campaign/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

audiences that diamonds communicate to others the enduring nature of their love and commitment as a couple.⁴⁸⁷

Another couple from the “Real is Rare” campaign is Karen and Robson. The image from “Karen and Robson” shows Karen and Robson facing one another in a tangle of limbs, with neither of them appearing to dominate the other. Karen’s left hand is on prominent display with a Gillian Conroy custom diamond engagement ring on her finger.⁴⁸⁸ The text states, “Karen & Robson have been together for eight years. Her diamond has spent two billion years beneath the earth’s surface and two years on her finger.”⁴⁸⁹ The ad’s statement that the couple had been together for six years before getting engaged is reflective of Millennial Americans’ tendency to postpone getting married until they are more established in their careers and financially stable. The ad’s image of Karen’s diamond engagement ring reflects the majority of Millennials’ desire to eventually get married and start a family. The combined text and image of “Karen & Robson” suggest that like Anke and Gauchen, Karen and Robson regard each other as equals in their relationship; reflecting American Millennials’ belief that the ideal marriage is one based on equal partnership. Once again, the ad also prescribes to Millennial consumers that the best way to express their love to one another is with a diamond engagement ring.⁴⁹⁰

A third print advertisement from the “Real is Rare” campaign features a couple named Elaine and Travis.⁴⁹¹ The image in the ad shows the couple almost standing shoulder to shoulder with Elaine lightly leaning against Travis, her left hand reaching back to line fingers of her left

⁴⁸⁷ Mother, “Anke & Gauchen;” Mother, “Anke & Gauchen (2);” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

⁴⁸⁸ Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond, “Behind the Scenes of the Real is Rare Print Campaign.”

⁴⁸⁹ Mother, “Karen & Robson,” Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond., August 17, 2017, <https://realisadiamond.com/behind-scenes-real-rare-diamond-print-campaign/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45.

⁴⁹¹ Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond, “Behind the Scenes of the Real is Rare Print Campaign.”

hand up with Travis's right. Like the other images from the "Real is Rare" print campaign, Elaine has a large diamond engagement ring on her left hand designed by Gillian Conroy. The text states "Elaine & Travis have been together for five years. Her diamond has spent two billion years beneath the earth's surface and six months on her finger."⁴⁹² Like the other two print ads in the series, the image of Elaine and Travis standing shoulder to shoulder conveys the sense that they treat their significant other as an equal in the relationship. This image combined with the ad's text and the image of Elaine's diamond engagement ring alludes to the Millennial ideal of an egalitarian marriage. Millennial couples viewing "Elaine and Travis" would then be encouraged to express the love they feel for one another with a diamond engagement ring.⁴⁹³

Taken collectively the video and print advertisements from the "Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond." campaign reflect a variety of the ideals and practices concerning marriage for American Millennial couples as well as some of the lingering notions of traditional marriage favored in past generations. Like many Millennials, the couples depicted in the "Real is Rare" campaigns are currently delaying marrying or spent a considerable time dating before deciding to get married. In all the advertisements, the couples appear to view each other as equals in the relationship, reflecting Millennials' desire to be in an egalitarian relationship with their significant other, especially a spouse. All of the advertisements from the "Real is Rare" campaign suggest to the audience that the love between equals is something rare, something precious, like a diamond. Therefore, the best way to display the rarity of their love to the world and with each other is with a diamond. The majority of the ads from the "Real is Rare" campaign do present, however, one glaring contraction to the egalitarian marriage model

⁴⁹² Mother, "Elaine & Travis," advertising tear sheet, *Real is Rare. Real is a Diamond.*, (Aug. 17 2017), <https://realisadiamond.com/behind-scenes-real-rare-diamond-print-campaign/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁹³ Ibid.; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, "Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," 37-40; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 33, 38-45.

idealized by this generation of Americans: the diamond engagement ring. With the exception of “Wild & Kind” and “A Girl Like You,” all of the “Real is Rare” campaign advertisements feature a woman wearing a diamond engagement ring that was given to her by her male fiancé. As diamond engagement rings continue to be an item purchased primarily by men, but desired and consumed by women, they continue to represent the heteronormative and gendered ideals of the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. In other words, these ads prescribe to American Millennials that the best way to express the love between equals is through a practice that, since 1939, represented a marriage based on institutional perceptions of inequality and other forms of inequality. Until Americans purchase diamond engagement rings for every member of a couple getting married, diamond engagement rings will continue to represent support for the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model.⁴⁹⁴

As the “Real is Rare” campaign is still just a few years old, it is too early to discern whether or not Mother’s diamond engagement ring advertisements for the Diamond Producers Association has resonated with Millennial consumers and, in turn, boosted diamond engagement ring sales. As a member of the Diamond Producers Association, De Beers remains committed to promoting diamond engagement rings as the ultimate symbol of love and commitment in American culture, but in the last year an old threat as reemerged to threaten the gem diamond market: lab-grown diamonds.

⁴⁹⁴ Mother, “Wild & Kind;” Mother, “A Girl Like You;” Mother, “Anke & Gaunchen;” Mother, “Anke & Gaunchen (2);” Mother, “Karen & Robson;” Mother, “Elaine and Travis;” Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 184-88; McQuarrie and Mick, “Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,” 37-40; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 33, 38-45..

The Rise of “Fun Diamonds:” The Reemergence of Lab-Grown Gem Diamonds

In 1953, when General Electric announced that it was capable of producing and selling lab-grown diamonds in the United States, De Beers reacted quickly to crush any chance that those diamonds would endanger the mined gem diamond market. In the twenty-first century, the issue of lab-grown diamonds, particularly lab-grown gem diamonds, has once again emerged. Before 2017 the lab-grown diamond market was relatively small, but that year a number of companies expanded the market considerably and De Beers was concerned that the Chinese could possibly begin mass production of the gems in the near future.⁴⁹⁵ Rather than fighting to destroy this type of outside threat to the diamond industry as it might have in years past, De Beers has decided to get ahead of the competition and embrace the potential for a lab-grown gem diamond market. In May 2018 it announced that it was going to launch its own online lab-grown diamond jewelry retail store, Lightbox Jewelry.⁴⁹⁶ On 27 September 2018 Lightbox Jewelry officially opened for online sales in the United States.⁴⁹⁷

Lightbox is currently De Beers’s solution to the lab-grown gem diamond problem. The online retailer claims that its lab-grown diamonds make buying these gems simple and affordable. Lightbox also claims that because the gems are grown in a lab instead of being mined from the earth, it can offer consumers diamonds at a lower price. More importantly,

⁴⁹⁵ Rob Bates, “Lab-Grown Diamonds Become a Bandwagon,” *JCK online*, November 16, 2017, <https://www.jckonline.com/editorial-article/lab-grown-diamonds-bandwagon/> (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁹⁶ Abha Bhattarai, “De Beers has scorned lab-made diamonds for years. Now it will sell them — for as little as \$200,” *The Washington Post*, May 29, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/05/29/de-beers-has-scorned-lab-made-diamonds-for-years-now-it-will-sell-them-for-as-little-as-200/?utm_term=.3b2a2e753416 (accessed November 3, 2018).

⁴⁹⁷ Lucy Johnson, “Lightbox Jewelry Opens to the Public,” *Jeweller Magazine*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.jewellermagazine.com/Article/8059/Lightbox-Jewelry-opens-to-the-public> (accessed November 10, 2018).

Lightbox also claims on its website that the diamond jewelry it offers is for happy and fun events such as birthdays or as gifts of friendship, not as symbols of romantic love and commitment.⁴⁹⁸

Lightbox's website is very transparent about how the diamonds it sells are produced. A lab company based in the United Kingdom named Element Six grows all the diamonds for Lightbox's products. The lab takes a small piece of lab-grown diamond and places it into a plasma reactor that is then heated to over 4000 degrees Kelvin. After four hundred hours in the reactor, the stone is big enough to have it cut and polished and set to sell. The longer scientists leave the stones in the reactor, the bigger they get, leaving room for Lightbox to offer larger diamonds in the future. By adjusting the temperature inside of the reactor, Element Six is able to make diamonds in a variety of colors. Currently Lightbox is offering lab-grown diamonds in white, powder blue, and light pink. Once these lab-grown diamonds are cut and polished, all diamonds over 0.2 carats in weight are laser inscribed with the Lightbox logo at the top of the stone.⁴⁹⁹

While Lightbox assures its customers that the logo is invisible to the naked eye, it fails to mention that the logo also identifies the diamond as lab-grown, ensuring that consumers cannot try to turn around and sell these diamonds to a jeweler at a higher appraised value.⁵⁰⁰ Furthermore, Lightbox only offers a limited variety of jewelry options for consumers. So far, the jeweler only offers customers diamond necklaces and earrings set in either sterling silver, 10k white gold, or 10k rose gold. None of the stones are larger than a half carat in total weight and

⁴⁹⁸ Lightbox, "About Us," Lightbox, <https://lightboxjewelry.com/pages/about-us> (accessed November 10, 2018).

⁴⁹⁹ Lightbox, "Laboratory-grown Diamonds," Lightbox, <https://lightboxjewelry.com/pages/laboratory-grown-diamonds> (accessed November 10, 2018).

⁵⁰⁰ Lightbox, "Laboratory-grown Diamonds."

the jeweler is not offering any type of diamond rings.⁵⁰¹ De Beers encourages consumers to believe that lab-grown diamonds are just for fun fashion jewelry while continuing to use real gemstones in their engagement rings.

For N.W. Ayer & Son, the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the agency's decline and eventual dissolution. For the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, that same period marked an era of reimagining and restructuring as the company struggled to maintain a position in the U.S. consumer market. For Americans, the period from the 1990s to the present represents an era of continual progress towards true marriage equality. While American Millennials tend to revert to gendered notions of marriage when faced with social and economic challenges, the fact remains that they still collectively hold egalitarian marriages as superior to male provider/female dependent consumer marriages. If this trend holds when the next generation starts to enter adulthood, Americans might finally witness the end of marriages formed under the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model.

⁵⁰¹ Lightbox, "All Jewelry," Lightbox, <https://lightboxjewelry.com/collections/all> (accessed November 10, 2018).

Conclusion

On a sunny and surprisingly warm Ohio afternoon in September 2016, the Pequignot family began a year-long whirlwind of wedding events. That afternoon was my sister's first of two bridal showers, followed immediately by her bachelorette party that evening. Before my sister said "I do" in December that year, our two brothers also began planning their own weddings. By the time the last wedding commenced in August 2017, my parents, three siblings, and their future in-laws had sent out nearly one thousand invitations, tied four hundred gold chair covers by hand for two wedding receptions, burned over one hundred candles, and furnished each wedding with enough sequins and glitter to permanently blind and/or maim several bridal parties. All three engagements and subsequent marriage ceremonies also prominently featured three diamond engagement rings. Based on my own family's experience it appears that the marriage rate and diamond engagement ring tradition amongst white American Midwestern Millennials remains strong, but we are certainly not the blueprint for the future of marriages and the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States.

The fate of the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States for the moment remains intact, but there is always the possibility that this tradition will not stand the test of time. After all, the diamond engagement ring tradition did not become popular in the United States until 1939. There is always a possibility that some other alternative to the diamond engagement ring could emerge to take its place. It is also possible that marriage in the United States will continue to decline and fade into a bygone practice. The idea that marriage and the diamond engagement ring in the United States will someday disappear seems unlikely, however, for a

variety of reasons. First, marriage has now become a source of entertainment for many Americans. From television shows such as *The Bachelor* to *Say Yes to the Dress*, millions of Americans turn on their television screens to watch real men and women search for their happily ever after. Second, the U.S. wedding industry is heavily invested in the longevity of this tradition and works diligently to find potential for future growth. Wedding media companies such as The Knott, for example, look for future trends to ensure that the U.S. wedding industry will continue to thrive. Third, diamond engagement rings and marriage are likely to endure in American culture due to the rise of social media. Social media users now have a personalized platform to promote and explore their thoughts, ideas, and consumption patterns, including those in the realm of marriage and weddings. Finally, marriages and the diamond engagement ring tradition are likely to endure in the United States because they are both at a point where they could potentially transform to reflect a more egalitarian form of marriage that is slowly becoming the ideal form of marriage amongst American couples.

Weddings as Entertainment

Weddings have become a major source of entertainment for many Americans since the dawn of television in the 1950s. One such early television program was *Bride and Groom*, which ran on CBS from 1951 to 1953 and on NBC from 1953 to 1958. Each episode featured a couple that was chosen from hundreds of applicants to have their weddings broadcasted across the United States. In exchange, the show provided each lucky couple featured on the program with wedding rings, the officiant's fee, flowers, wedding photos, films of the ceremony, and a honeymoon trip. *Bride and Groom* also gave each couple appliances, silverware, carpet, and cosmetics as wedding gifts from the manufacturers that sponsored the show. Viewers tuning into the program

would hear compelling personal stories about each couple and watch as they received the lavish white wedding of their dreams.⁵⁰²

The end of the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of television programs featuring real-life couples on their wedding day. In 1996 The Learning Channel (TLC) premiered its first reality wedding show program, *A Wedding Story*. Each episode of the program was shot to appear like a home video of the bride and groom's big day. Unlike the poor young couples featured in *Bride and Groom*, the couples from *A Wedding Story* paid for their own lavish weddings, as most of the couples featured on the program possessed an above average income compared to their audience. TLC's *A Wedding Story* became another big hit for the network and by 1999 the show was so popular with women between the ages of 18 to 34 that the network created other program spin-offs such as *A Baby Story* and *A Dating Story*. The show's success also encouraged other networks to create their own wedding and dating "reality t.v." programs with titles such as *Weddings of a Lifetime*, *Will You Marry Me?*, and *Bridezillas*.⁵⁰³

The turn of the twenty-first century brought with it a boom of wedding and dating reality television shows, the most famous of which is a program on ABC titled *The Bachelor*. Premiering in 2002, *The Bachelor* featured twenty-five attractive single women competing to win the affections of the show's equally attractive bachelor. During this multi-episode series, the female contestants all vied for the attentions of the bachelor in the hopes that he would choose them to remain in the competition during the "rose ceremony," or elimination round, of each episode. Those unlucky women left at the end of the night without a rose from the bachelor were asked to leave. As the season progressed, the remaining women would each get to know the

⁵⁰² Jellison, *It's Our Day*, 203-04.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 211-13.

bachelor better on a series of dates in which viewers tuned-in to watch feelings develop between participants. By the season finale the two women remaining would find out which of them the bachelor had chosen to propose to, making that woman the “winner.” While the show was not an overnight sensation, *The Bachelor* ultimately became a ratings hit for ABC and generated a slew of new wedding reality t.v. programs and competitions such as *Race to the Altar*, *Who Wants to Marry My Dad?*, and *The Bachelorette*.⁵⁰⁴

The Bachelorette's first season in 2003 resulted in the show's bachelorette, Trista Rehn, becoming engaged to the male contestant winner, Ryan Sutter. Eleven months later ABC created a two-hour program special, *Trista and Ryan's Wedding*, to which seventeen million viewers tuned-in to watch the couple on their big day. ABC spared no expense in celebrating the happy couple. In total, the network spent nearly \$3.8 million on goods and services for the lavish fairy-tale wedding ceremony; including \$100,000 for Trista's wedding gown and \$500,000 for the wedding flowers. Trista and Ryan were also paid an addition \$1 million for agreeing to have their wedding organized and broadcasted by ABC.⁵⁰⁵ Since its first season, *The Bachelor* has remained extremely popular with American audiences. The show will premiere its twenty-third season in January 2019.⁵⁰⁶ Since the premiere of *The Bachelor* and the success of its first spin-off, *The Bachelorette*, ABC has created an entire franchise of dating spin-off shows, such as *Bachelor in Paradise*, which has produced over forty-four seasons of episodes over the span of sixteen years.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 218-19.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 218-21.

⁵⁰⁶ ABC, “About *The Bachelor*,” ABC, 2018, <https://abc.go.com/shows/the-bachelor>.

⁵⁰⁷ Rosemary Leger, “These *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* Couples Are Still Together as of 2018,” *Brides*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.brides.com/gallery/the-bachelor-wedding-couples> (accessed December 1, 2018).

The continued popularity of wedding and dating reality-t.v. shows like *The Bachelor* demonstrates Americans' continued preoccupation with and celebration of marriage. While these shows by and large do not represent how many Americans pick their future spouses, they do reflect the majority of Americans' continued belief that finding love also ultimately leads to marriage. While wedding and dating programs have turned courtship into an orchestrated spectacle, their popularity also proves that enough Americans are fascinated by and romanticize the search for "the one" that marriages in the United States will likely continue.

The Wedding Industry

Long before Americans tuned into their televisions to watch shows about weddings, the wedding industry in the United States grew into a multi-billion-dollar a year industry. As of May 2018, the U.S. wedding industry generated \$78.9 billion in revenue and more than \$5.8 billion in profits. The caterers, retailers, florists, photographers, wedding planners, and other businesses that make up the wedding industry employ almost 1.2 million Americans. Industry projections estimate that while the annual marriage rate in the United States will continue to decline, the wedding industry will continue to grow. It is estimated that by 2023, the wedding industry will earn \$81.4 billion in revenue.⁵⁰⁸ Wedding industry businesses are heavily invested in the continuation of a steady marriage rate in the United States to maintain their industry's continued growth.

⁵⁰⁸ Anya Cohen, "Tying the Knot: Rising Disposable Income Will Boost Industry Demand," IBIS World, May 2018, <https://clients1-ibisworld-com.spot.lib.auburn.edu/reports/us/industry/default.aspx?entid=2008> (accessed November 4, 2018).

One of the factors ensuring the U.S. wedding industry's continued financial success is the boom of wedding planning media groups such as The Knot. Founded in 1996 by husband-and-wife team, Carley Roney and David Liu, The Knot began as a wedding-planning website. Since its founding The Knot has become a huge influence on the wedding industry. Its wedding-planning website provided brides and grooms with information on wedding vendors in their area that would help to make their wedding day a special event.⁵⁰⁹ The Knot also offers editorial content and online tools such as a budget calculator to help couples plan their wedding.⁵¹⁰ Where The Knot especially excels is with its wedding e-commerce business. The website is the largest internet retailer of wedding supplies, favors, and bridal party gifts in the United States.⁵¹¹ The Knot has now expanded its business to include personalized wedding websites for engaged couples, bridal magazines, and phone apps, wedding books, and retail collectively held as subsidiaries under their media and technology company XO Group.⁵¹²

In addition to becoming the most influential business in the U.S. wedding industry, The Knot has monitored the state of the industry through its annual "Real Weddings Survey" since 2006. Using survey information from engaged couples that use The Knot's services, the "Real Weddings Survey" reports to its members in the U.S. wedding industry how much average Americans spend on each individual item or service related to their wedding. The reports also outline wedding spending trends by region and which family members are contributing financially to the wedding. By providing this information to business owners in the wedding industry, The Knot helps to ensure that each bridal boutique owner, florist, reception venue, and

⁵⁰⁹ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 221-22; XO Group, Inc., "About Us/The Knot," XO Group, 2018, <https://xogroupinc.com/the-knot/> (accessed November 1, 2018).

⁵¹⁰ Rebecca Meade, *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 19.

⁵¹¹ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 222.

⁵¹² XO Group, Inc., "About Us/The Knot."

photographer offer the latest fashions and services for their customers; ensuring maximum profitability and continued growth.⁵¹³

The Knot also pays special attention to trends in the engagement and wedding jewelry market. In 2015 it released the results of its first biannual “Jewelry & Engagement Study,” which surveyed twelve thousand brides and twelve hundred grooms that were either engaged or recently married between 2014 and 2015. The survey’s results indicated key financial spending habits and marriage proposal trends in the United States. One trend that the survey uncovered was that 67 percent of the brides it surveyed admitted that they began searching for engagement rings before getting engaged. More important for jewelers and the diamond industry, the survey also discovered that 85 percent of grooms and 57 percent of brides preferred their diamond engagement ring to have a smaller, higher quality diamond than a larger stone of lesser quality.⁵¹⁴ In 2017 The Knot released the results of its second “Jewelry & Engagement Study.” Like the previous survey, the 2017 survey outlined key spending habits and noted any changes that the jewelry retailers would need to know in order to appeal to engaged couples looking for diamond engagement rings. One noted change from the respondents in the 2015 study was that the male respondents in the 2017 survey indicated that they were more concerned with the price of the diamond engagement ring rather than the size and quality of the stone. The women in the study, on the other hand, were more concerned with the quality of the ring as well as its uniqueness and craftsmanship (two factors that were ranked above price and quality for both men and women in the study). The study suggested to jewelry retailers that the best way to attract customers to their diamond engagement rings was to emphasize the quality, craftsmanship, and

⁵¹³ Business Wire, “The Knot Unveils 2008 Real Weddings Survey Results.”

⁵¹⁴ Ashley Gorelik, “The Knot 2015 Jewelry & Engagement Study,” The Knot Pro, December 16, 2015, <https://partners.theknotpro.com/wedding-business-blog/2015/12/16/the-knot-2015-jewelry-engagement-study> (accessed December 7, 2018).

uniqueness of each ring before discussing pricing. Doing so encouraged consumers to fall in love with the rings offered to them and be less likely to balk at conversations on pricing later.⁵¹⁵

Wedding media companies like The Knot work to make weddings, and therefore marriage, an attractive prospect to American consumers. Although the annual marriage rate is expected to decrease slightly from 6.3 out of every 1,000 people in 2018 to 5.7 by 2023, the wedding industry predicts that Americans who do chose to get married will do so with more elaborate and expensive weddings. While the U.S. wedding industry cannot directly control the annual marriage rate, its concerted efforts to make each wedding as personalized and unique as possible will likely help to ensure Americans continued desire for a dream wedding. In so doing, their efforts may help ensure the continued relevance of marriage and diamond engagement rings in American culture.⁵¹⁶

Pinning Your Happily Ever After: Rise of Engagement and Wedding Content on Social Media

For many Americans, social media has become an important platform to engage with the world around them and share their life experiences with friends, family, and even complete strangers. Social media platforms such as Pinterest also offer Americans a chance to acquire and share ideas about their own dream engagement and wedding. By using social media to share

⁵¹⁵ Sarah Hooper, “The Knot Engagement Ring Trends & Insights Report 2017 Is Here,” The Knot Pro, November 16, 2017, <https://partners.theknotpro.com/wedding-business-blog/2017/11/16/the-knot-engagement-ring-trends-insights-report-2017-is-here> (accessed December 7, 2018); JCK Magazine, “Facts of Love: The Results of The Knot’s 2017 Jewelry & Engagement Study,” *JCK*, September 15, 2017, <https://www.jckonline.com/magazine-article/facts-of-love-the-results-of-the-knots-2017-jewelry-engagement-study/> (accessed December 7, 2018).

⁵¹⁶ Cohen, “Tying the Knot,” 28.

information about weddings and engagements, Americans are keeping ideas of marriage and diamond engagement rings socially relevant and desirable.

Today many women use Pinterest to generate ideas about their engagement rings and weddings. According to The Knot, 62 percent of the brides it surveyed in its 2017 Jewelry and Engagement Study reported using Pinterest to get ideas and information about what type of engagement ring they wanted.⁵¹⁷ Pinterest also tracks and reports its predictions on future wedding trends based on the types of wedding related images their users “pin” to their personal boards.⁵¹⁸ The social media platform has also changed the way that brides envision their ideal wedding. With instant access to a plethora of images and ideas about their ideal diamond engagement ring, gown, wedding cake, etc., brides have now also raised the bar for what a wedding day should entail.⁵¹⁹ In 2016 alone Pinterest reported that forty million used its website for wedding planning ideas. Pinterest users saved nearly nine hundred million pins about weddings and conducted three hundred and seventy-eight million wedding-related searches. In fact, 27 percent of Pinterest users that year planned for their wedding at least several times a day using the website.⁵²⁰

In 2017 a new social media platform emerged that is dedicated to finding, buying, and showing off women’s diamond engagement rings. Dubbed by Brides.com as “Pinterest for Engagement Rings,” Sparkly is a social media platform where users can look at thousands of

⁵¹⁷ *JCK Magazine*, “Facts of Love.”

⁵¹⁸ Pinterest, “2018 Wedding Trends: Sweet and Simple,” Pinterest, February 21, 2018, <https://newsroom.pinterest.com/en/post/pinterest-wedding-report-2018> (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁵¹⁹ Andrew Arnold, “How Social Media Has Transformed the Idea and Costs of the Ideal Wedding,” *Forbes*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewarnold/2018/07/31/how-social-media-has-transformed-the-idea-and-costs-of-the-ideal-wedding/#2f7a568e61bd> (accessed November 30, 2018).

⁵²⁰ Ivy Jacobson, “Guess How Many People Use Pinterest for Wedding Planning Every Year?, Spoiler Alert: It’s a Lot,” *The Knot*, 2016, <https://www.theknot.com/content/pinterest-wedding-planning-study> (accessed November 30, 2018).

images of real-life brides showing off their diamond engagement rings. Sparkly allows users to sort and filter these images according to the details of the rings that appeal to them, such as the cut of the stone or the setting. Users can even filter the images by carat size to ensure that the diamond engagement ring of their dreams looks good on their finger. Sparkly also offers users a filter that allows viewers to select the hand that most closely matches their own so that they can envision how a particular ring might suit them. The website allows users to then select up to five ring images to share with friends, family, and their significant other, in order to get their feedback on the selected ring options. To guarantee that users still get a surprise marriage proposal, users are not informed about when or if their significant other views their selections.⁵²¹

Today many engaged American couples use Facebook or Instagram as the place to publicly announce their engagements to friends and family. The Knot discovered that in 2015 79 percent of couples announced their engagements on social media within three days after the proposal.⁵²² Using social media to share the good news of their upcoming nuptials also allows users to publicly proclaim to the world that they have succeeded in finding someone that they are willing to spend the rest of their lives with. Getting engaged is still a sign of personal achievement for many Americans. They have found someone who desires to be with them and by being engaged they prove to others that they are in fact desirable. Going through with the next step by getting married is now the final symbol to demonstrate that an individual has

⁵²¹ Jamie Cuccinelli, "This New Website Is Like Pinterest for Engagement Rings and We're Living For It," *Brides*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.brides.com/story/sparkly-pinterest-engagement-rings> (accessed November 30, 2018); Sparkly, "Welcome to Sparkly," Sparkly, 2018, <https://mysparkly.com/about> (accessed December 1, 2018).

⁵²² XO Group, Inc., "The Top 10 Trends For Proposals and Wedding Jewelry Revealed by The Knot 2015 Jewelry & Engagement Study," XO Group, December 15, 2015, <https://xogroupinc.com/press-releases/the-top-10-trends-for-proposals-and-wedding-jewelry-revealed-by-the-knot-2015-jewelry-engagement-study/> (accessed November 30, 2018).

reached adulthood in American society. As long as marriage remains a symbol of adulthood and achievement in the United States Americans will continue to desire to get married.⁵²³

Are Diamonds Really Forever?

In its current form, the diamond engagement ring tradition in the United States continues to symbolize love and commitment in American culture. As it remains an object largely worn by women and purchased by men, the diamond engagement ring also remains on some level a testament to the male provider/female dependent consumer marriage model. As Americans become more supportive of and move towards more egalitarian marriages, the diamond engagement ring tradition has become somewhat disconnected from Americans' contemporary perception of ideal married life. If diamond engagement rings currently symbolize a model of marriage that is becoming less and less popular in each generation, how will the diamond engagement ring tradition, and subsequently the diamond industry, adapt to reflect this new form of marriage? There is at least one possible alternative available to couples that want to participate in the diamond engagement ring tradition without the gendered connotations attached to the act of giving and receiving a diamond engagement ring.

One possible way for American couples to transform the diamond engagement ring tradition to reflect more egalitarian marriages is for couples to both wear some form of diamond engagement ring. The concept of men's engagement rings is not new to the United States. In an attempt to generate new business, American ring manufacturers and retailers in 1926 began a campaign to promote engagement rings for men. Prompting the idea as a modern revival of an

⁵²³ Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, 141-42.

old custom, these businesses endeavored to popularize a rare practice from the mid-to-late nineteenth century where men wore engagement rings. Ring manufacturers used radio advertising and sent window display advertisements to jewelers around the United States to popularize men's engagement rings with American consumers. The campaign faced a few major challenges. Jewelry was primarily considered an adornment worn by women. In order to make the men's engagement ring popular with consumers, advertising agencies hired by the ring manufacturers depicted the rings as distinctly masculine by giving them names such as "Major," or "Stag."

Ring manufacturers and their advertisers also attempted to make the men's engagement ring more appealing to consumers by asserting that the ring was not a public display of a man's betrothed status. Jewelers were in fact encouraged to tell customers that only the bride and groom would know the groom's ring was actually an engagement ring. It was intended to be a personal symbol between the couple; not a public display of love and devotion. This emphasis on personalizing the ring was stressed further by the fact that men's engagement rings lacked a prescribed form and materials that identified it as a symbol of commitment. Some men's engagement rings were offered in gold with birthstones while others were made of iron or bronze. The third and most daunting challenge to the men's engagement ring campaign was that these rings were intended to be purchased by women for men. The idea that a man's fiancée would have to spend their own money to purchase his engagement ring was a wholly unappealing idea to male consumers. Trade advertisements for men's engagement rings

encouraged jewelers to contact the bride without the groom's knowledge and give her a card to measure her fiancé's ring finger so that she could buy the ring for him in secret.⁵²⁴

Needless to say, men's engagement rings never became a popular trend with American consumers. By 1927 jewelers ruled men's engagement rings a rarity and unlikely to become a time honored tradition. By the 1930s jewelry trade literature no longer featured men's engagement rings. In 1944 Granat Brothers, a West Coast ring manufacturer, hired N.W. Ayer & Son to create advertisements for the leap-year offering a man's diamond engagement ring as part of a set to go with the bride's diamond engagement ring.⁵²⁵ The last concentrated effort to promote men's engagement rings in the United States was made by the Feature Ring Company in 1956. The ring manufacturer created what it called the "Acceptance Ring," a men's diamond ring mounted in white gold and engraved with the phrase "Omina Amor Vincit," or "Love Conquers All." These acceptance rings were promoted as a ring that fiancées' could give to their betrothed to commemorate her acceptance of his marriage proposal. Like the men's engagement rings of the 1920s, the acceptance ring failed to appeal to American consumers, as by that time the diamond engagement ring tradition was firmly entrenched as one in which men gave rings to women.⁵²⁶

While the men's engagement ring failed to catch on with American consumers in the 1920s, there is still a possibility that the time has finally come for the men's engagement ring to gain popularity in the United States. Internationally, the men's engagement ring is not a wholly unknown concept. There are at least two countries in the world that practice giving engagement rings to both the perspective bride and groom: Chile and Sweden. Chilean men wear their

⁵²⁴ Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 43-47.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵²⁶ Ontes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 67-69.

engagement rings on their right hands until their wedding day when they move the ring to their left ring finger.⁵²⁷ In Sweden, both men and women wear a gold band as an engagement ring before the wedding. On their wedding day, the bride receives a more ornate diamond ring as her wedding ring.⁵²⁸ In more recent years the U.S. wedding industry has explored the possibility of a men's engagement ring trend. In 2012, The Knot's annual engagement and proposal survey discovered that 17 percent of the men it surveyed stated that they would be willing to join their fiancées in wearing an engagement ring.⁵²⁹ In 2014, a national survey of engaged couples by the U.S. jewelry chain Robbins Brothers revealed that 67 percent of the men it surveyed said that they would be willing to wear an engagement ring.⁵³⁰ That same year The Knot reported that 5 percent of the men they questioned in its annual survey stated that they wore an engagement ring.⁵³¹ This data suggests that it may be time to reintroduce the concept of men's engagement rings to American consumers.

More recently *The Huffington Post* uncovered the possible reason behind why a small, but growing number of American men are now willing to wear an engagement ring. For men who choose to wear an engagement ring, the ring itself is a demonstration of their commitment to their fiancées. Having both the bride-to-be and the prospective groom wearing engagement rings shows others that he does not have a claim of ownership over her nor does he need to act as

⁵²⁷ Forevermark, "Which Finger Should I Wear My Engagement Ring On?," Forevermark, 2018, <https://www.forevermark.com/en/now-forever/guides/which-finger-to-wear-ring/> (accessed November 28, 2018).

⁵²⁸ Ibid.; Sophie Inge, "Seven Totally Swedish Wedding Traditions," *The Local*, June 9, 2015, <https://www.thelocal.se/20150609/seven-traditions-that-make-a-swedish-wedding> (accessed November 28, 2018).

⁵²⁹ XO Group, Inc., "TheKnot.com and Men's Health Find 17% of Men Would Wear a 'Man-Gagement' Ring," XO Group, February 14, 2012, <https://xogroupinc.com/press-releases/02142012-theknot-com-and-mens-health-find-17-of-men-would-wear-a-man-gagement-ring/> (accessed November 30, 2018).

⁵³⁰ Sarah Jio, "Engagement Rings for Men: Would You Buy One for Your Guy?," *Brides*, February 19, 2014, <https://www.brides.com/story/mens-engagement-rings>; Samantha Zabell, "The Rise of the Man-gagement Ring," *The Atlantic*, February 14, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/02/the-rise-of-the-man-gagement-ring/283827/> (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁵³¹ Zabell, "The Rise of the Man-gagement Ring."

a provider for her, but rather that the couple claims to love and provide for each other.⁵³² As women in the United States are now often equal financial providers with their husbands, the diamond engagement ring no longer has to symbolize a man's role as the sole provider for his family and a woman's role as a dependent consumer. By having both his and hers diamond engagement rings couples can demonstrate their ability to provide in the relationship and their mutual dependence on their significant other to ensure a long and happy life together.

Will the diamond engagement ring tradition and the institution of marriage eventually become obsolete? The answer to that question is: not very likely. As long as Americans continue to desire diamonds and diamond engagement rings, the tradition will likely remain. While fewer Americans are getting married, the fact that those that are choosing to marry are doing so with more personalized and expensive weddings fueled by a growing wedding industry suggests that the institution of marriage in the United States will continue.⁵³³ Simply put, marriage and the diamond engagement ring tradition are unlikely to fade away from American culture and daily life because ultimately these two things provide physical symbols of love and commitment to another person. And as long as that fact remains diamonds will continue to mean forever.

⁵³² Kelsey Borresen, "Why These Men Bucked Tradition and Wore An Engagement Ring," *Huffington Post*, May 3, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/men-who-wear-engagement-rings_n_5ae8a09ee4b055fd7fd020b3 (accessed December 7, 2018).

⁵³³ Cohen, "Tying the Knot," 28.

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