

**Jewellery's Circular Economy:**  
**Materialising connections through the gifting and wearing of adornments**

**Abstract**

It is something of a truism that jewellery connects people and brings them together – playing a role in marking life's rites of passage and changing relationships – but there is less critical analysis of the mechanics by which this takes place. This paper addresses the question of jewellery's role in connecting networks of family and friends, by paying particular attention to its inherently social role. It will consider the gifted nature of much traditional precious jewellery, exploring a range of jewellery practices, including selection, commissioning, purchasing, gifting, wearing, re-gifting and bequeathing with and between groups of individuals. Investment in the artefacts themselves – in financial, social and emotional terms – and the relationships they speak of helps to bring people together and cement relationships through practices of exchange and reciprocity.

This draws on primary research (drawn from creative workshops, interviews) carried out as part of my doctoral project, and specifically examines how jewellery worn with various degrees of regularity spans different modalities of embodied consciousness. These modalities might include unconscious wear, in the case of jewellery that is worn so often it is barely noticed, to jewellery that stubbornly refuses wear because it retains meanings that no longer resonate with the wearer. I argue that the practices around the gifting and reciprocal wearing of jewellery allow women to take on board the perspectives of others as they negotiate these different modalities, incorporating others' views of themselves into their own sense of self. In doing so, I point to the key processes whereby connections between individuals are materialised through the gifting and wear of jewellery, and articulate its highly social nature in coalescing and binding groups of invested individuals.

**Keywords:** jewellery; gifting; wearing; self; memory; dress.

**Introduction**

In this article, I consider the degree to which jewellery contributes to identity, allowing the wearer to articulate ideas about who she feels herself to be. I consider the degree to which identity is shaped by those around us, with the very social nature of jewellery becoming a key theme. I present some of the key findings from a qualitative research project, exploring the social nature of items of jewellery that is either worn regularly or retired from use by women based in the UK. Exploring the role of art jewellery was a key element of this research, but here I focus on the rather more ordinary, conventional jewellery that might be worn daily, often with

little conscious thought. Little has been said about the role of jewellery in contributing to identity, or about the social nature of adornments of this nature – described, here, as traditional precious jewellery. Through interviews and workshops, I built up a picture of how jewellery's gifted nature brings structure to women's sense of identity, by anchoring and connecting women to networks of friends and family that they have known over years. This allows them to stay connected, granting a sense of reassurance that they have an enduring identity over time. The key argument that I seek to make is that, by allowing us to acknowledge both change and continuity, jewellery offers support and succour to our network of familial and social connections. Here, I explore how jewellery serves as a very important and highly particular instance of material culture: because it is small, durable and precious enough to be retained, it is able to evoke highly charged memories which serve to connect us to others – across time – through the stories it evokes. This gifted quality, responsible (in part) for charging items with memories and evoking stories, also introduces tension, as gifts call for reciprocity which risks pulling the wearing of jewellery into the realm of transaction. Jewellery is under-researched, but here I seek to set out its significant role in identity formation, and show how it can contribute to dress research, alongside the study of garments and accessories.

### **Literature review**

The theoretical frameworks that are pertinent to this enquiry can be found within the literatures of identity, embodiment, and the material world, including jewellery and adornment. All have been leveraged extensively in the service of dress research, but perhaps less so in relation to the analysis of the wearing of jewellery. Of course, there is scholarship around the study of jewellery, but it is patchy, and tends to cluster in key areas (the production of artefacts in the workshop or studio). There is little about jewellery (in any of its forms) on the body and in wear and use, and even less about traditional precious jewellery in this context. On the other hand, there is almost too much research and scholarship about identity, and knowing where to begin can be a problem. This review will firstly consider scholarship that explores the tensions at the heart of identity, and reflect on how our sense of a cohesive self is supported by a narrative identity that develops over time. I go on to look at identity through the lens of the material world, and ask how the interactions of physical artefacts and our embodied forms can help us develop our analysis of jewellery in use, before closing by considering how our material possessions – both worn and unworn – are rendered meaningful and potent.

Identity is borne out of two opposing pulls which are in tension: our inner sense of self and the view we present to the world. The divide between them is not clear cut; Rose describes it as a 'discontinuous surface, a kind of infolding of exteriority' (Rose, 2007, p321), a process that begins in infancy when 'object permanency' is acquired by infants gradually learning to fold objects into their consciousness, retaining them mentally even when they are physically absent. Eventually this leads to

what Mead and Morris describe as the 'generalised other' (Mead and Morris, 1934, p154): a form of internalised social control against which the individual can measure her actions. Oscillating between her own perspective and that of the generalised other allows the child to assess a planned action and anticipate how others might respond to it, in order to make a judgement about its appropriateness. Internal and external concepts of self are seldom viewed separately: we overlay the two modes of being so that they are indistinguishable, and Merleau-Ponty (2012) uses the metaphor of the view through a pair of binoculars, observed as a singular image but actually constructed of two individual, overlaid images.

Bodies are subject to the same forces of push and pull that are outlined above, resulting in an experience of the body that shifts with our perspective: Blackman (2008) describes the body as an 'absent presence' (p6), capturing the sense that bodies fade from awareness when we are lost in a task, but intrude as a focus of attention when we are ill or in pain. Despite this, scholarship of the material world suggests that we are actually profoundly embedded within our material environment and our boundaries are far from clear cut (Shilling, 2001, Grosz, 1994, Kristeva, 1982). The qualities of autonomy and being able to draw on one's own resources are regarded as important in the West but, in contrast, Eastern culture recognises the virtue of *interdependence* to a far greater degree (Markus and Kitayama, 1999). This highlights the degree to which the material nature of bodies is on a continuum with the material nature of the world around us, and jewellery is important here, in that it often serves as a bridge with the outside world. It is sometimes experienced as part of the body of the wearer and sometimes experienced as other, an item of dress that can be controlled and manipulated for the desired effect. Situated at the boundary of our physical bodies, it operates as both an object that is external to us *and* as something that is part of us; as such, this helps us to navigate the boundary and negotiate what it means to have or to be a body in the world. Within the field of dress studies, many writers have explored the relationship between clothing and embodied identity (Entwistle, 2001, Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998, Woodward, 2007, Young, 1990, Boulton and Jerrard, 2000). Here, the notion of social control is a pertinent one, and the complexity of decision-making around clothing and what it means to wear garments on the body is explored by a number of these writers. Woodward (2007) explores how women negotiate the gaze of others – including the generalised other – in order to understand how their clothed bodies will be judged by society.

Extending our frame of reference further into the material world, others have considered the role that possessions more generally play. Belk (1988), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) are significant contributors in exploring how the spatial distribution of these possessions within the domestic sphere contributes to one's sense of self. Turkle (2007) and Heersmink (2018) explore the evocative nature of objects and consider how they assist in the process of scaffolding memory, serving as a kind of external hard drive for memory and hence for the narrative of our lives. This clearly has significant implications for jewellery – both worn and unworn – which often evokes memories from key stages of our lives. Finally, the gifted nature of traditional precious jewellery is also relevant to

this discussion, and – again – here the scholarship is patchy. Nevertheless, Mauss, in his seminal work *The Gift* (1980), points to the transactional nature of gift giving which offers ‘only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit [...] when really there is obligation and economic self-interest’ (Mauss, 1980, p4). This obligation requires that the receiver of gifted jewellery reciprocates, usually by wearing the piece that has been gifted, ensuring that the care taken in selecting and presenting the piece is mirrored and returned. Habermas’s (2011) paper touches on the significance of gifted jewellery and its indexical nature, pointing to the gifter and standing in for them when they are absent.

Many of the sources pointed to above touch on jewellery only tangentially; there is little thorough-going research that explicitly foregrounds the role of worn jewellery in supporting memory and articulating aspects of identity. The situation is compounded by the complex nature of the jewellery field, across which the concept of wear is a contested and shifting notion. Traditional precious jewellery is usually intended for regular wear, whereas fine jewellery might be worn only at prestigious occasions, and art jewellery might be more frequently seen than worn, viewed instead within the context of an exhibition or through the medium of photography. This paper addresses this gap in jewellery scholarship, and seeks to show that traditional precious jewellery is rich in association, and significant in holding communities of people together, and that – through these two elements – can play a significant role in maintaining a sense of who we are.

## **Methodology**

There were two strands to this project: after gaining ethics approval and the informed consent of the participants, an initial strand involved me carrying out a series of creative workshops with groups of female participants who were over the age of 30 (and hence likely to have a range of life experience), inviting them to respond to a broad range of pieces of art jewellery. After this, the same participants were invited to meet with me individually to discuss the jewellery that they wore (or had worn) regularly. It is this second strand of activity that this paper focuses on, as this (unlike the experimentation with art jewellery) facilitated a discussion of jewellery’s role in structuring women’s identity and social networks. Here, I asked participants to bring two pieces of jewellery – one ‘live’ and one ‘retired’ – to the interview, and we discussed the full arc of the jewellery’s acquisition, wear and (in the case of the retired jewellery) its lapse from use; often reference was made to other pieces of jewellery (and occasionally clothing, too) beyond the items brought to the meeting, and discussion of these was included in my analysis too.

At the heart of the conversation was the question of what the jewellery means to them: the associations it carries and what it means when worn. The interviews were semi-structured, in that I had a list of questions and topics to be covered, but was not prescriptive about the order in which they were covered. Follow-up questions were asked to explore areas of interest and the ebb and flow of the conversation was shaped by the points raised by the participant as much as by my list

of questions. Each session was recorded (usually video recorded; sometimes audio only), and following the interview itself a transcript was prepared. Analysis took place using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, the functionality of which allowed me to code key points (essentially colour-coding and labelling) and to create structured tree diagrams to show how the individual points (called nodes, in NVivo) relate to each other. Through a process of coding, reflecting on the nodes generated, and writing memos (documenting reflections, connections and relevant theoretical insights), analysis proceeded from initially grouping and describing common threads to analysing how the meanings ascribed to the jewellery are constructed and what this can tell us about its role in embodied identity.

### **Findings - Live jewellery**

The participants (referred to using pseudonyms, here) were keen to talk about their jewellery and to share the stories of its acquisition and wear: many of these stories revolved around how the jewellery came into their possession, and participants frequently described the ways in which jewellery was gifted to them by family members and close friends. Mel brought a skull necklace, gifted to her by her husband, which reminded her of Birmingham (and its rock music) throughout a four month motorcycle tour of South America; Greta brought a cross pendant, purchased jointly by her mother and mother-in-law when on holiday; Tanya brought a pendant gifted by her parents to celebrate her doctoral graduation. Some items were self-purchased: Mani talked about a pendant she had bought herself to celebrate successfully running her own business for a year, its value linked to the business' turnover. Elsewhere, purchases were less weighty: Jo took delight in her find of a glass bead necklace in a second hand shop, and Leanne claimed that she had forgotten the origin of one of her constantly-worn silver rings.

Some things occupied the space in between gifts and purchases: Mani spoke about the purchase of 'gifts for me' (Mani), particularly when passing through airports, and elsewhere pieces that were notionally conceived as gifts were actually purchased by both parties. Hannah's engagement ring occupied this category; similarly, Daksha's family purchased her Hindu mangalsutra marriage necklace (usually purchased by the husband), as this was a mixed marriage and her non-Hindu husband-to-be was entirely unfamiliar with the conventions involved. Much of the jewellery was entirely conventional – small, relatively discrete pieces, often made in precious metal (silver and gold) and sometimes with gemstones, often designed and made within a Western tradition (although Daksha's mangalsutra was an obvious exception to this).

Most of the pieces were worn regularly, and some constantly: several participants proclaimed that they felt 'naked' without their jewellery, which was worn so habitually that it was barely noticed on the body, its absence more conspicuous than its presence. Other items of jewellery were removed at night, and others worn only periodically. This meant that decisions needed to be made about when and how they were worn, and occasionally this behaviour became ritualised or

shrouded in patterns of behaviour that became meaningful in itself. It is significant that the process of wearing jewellery gifted by significant others enabled connections to be made and affirmed. Participants spoke about how wearing jewellery prompted memories of when the piece was gifted, or of the previous occasions on which it had been worn.

### **Findings - Retired jewellery**

Jewellery discussed in the context of no longer being worn was, as before, accompanied by stories of its acquisition, and these pieces tended to relate to significant life events: key birthdays, celebration of relationships, the loss of loved ones. However, they were retired from use and this brought feelings of ambivalence. Events had rendered the jewellery not only unworn but often unwearable: one participant brought a couple of silver bangles, part of a wider collection that had been purchased during her marriage. The ending of this relationship precipitated the retirement of the pieces and the pieces became instead a tool for reflection, seldom returned to with but kept as a reminder of the relationship and that time in her life. As such, some pieces pointed to particular social roles: wife, partner, daughter. The adoption, relinquishment or occasional refusal of aspects of these roles contributed to this sense of ambivalence.

While the stories of the items' acquisition were rehearsed in order to revisit significant life events, the retired nature of the pieces meant that the participants' reflections dwelt on the theme of change and how this is accommodated. Daksha spoke about a set of gold jewellery purchased in India by her mother as a dowry in preparation for her arranged marriage: her shifting emotional response to the jewellery (from intense aversion, to gradual acceptance) and its potential for wear reflected her changing relationship with her parents and, in turn, their relationship with their adopted country. She acknowledged that she had subverted my request to talk about a piece that is beyond wear, and admitted that the previously retired set of dowry jewellery was now occasionally worn at family weddings. Other pieces were spoken about by participants in their absence: Leanne's charm bracelet was too sentimentally significant to be brought from its hiding place in her home; Amira reflected on a set of jewellery belonging to her daughter that had been stolen from her as she escaped from Syria as a refugee.

### **Analysis**

Jewellery allows us to (metonymically) take people who are precious to us with us as we travel through the world: it reminds us of them (how much they mean to us; how much we are obligated to them), but beyond this it also allows us to incorporate them into our sense of self. Jewellery does this by allowing us to see ourselves as the gifter does. The two modalities of embodied consciousness (theorised by Mead and Morris's (1934), and by Merleau-Ponty's (2012)) are helpful here: on the one hand, we are unaware of bodily boundaries when lost in a task, or in a state of flow; on the other, we might see ourselves in focus as if from an external

perspective; I prefer Merleau-Ponty's terms – self-as-subject and self-as-other – and will use them here. Hannah exemplifies this when reflecting on her wedding and engagement rings: relatively recently married, she is still getting used to the experience of wearing these items. Sometimes she can wear them unconsciously, fiddling and playing with her wedding ring without really thinking about it; of this, she says, 'I don't even know I'm wearing it anymore' (Hannah, here, adopts the perspective of self-as-subject). But then she might catch sight of it and remember that her circumstances have changed: she says, 'when you're on the tube and you're kind of grabbing onto the side and you're like looking and, oh, I am actually married, and, oh, we've actually done it' (Hannah, here, in the guise of self-as-other). At one level, the external view that this glimpse of her wedding ring brings into focus is that of her husband: almost as if her husband was there looking at her, seeing the wedding ring reminds her that she's married, and this jolts Hannah into action; she says, 'oh, I might just send him a text, see if he's all right'. At another level, this might be part of the reason why people engaging in extramarital affairs remove their wedding rings: the ring is a metonymical or indexical representation of their spouse, and they don't want their husband or wife looking on while they are being unfaithful.

Woodward (2007) highlights the role of mirrors in women's decision-making around dress. This allows them to access this external view and make adjustments to their clothing and presentation, according to what they see of the self-as-other. There are obviously lots of parallels between clothing and jewellery (the use of mirrors being one of them), and these are articulated by Jo, when she comments (about clothing):

I think it's partly, as an older women now, you know - late 50s - I think that you've got less...there's more dangers in clothes, you know - I'm quite, quite aware that you - and particularly at work where you've got to project a certain level of professionalism and you don't want to - as my mother would say - you don't want to be too 'mutton dressed as lamb', or anything. (Jo)

However, she also makes the point that jewellery is different:

it's something you can have a bit of fun with, as I was saying earlier, you can project a sort of sense of yourself as somebody who's interested in style, interested in colour, but you're not having to try too hard with it. (Jo)

I suggest there is an additional reason for jewellery to be different from clothing, and that is that clothing doesn't tend to have the same investment of others – it is more frequently acquired by the individual, and not gifted by others to the same extent. Because of this, the perspective that is encountered in the mental mirror

when clothing is reviewed is Mead's (1934) generalised other rather than the gaze of a singular and known individual. Mead's generalised other is a heady cocktail of different people, known and unknown, sharing their opinions and views, wanted and unwanted, and the reminder of the dangers of being seen as 'mutton dressed as lamb' is a familiar refrain in the ears of many middle aged women (Boulton, 2003, Woodward, 2007). This is the voice of our imaginations telling us what people think of us, and it is easy to see how this is experienced as a form of generalised social control. For this reason, Jo works around what she describes as the 'shoe-necklace-cardigan matrix' (Jo) to articulate her sense of style because it's safer than clothing that might reveal too much of her middle-aged body.

For jewellery that is gifted, however, the voice in the ear is more focused. Rather than being a melange of generalised voices, it is the perspective of the gifter that is foregrounded. Just as Hannah is prompted to text her husband when she catches sight of her wedding ring, Anna sees her grandmother looking back when she encounters the pair of rings that had been bequeathed to her by her nana. She describes the experience thus:

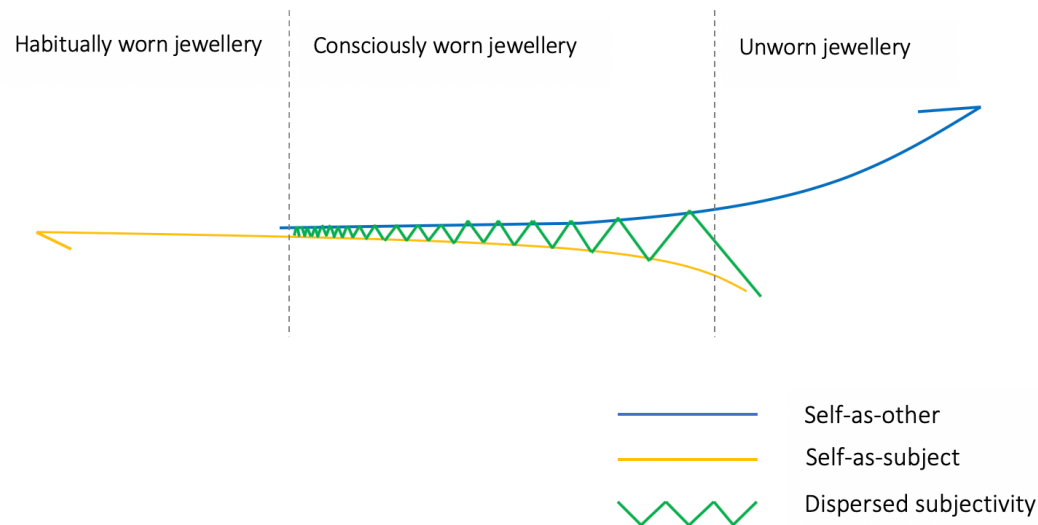
yeah, it's kind of like it's mine and my - part of me and my nan, that nobody else *gets a look-in*, kind of thing. And, like I - yeah - I find that quite important.

(Anna; emphasis added)

Her language points to a (metaphorical) exchange of looks, into which I'm wary of reading too much (the conflation of sight with understanding is part of our lexicon, after all), but the suggestion of an exchange that is active and reciprocal is pertinent: Anna looks at it, and it looks at her. I suggest that this exchange represents a kind of oscillation between the self-as-subject and self-as-object. This is a near-relation of the calibration you might make when checking your clothes in the mirror against the standards of the generalised other, but here the question of 'how do I feel' is held up against the parallel question of 'what would my grandmother think?' or 'what would my husband make of this?' The more aligned these two perspectives are, the smaller the gap, and we will turn to the question of what this might mean for the wearer now.

There is always a gap between these two modalities of the self, and this points to the split at the heart of identity. Nevertheless, the ability of jewellery to facilitate an easy or comfortable oscillation between self-as-subject and self-as-other is variable, and connected to the degree to which wear is habituated. It is possible to plot out the modalities of the self so that they overlap along a continuum which stretches from habitually worn jewellery on the one side to unworn jewellery on the other.





*Figure 1: Continuum of dispersed subjectivity, illustrating the interaction of different modalities of embodied experience – self-as-subject/self-as-other – as they relate to jewellery, across the extended field of wear and use.*

At the left hand side of this continuum, we can see that only one modality of the self is engaged – that of the self-as-subject. This indicates that the jewellery is been worn so habitually that it has become embedded within the sensory limits of the body, and little attention is paid to it during wear. This is the jewellery that was being spoken of when the women in the study said ‘I feel naked without it’ or that their jewellery was ‘part of me’. As Daksha commented on her habitually worn wedding ring: ‘if I *didn't* have it I would really notice it’ (Daksha). Here, the perspective of the ‘other’ (frequently the gifter of the item) is aligned so closely with the perspective of the ‘subject’ that they are effectively indistinguishable.

In the middle of the continuum, the gap between the two modalities is beginning to make itself felt. As a consequence, the felt experience of wearing the jewellery is calibrated against what it must look like to others. Initially, the modulations are tight and barely perceptible (suggesting a high degree of coherence between modalities), and here the wearer of the jewellery might frequently slip into the modality of self-as-subject and think of her jewellery only seldom; when it does come into focus, it might be to reflect warmly on the giver of the gift. At the far end of this central zone, the modalities of the self diverge and the gap becomes bigger and

harder to bridge, implying a more limited degree of coherence; here, the wearer might feel more self-conscious when wearing the jewellery, and memories of the gifter might be more ambivalent. These feelings increase as the continuum advances to the right.

At the far end of the continuum, the gap between the modalities of the self is unbridgeable. Jewellery has lost its ability to engage the self-as-subject and the wearer is unable to lose themselves in the experience of wearing the jewellery. Given that constantly watching oneself and feeling uncomfortable about one's appearance can be draining, the jewellery often lapses from wear at this point. The jewellery may still be potent, but it often says more about the gifter's reading of the individual rather than about the wearer's sense of identity. The wear, use and handling of the jewellery is often ritualised in order to render the sometimes highly potent artefacts safe: jewellery items may be stored in a particular way, worn (sparingly) for particular occasions and plans may be made for their disposal/bequeathal. In this zone, far more than the zones nearer to the body of the wearer, jewellery is treated with reverence or shrouded in secrecy.

The continuum provides a model for explaining how the social nature of jewellery – practices associated with its gifting and reciprocal wearing – allows women to incorporate others' view of themselves into their own sense of self. We considered Hannah's reflections on the process of getting used to wearing a wedding ring, earlier, and this is certainly an example of how an item of jewellery is located in one zone of our continuum when it is first worn – but then, through regular and then habitual use, is then drawn into another zone as Hannah learns to accommodate her new identity of married woman and the gap between self-as-subject and self-as-other is narrowed. Her more ostentatious engagement ring is often removed to play sport (and sometimes not replaced for a few days) and hence is worn more self-consciously, but her wedding ring is worn all the time. At the time of the interview (a year into her marriage), it was becoming part of her: she found herself fiddling absentmindedly with her wedding ring and only then noticing that 'unconsciously you're interacting with it' (Hannah). This points to the mechanism whereby individuals are bound together, and networks of family and friends coalesce, by taking the people around us whose connections are manifested in gifts of jewellery into the heart of identity through habituating their perspective into our sense of self.

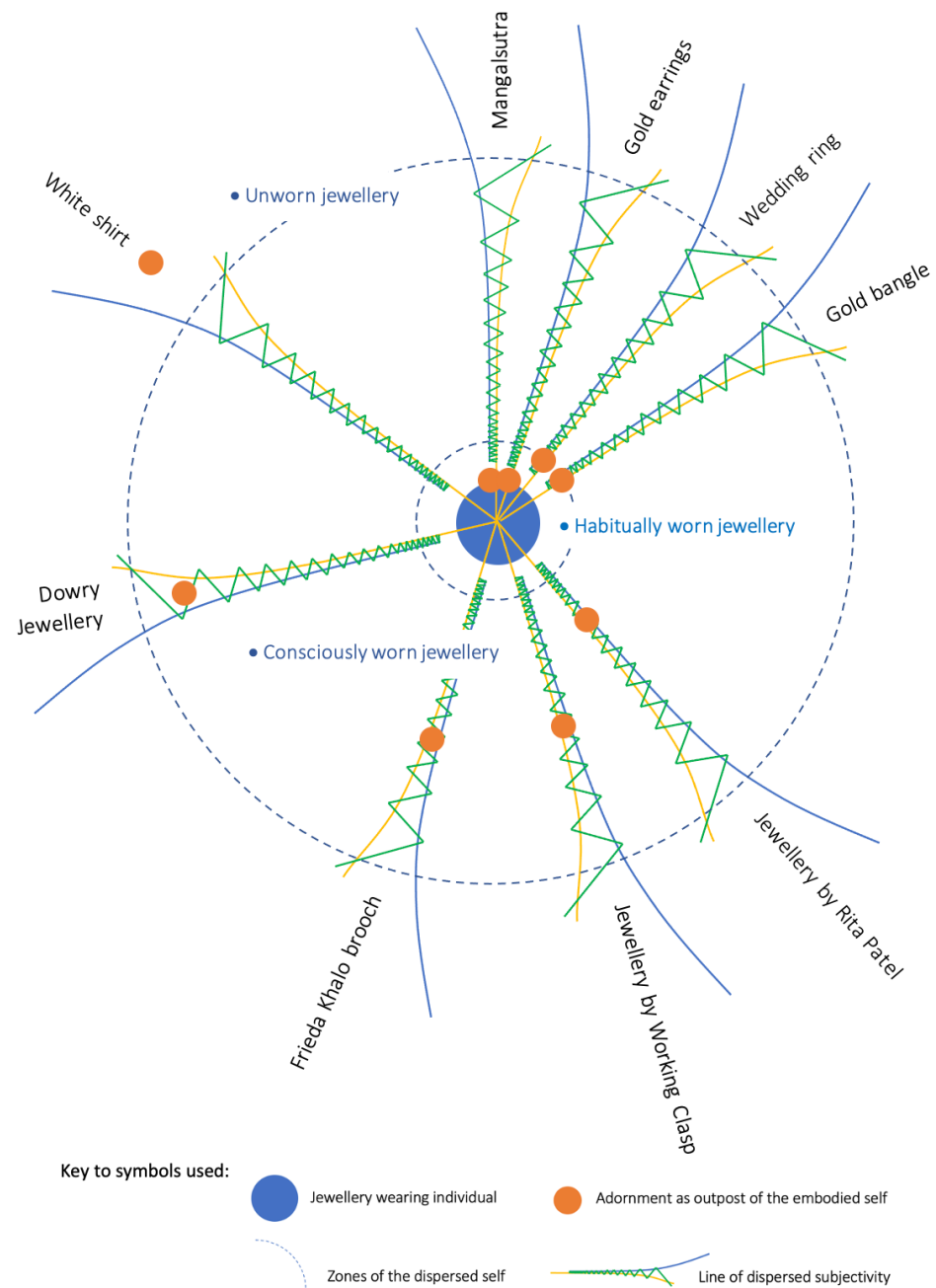


Figure two: Daksha and the dispersed field of jewellery wear and use

I would like to end by pulling back and taking a final glimpse of a broader conceptual map of the process whereby this networking takes place (figure two, above). This is a map of the dispersed field of jewellery wear and use of Daksha, who is represented by the large blue circle in the centre of the diagram. She is surrounded by nine radiating copies of the modalities continuum that I have just described, and on each is an orange dot indicating the position occupied by a single piece of Daksha's jewellery. Some pieces of jewellery are habitually worn directly on Daksha's torso (her mangalsutra (a traditional Hindu necklace indicating the status of a married women), and her gold earrings) and some are worn *almost* at one remove on her hands and wrist (her wedding ring and her mother's gold bangle). These pieces are worn all the time and are part of her, worn without conscious reflection. Elsewhere, pieces are worn more occasionally: a decision is made to put them on and take them off, and here the work of negotiating the gap between self-as-subject and self-as-object must be undertaken as 'how do I feel?' is held up and calibrated against the question of 'what would the others say?' At the outer edge of the diagram, unworn jewellery is absent, but Daksha made reference to a garment (a lost white shirt that was stolen by customs officers who searched her suitcase as a child) that is beyond wear: just within the bounds of what is tolerably wearable is the dowry jewellery that was purchased by her parents in anticipation of matching her with a husband. The collection of gold jewellery was highly divisive, causing a significant tension within the family when Daksha was in her teens and early twenties. Eventually, Daksha met and married a man of her own choice and gradually the family were reconciled, but the dowry jewellery remained a point of division and tension. It was kept in a bank vault for years, and it is only in her fifties that Daksha, at this point one of the elders of the extended family, had begun to wear the jewellery when dressed in traditional Indian clothing for family weddings.

The ability of the jewellery to shift from one zone to another of this conceptual map points to the fact that jewellery continues to have significant agency over its sometimes extended lifetime. Regularly worn jewellery, gifted by loved ones, is drawn into the process of identity construction, and the perspective of the giver activated each time the items are worn. If its use becomes habitual, it might receive less conscious attention, but this might be because the perspective of the gifter has become so closely aligned with that of the wearer that the two perspectives have effectively become one. Elsewhere, items can slip from use or be brought back into use and wear – but they remain potent pieces either side of this divide; unworn pieces often continue to operate as a 'scaffold for memory' (Heersmink, 2018) even if they adorn the domestic space instead of the body of the wearer. The mandala-like appearance of this final model is apposite: it articulates the role that jewellery plays in connecting individuals with their networks of family and friends, and need to be seen in this context. One mandala-like conceptual map will connect with others to create an intricate matrix of interconnecting forms. This is the social function of jewellery: to materialise the links between loved ones and to help us to change and accommodate new relationships as they evolve around us.

## Conclusions

The analysis above helps to shed light on jewellery's own system for connoting meanings and associations that is different from that of clothing, because of its frequently gifted nature and the need for reciprocity that this entails. The paper has explored the intersecting fields of identity and memory, and how – in particular – modalities of looking can foreground a range of different perspectives. Jewellery's capacity to facilitate a view through a loved one's eyes is a key element of its potency and, when seen in the context of women's collections of jewellery, illustrate jewellery's ability to bind and connect networks of family and friends in a powerful way. While I in no way wish to diminish the contribution of this paper or the insights of the women who participated so generously to this study, the conclusions drawn here are already known at an intuitive level by many working within the creative field of jewellery, who are aware of the power of jewellery to provide a physical connection to loved ones, past and present. Nevertheless, this paper's contribution is to begin to set out a theoretical framework underpinning the wearing of jewellery, through the analysis of its gifted (and occasionally transactional) nature and the role that this plays in mediating and structuring the wearer's sense of their own embodied identity.

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