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# Beneath the Kiss: Unearthing the Ideological Underpinnings of Kay Jewelers Advertisements

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UNDERPINNINGS OF KAY JEWELERS ADVERTISEMENTS

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my fellow cohorts in the Department of Communication. Thank you for keeping me sane on this crazy and beautiful journey.

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UNDERPINNINGS OF KAY JEWELERS ADVERTISEMENTS

by

CHELSEA N. HILL, B.A.

THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

Advertising is a frequently used influential and persuasive means of communication, such as Kay Jewelers, a corporation whose advertising methods have been superficially appealing to a female audience. However, this study sought to investigate the ideological underpinnings associated with Kay Jewelers advertisements, employing an ideological criticism to argue through feminist theory that Kay Jewelers utilizes key elements of heteronormative love as a means to persuade and influence men to purchase their jewelry products. Through this underpinning of heteronormative romance, Kay Jewelers emphasizes the notion that an artifact, like a piece of jewelry, is necessary in order to properly express true feelings and communicate the message effectively to a heterosexual partner. This in turn, hyper-ritualizes the act of gift giving and appeals to a masculine population using feminine appeals, creating a unique discourse of masculinity. Moreover, Kay Jewelers advertisements also reinforce the construction of nuclear families, perpetuating normative family types and structures.

*Keywords: Kay Jewelers, heteronormative romance, hyper-ritualization, masculinity, nuclear family, ideological criticism, feminist theory*

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This study developed out of a longstanding fascination with mainstream advertisers' marketing strategies, especially jewelry marketing. Jewelry advertisements, specifically Kay Jewelers, appear on television and are aggressively marketed during holidays such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas (Signet Annual Report, 2015). Additionally, experiences, attitudes, expectations, sexual beliefs, activities and timing of events, such as weddings and engagements associated with love are connected with the influence that the media have on people's beliefs about romantic love (Medora, Larson, Hortacsu, & Dave, 2002) and are championed in Kay Jewelers television commercials. However, romantic love has not always been viewed as an important aspect of relationships. In fact, it wasn't a prerequisite at all for marriage until the modern era (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Romantic love, as Eva Illouz (1997) suggests, reflects the democratic inclusion of all people into the ideology of romance and the division of lovers in socioeconomic classes. Kay Jewelers not only markets directly to the middle class man, but their television commercials account for the largest portion of their ad spending, which highlights their motive to market to men using simple and emotional messages, rather than complicated and luxurious ads (Lieber, 2015). Advertisements of this nature deserve scholarly attention to determine how they may contribute to the perpetuation of idealistic, traditional beliefs.

### **1.1 History of the Engagement/Wedding Ring and its Symbolism**

Associating rings with marriage is not a new concept. Overall, this association encompasses at least a two thousand year history and an evolution of iconography (Ogden, 2014). In fact, even in ancient times, rings symbolizing the commitment of marriage were rings

of gold, indicating that jewelry for this type of event has always been costly (Ogden, 2014). Moreover, the gold-band wedding ring has been used in Europe since at least the 1400s and those bands associated with the act of marriage often were engraved with loving or sentimental inscriptions. Examples from the 1600s include, “May we love forever”(p. 40), “Two bodies one heart” (p. 40), and “I will be yours while breath endures” (p. 40). These selective words were known as the “posy,” and such rings today are identified as “posy rings” (Ogden, 2014). However, Ogden (2014) further explains that in this day and age, engagement rings are frequently equated with diamonds. The history of diamond rings predates De Beers’ marketing by some five hundred years. Although not of the most romantic nature that we generally associate with engagement and marriage, the earliest example of the diamond ring correlates to the arranged marriage of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I of Austria in 1477. The term “engagement ring” dates back to approximately 1812 in England and by the mid-1800s, in the United States, the diamond solitaire had become established as the most suitable type of engagement ring (Ogden, 2014). The diamond ring has become a very significant expenditure for men. According to Kolowich (2014) De Beers ran a campaign in 1980 implying that in the United States, men were expected to pay the equivalent of two months’ salary for a ring. They marketed this by asserting, “Isn’t two months’ salary a small price to pay for something that lasts forever?” (para. 25). However, upon leaving the jewelry store, whatever gift has been purchased is worth 50% less than what was just paid for it (Kolowich, 2014). Yet, there is still the compulsion to buy these gifts for our loved ones due to remarkably effective marketing strategies from the past and present.

## **1.2 ‘Diamonds are Forever’ & ‘Every Kiss Begins with Kay’: A Comparison**

In 1947, Copywriter Frances Gerety coined the term, “A Diamond Is Forever” while working for a Philadelphia advertising agency known as N.W. Ayer & Son (Sullivan, 2013). When she was hired in 1943, her main account became De Beers Jewelry and was responsible for all of the company’s advertisements for the next 25 years. With the help of N.W. Ayer and Frances Gerety, De Beers was able to successfully turn a failing market into a psychological necessity during a period of war and economic turmoil (Sullivan, 2013). Furthermore, this company was able to use marketing to create and manipulate demand for diamonds from virtually nothing. According to surveys of consumer attitudes conducted by N.W. Ayer, many Americans thought diamonds to be a luxury item for the wealthy. Sullivan (2013) further explains that women didn’t want diamonds, they wanted men to spend money on washing machines or new cars; to them, diamonds were considered a waste of money. N.W. Ayer was chosen to handle the De Beers diamond campaign because of their ideas on conducting extensive research on social attitudes about diamonds, and then appealing to a wider audience by strategically changing them (Kolwich, 2014). The agency ambitiously set a goal “to create a situation where almost every person pledging marriage feels compelled to acquire a diamond engagement ring” (Sullivan, 2013, para. 9). Ms. Gerety and her colleague in charge of publicity, Dorothy Dignam, were able to successfully create a degree of emotional attachment to the diamond ring (Sullivan, 2013). During war times, a typical commercial ad for De Beers expressed the following:

Star of Hope: The engagement diamond 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 of tranquil. Its lovely assurance shines through all the hours of waiting to kindle with

joy and precious meaning at the beginning of their new life to be. (De Beers, 1947 cited in Sullivan, 2014, para. 12)

Kay Jewelers takes a similar approach to sentimental advertisements today, with such ads that read:

For the woman who shines brightest, Kay Jewelers presents the Leo Artisan Diamond.

The design of its facets produces an incredible level of brilliance from the creators of the first diamond designed to be visually brighter, now at Kay; the number one jewelry store in America. Every kiss begins with Kay. (Kay Jewelers, 2015)

American shoppers today spend approximately \$41.2 billion on midmarket jewelry every year (Lieber, 2015) and Kay has recently been growing at a rate of 12% annually, accounting for approximately 41% of Signet's total sales in fiscal 2015 (Signet Annual Report, 2015). They have maximized the mid-market and expanded their footprint in order to stay at the top of the jewelry food chain.

In 2015, De Beers announced plans to reboot 'A Diamond is Forever' for Forevermark brand in holiday campaigns. Although the phrase has been a popular culture icon for decades and used in every De Beers ad for years, Charles Stanely, Forevermark U.S. President said that the phrase was chosen for the diamond brand because it is recognized universally and understood, and consumers didn't necessarily associate it with any particular name or brand. Therefore he supposed that, "the fact that the slogan isn't tied to a brand name adds to the opportunity to tie its equity to Forevermark" (Greiff, 2015, para. 6). Similarly, Signet Jewelers hopes to increase their already pervasive existence. Mark Light, Signet's chief executive officer, recently spoke of the company's "Vision 2020 plan," which lays out a strategic proposal for expansion. He explains that within the next five years, Signet strives to grow its visibility in the jewelry market; hitting

specific goals, such as being regarded as the best in bridal markets (Lieber, 2015). These efforts are apparent in Kay Jewelers' release of the new Miracle Links Collection, debuting in the fall of 2015 (Lieber, 2015), perhaps to compete with the reboot of Forevermark.

### **1.3 Kay Jewelers: History and Target Demographics**

In 1916, brothers Edmund and Sol Kaufmann opened the first Kay Jewelers in their father's furniture store in Reading, Pennsylvania. During this time, Kay offered far more than exceptional jewelry. Their original store included electric razors, eyeglasses, music boxes, silverware, kitchen appliances and radios. Kay Jewelers is a parent company with Signet Jewelers and is a division of Sterling Jewelers Inc., headquartered in Akron, Ohio. Together they are the largest specialty retail jeweler in the world and are also one of the largest corporate sponsors for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. In fact, according to Folse, Niedrich, and Grau (2010) they have long been involved with cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns, making specified donations to non-profit partners each time consumers perform a prescribed behavior, such as purchasing the company's products. As part of its annual CRM partnership with the hospital, Kay's donates \$4 to St. Jude each time a limited edition teddy bear is purchased. Furthermore, over more than 90 years, Kay's has accumulated over nine hundred stores, offered online services, and boasted of being "empowered with the knowledge to assist each customer," (Kay Jewelers, 2000-2015) priding itself on having a deep understanding of its customers, and being known and recognized by their catchy slogan, 'Every kiss begins with Kay.' However, their customers appear to be a very specific market.

Target demographics suggest that Kay Jewelers operates in regional malls and off-mall stores (primarily located in outlet malls) and directs marketing towards households with an income between \$35,000 and \$100,000, with a midpoint target of approximately \$65,000 (Signet

Annual Report, 2015). In 2014, Signet Jewelers purchased a rival company, Zales Corp. for \$1.4 billion. This gain to the already largest specialty jewelry store in both the U.S. and the United Kingdom now includes Zales Jewelers, Gordon's Jewelers, and Piercing Pagoda in addition to the existing portfolio of Kay Jewelers, Jared and a variety of regional brands in the U.S., including H. Samuel and Ernest Jones. As Signet continues to expand the omni-channel experience of its shoppers, they are devoting more and more resources to developing their ecommerce capabilities (eMarketer, 2014; Signet Annual Report, 2015). The omni-channel experience is what the industry has dubbed the shift in consumers becoming increasingly more connected, with access to multiple shopping channels per company (Berg, 2013). However, the quality of Kay Jewelers products is not the only element on which their brand is based. Signet also conveys the importance of having their customers confident in their retail brand (Signet Annual Report, 2015). In other words, what are equally important are customers' perceptions and experiences of their products, as displayed in their depictions of heteronormative romantic love in their advertisements.

Kay Jewelers creates a spectacle of love within their commercial advertisements, which works ideologically to convey to the audience what they should believe about romance, marriage and heterosexuality. The ideology of romantic love is a belief in a social relation disconnected from real conditions of existence that masks or conceals contradictions in favor of producing a reassuring illusion, as well as the promise of well being (Ingraham, 1999). Moreover, this ideal depends upon a belief in monogamy as the ideal expression of intimate relationships, making all other possibilities unacceptable or unimaginable. Contemplating our nation's romance with engagement practices, we understand the promise to marry and the physical act of getting married as instances of love and commitment, but it is not until the real experience of living

together, loving together, and caring for one another that couples discover what is required of true love (Ingraham, 1999).

#### **1.4 Rationale**

At first glance, Kay Jewelers commercials seem to be in pursuit of alluring a female audience, especially through the use of nonverbal immediacy. Nonverbal immediacy is the actions that convey warmth, closeness, friendliness, and involvement with other people (Gass & Seiter, 2007). Kay also benefits from immersive advertising as well, which is utilized to generate a story that women can fantasize about happening to themselves. However, as previously mentioned, according to their target audience demographics, Kay's target audience is males over the age of 30 who have an average income of \$35,000-\$100,000 (Signet Annual Report, 2015). With this demographic in mind, the purpose of this qualitative, ideological criticism is to examine how Kay Jewelers markets the ideologies of heteronormative romantic love and marriage to men through their commercial advertisements. After close examination of the issues, questions also remain as to whether or not these aggressive marketing strategies that are most heavily targeted to straight male shoppers (Kit Yarrow, cited in Lieber, 2015) are useful, and why a large percent of gay Americans appear to remain closeted. Furthermore, since advertising is predominately researched quantitatively, this qualitative approach will allow for a look at advertising from a different lens, fostering appropriate changes in future advertising endeavors. Perhaps by analyzing the ideologies embedded in the ads, a way could be found to acknowledge and support contemporary ideals as well. Significant data were obtained through a thorough analysis of thirty-one Kay Jewelers commercials and were additionally viewed and coded by three other individuals.

This study contends, through a feminist theoretical analysis, that Kay utilizes key elements of heteronormative love as a means to persuade and influence men to purchase their jewelry products. Through this underpinning of heteronormative romance, Kay Jewelers emphasizes the notion that an artifact, like a piece of jewelry, is necessary in order to properly express true feelings and communicate the message effectively to a heterosexual partner, consequently excluding the American gay and lesbian community. This in turn, hyper-ritualizes the act of gift giving and appeals to a masculine population using the appearance of a feminine appeal, creating a unique discourse of masculinity. Moreover, I will discuss how Kay Jewelers advertisements also reinforce the construction of nuclear families. This analysis reveals that traditional views of romantic love and marriage are perpetuated in these adverts, stifling contemporary ideals and reinforcing heteronormativity.

I utilized an ideological criticism from a feminist perspective on this project. This also involved performing an intercoder reliability check on the thirty-one advertisements that I coded. According to Burla, Knierim, Barth, Liewald, Duetz, and Abel (2008), analysts can help provide a valid instrument for quality assurance, help to identify weaknesses in the coding process, as well as improve clarity in the coding system data. By using coders with diverse personalities and individuals who work in different environments, reliability can be indicated by substantial agreement of results among these duplications. In order to assess the quality of the coding, all three coders coded the same body of content, including all thirty-one Kay Jewelers commercials (Kay Jewelers, 2012-2015). In my analysis, I address the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do commercial advertisements market love and marriage?

RQ 2: How do commercial advertisements represent heterosexual love?

RQ 3: How are masculine gender roles represented?

RQ 4: How do commercial advertisements reinforce the construction of nuclear families?

The next chapter presents the theoretical literature that served as the foundation for the study. In order to illustrate the need to investigate these perspectives of advertising from a communication standpoint, the study's review of literature will provide: an overview of the current existing approaches to the critical study of advertising that take a look at mass communication and their social and cultural effects. The next section explores the role of romantic love as an ideology and how its been conceptualized in past research. Also, the next chapter examines the tradition of heteronormativity, how it ideologically permeates our culture, and how ritual heterosexism is perpetuated on television and other forms of media. Furthermore, this section will also discuss how gender roles are represented in advertising, including: gender segments, the utilization of sex appeal, and male identity. Following this section, ritual advertising is considered. Finally, the chapter reviews patriarchy and the nuclear family, concluding with the theoretical framework of feminist theory: the history, epistemology, and how the theory relates to the aim of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Existing Approaches to the Critical Study of Advertising

There is a substantial amount of literature that addresses the role of mass communication and advertising within the institutional structures of contemporary capitalist societies. Specifically, critical research of the study of advertising has addressed the social and cultural effects of mass communication and their role in preserving an unjust social order (Harms & Kellner, 1991). For example, Erving Goffman's (1979) *Gender Advertisements*, Williamson's (1978) *Decoding Advertisements*, and Andren, Ohlsson, and Tannsjö (1978) *Rhetoric and Ideology in Advertising*, have "examined the content and structure of advertisements for their distorted communication and ideological impact" (Harms & Kellner, 1991, p. 41). By employing semiotics and/or content analysis, numerous critical studies have been able to examine how advertising's mass communication "persuades" or "manipulates" consumers at a micro level (Harms & Kellner, 1991). On the contrary, the works of Schiller (1971) and Ewen (1976) locate advertising and mass communication within the history of contemporary capitalism and examine their impact on the larger social and political economic structure (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Furthermore, Harms and Kellner (1991) explain that the main objective of a critical study of advertising is to investigate how advertising and mass media have "contributed to the development and reproduction of an undemocratic social order by concentrating enormous economic and cultural power in the hands of a few corporations and individuals" (p. 41). These aspects of critical media studies generate insight into the conservative social functions and ideological effects of mass communication (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

There are several aspects of critical theory of advertising (CTA) that must be taken into account: (1) CTA must analyze its economic functions as a manager of consumer demand and of market share, as well as its impact as an ideological force in social reproduction; (2) CTA should provide methods and examples of reading advertising critically, which shows how ads are rhetorically constructed, how they communicate and manipulate, and how individuals can resist their seductions and fascination; (3) CTA should draw on the most advanced work in semiotics, post-structuralism, feminism, hermeneutics, and other methods of interpretation and ideology critique, as well as on critical social theory; (4) CTA should operate from a standpoint of human emancipation from unnecessary and unjust forms of domination; and (5) CTA should attempt to ascertain the effects of advertising on the economy, politics, culture, and everyday life and propose remedies for its harmful effects (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Moreover, from a critical perspective, advertising occupies a crucial crossroads between economics, culture, politics, and society that is situated at the center of important social developments and processes. Therefore, the power of advertising is multi-faceted: it becomes a privileged discourse in a new symbolic environment, which shapes consumption, as well as the form and content of media, politics, and thought and behavior. Harms and Kellner (1991) argue that all national advertising should be increasingly taxed just as other “sin industries” are. Also, to limit its harmful effects, advertising should be more actively regulated. Additionally, Harms and Kellner (1991) support the elimination of commercial bulk mailing and telephone solicitation because of its intrusive nature. Most importantly, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) needs to be more active in monitoring the ownership and control of the various mass media. Overall, this critical theory of advertising suggests that it is not unrealistic to dream of a world that is not riddled with advertising that is a burden on contemporary capitalism (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

## 2.2 The Role of Romantic Love

Romantic love is a defining sentiment of our culture. The ideology of romance has undergone immense changes over time, moving from a courtly idea of love to a quest for self-fulfillment (Branden, 1980). However, while some observe the rampant individualism of contemporary love, others suggest that love is moving away from self-fulfillment to the idea of androgynous interdependence (Cancian, 1990). In other words, Cancian (1990) explains that instead of love being a strictly feminized concept, it has moved into an androgynous idea of love, giving both partners responsibility for the relationship. However, Illouz (1997) focuses more on how mass communication has affected the way romance is perceived. She sees romance undergoing two different interconnected processes: the romanticism of commodities and the commodification of romance. The romanticism of commodities is a visual idea of love as spectacle that has been transmitted by mass communication to the public as production and consumption have continued to expand. Romanticizing commodities occurs when the media portray certain products and services as romantic (Illouz, 1997). For example, a cheap fast-food meal is not considered a romantic gesture, but a three-course candle-lit dinner at a five star restaurant is. These images of how romance *should* be as portrayed through the media perpetuate traditional romantic ideals.

Past research has predominantly approached the study of romantic ideals in two ways. First, according to one conceptualization, romantic ideals refer to traits unique to each partner and relationship (Markey & Markey, 2007). In this realm, researchers ask participants to rate their ideal and current partner on a list of ratings (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Moreover, the definition of a romantically ideal partner or relationship is unique to each individual, and pertains only to issues related to specific partners and relationships instead of to

love, romance, and the relationship process more broadly. The second conceptualization extends beyond individual partners and is instead a collection of expectations about relationships and love. In this sense, the romantic ideal is a set of beliefs about the power of love and the perfection of romance, and is generally comprised of the following four themes: love can overlook flaws; love can seek out the one perfect mate; love can happen instantaneously; and love can overcome all obstacles (Bell, 2008; Sprecher & Metts, 1999). It is this set of expectations that is a model for how a relationship should form, develop, function, and be maintained. This broader conceptualization is pertinent here because it relates to shared beliefs that exist in a culture and that extend beyond individual preferences. Such beliefs develop and get reinforced by cultural institutions such as schools, churches, and the media.

The U. S. American concept of romantic love incorporates three concepts in close, intimate relationships: self-disclosure, interdependence, and emotional warmth (Perlman and Fehr, 1987), whereas in other cultures, such as Indian, lack high degrees of these qualities, view marriage as being sacred, and still practice arranged marriages (Medora, Larson, Hortacsu, & Dave, 2002). In Medora et al.'s (2002) study, they sought to discover the differences in levels of romanticism in U.S., Asian-Indian, and Turkish young adults. The authors were also interested in investigating gender differences among these young adults' perceived attitudes toward romanticism. They found that American young adults had the highest romanticism scores, followed by Turkey and lastly, Asian-Indian with the lowest scores. These findings support Goode's (1959) theory in which he postulated that romantic love is valued and experienced more in industrialized and technologically advanced countries like the U.S. and Europe, while it is valued less in more collectivist, traditional, and less industrialized cultures. Medora et al. (2002) state that a probable reason for these cultural differences can be attributed to western society's

freedom of mate selection. In more traditional societies, familial obligation takes precedent over mate selection and marriage, making it less likely for individuals in these cultures to experience different facets of love (Medora et al., 2002). Moreover, these traditional ideals also place importance on the value of heteronormative relationships.

### **2.3 The Tradition of Heteronormativity**

Heteronormativity refers to an interdependence of gender and sexuality, which defines gender as a binary category and naturalizes sexual attraction as directed towards the opposite gender. Non-heterosexual structures of desire (homo- and bisexuality, transgender, trans-, inter-, asexuality, etc.) are marginalized as deviating from the heterosexual norm, and are also regulated by it (Jackson, 2006). Yet, when we discuss “the heterosexual norm” we talk about a hegemonic form of heterosexuality, which can be described as “traditional gender arrangements and lifelong monogamy” (Seidman, 2005, p. 59-60). Heteronormativity, as a concept, originates from queer theory as a critique of feminist movements and theories that reproduce gender as heterosexual norm, and was used first by Michael Warner (1991) in the introduction to a special edition of the journal of *Social Text*, titled *Fear of a Queer Planet*. In the article, Warner (1991) explored heteronormativity itself and its underlying power structure. Judith Butler’s (1990) “heterosexual matrix,” which represents a social and cultural system of order, forces humans into the form of social binaries and clearly distinct genders, which are hierarchically positioned. The desire is targeted at the oppositional gender and thus forms gender and sexual identity.

Ideological, ritualistic patterns pervade the culture at large in everything from commercials and magazines to television. Through these mediums we can observe how television has helped to uphold heteronormative customs, continually reinforcing traditional gender roles, while standing watch over sacred institutions, such as marriage (Tropiano, 2009).

Rituals of heterosexual celebration such as Valentine's Day, weddings, and anniversaries, provide concealing images of reality that both historically and materially support heterosexuality (Ingraham, 1994). Television also continues to perpetuate the heterosexual imaginary, "the belief system that relies on romantic and sacred notions of heterosexuality in order to create and maintain the illusion of well-being" (Ingraham, 1999, p. 16). Similarly, television also provides a marketplace for the construction of the heteronormative nuclear family. The underlying premise of the heterosexual imaginary-heteronormativity is the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and expected social and sexual relations, and also ensures that heterosexuality as an organization, upholds gender, weddings, and marital status as both a model and the norm (Ingraham, 1999). Tropiano (2009) examined a 2004 game show, *Playing It Straight*, in which a love seeking female contestant had to determine the sexual orientation of her male suitors. He argued that the show transformed heteronormativity into a performance and revealed how the construction of heterosexuality depends upon the recognition and exclusion of homosexuality.

Considering this exclusion, rituals, like weddings, expose profound legal inequality that is reinforced by legal authority through 2015 when the U.S. Supreme Court in effect legalized gay marriage. Oswald (2001) analyzed the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people who attended family weddings in order to "understand how outsiders within status can be produced during religious ritual" (p. 39). She explained that by partially redefining LGBT people as "other," it serves as a way to uphold heterosexual norms. Oswald (2001) found that weddings could produce a sense of "outsiderness" for members of the LGBT community when the rituals are manipulated by heterosexist religious practices. Moreover, the qualitative findings from her study inspired her next article, in which she examined what factors lead gay men and women to

attend family rituals and how they affect their sense of belonging during the event. In this quantitative study, she found that partners were more likely to be invited when they had a visible coupling (Oswald, 2002); further dismissing the LGBT community, only in this case, for not being in a romantic relationship.

From an advertising standpoint, the majority of advertisers seem to present a worldview that ignores the gay and lesbian audiences, reinforcing the cultural dominance of heterosexuals in society. This overlooked sub-group of the population captured the attention of marketers in the 1990s as an untapped resource, making this marketing segment an evident treat for hungry corporate giants (Wardlow, 2014). Two advertisements stand out as examples of this type of advertising: (1) A Donna Karen of New York (DKNY) advertisement in the November issue of the gay and lesbian magazine, *Out* (1998). This advertisement, which introduced the DKNY shirt and tie collection, shows a woman adjusting an exceptionally attractive man's tie. The two are gazing into each other's eyes and leaning in for a kiss. This ad in the gay media is ambiguous in that it does not seem to be made for gays and lesbians. Reinforcing the notion of heterosexuality in nature, it appeals more towards a bisexual audience who can appreciate the heteronormative aspects; (2) The Bud Light ad in the September issue of *Out* (1998). This advertisement features a bottle of Bud Light strapped to a red sequenced platform heel. This advertisement, while eye-catching, seems to suggest that gay beer drinkers are flamboyant; stereotyping gay men.

One way in which marketing efforts can stereotype individuals or groups of people is through niche marketing, which focuses on marketing a specific product to a specific subset of that market. In niche marketing, groups tend to lose their range of diversity and identity because advertisers apply a one-size-fits-all marketing approach (Bhat, 1996). However, Bhat (1996) argues that the "homosexual" market cannot be described as a niche market because niche refers

specifically to consumers with the same basic needs. Moreover, Bhat (1996) explains that these needs are related to the 4 Ps of marketing strategy: price, product, promotion, and placement. Furthermore, she also insists that “homosexuals” are not one in the same, therefore, advertisers should not use market strategies that make that assumption. Chasin (2001), in response to Rivendall Advertising, stated that “their ads seem to represent all gay people as male, highly educated, and affluent, with consumption patterns that include unusually frequent travel, liquor and music purchases, and the like” (p.36). From this perspective, the lack of diversity in gay and lesbian advertising strategies is apparent.

## **2.4 The Representation of Gender Roles in Advertising**

### **2.4.1 Gender Segments**

Advertising is sold on the basis of the demographics of the audience expected to view the advertisements. Gender is a frequently used variable for persuasive appeal because it meets the requirements for successful implementation of segmentation strategies (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). As illuminated by Darley and Smith (1995), significant gender differences across a variety of tasks and traits have been demonstrated in past studies. Also explained is that gender segments are large enough to be profitable, while also remaining easily identifiable and accessible. What is more, how males and females process advertising information is perhaps the most important aspect of these gender segments (Darley & Smith, 1995). Advertising also tends to stereotype according to gender roles; therefore earlier studies have focused on the gender differences in information processing. For example, Poole (1977) found that females tend to use more evaluative concepts to conceptualize items, while males focus more on physical attributes. Similarly, Broverman et al. (1968) suggest that females are more subjective and intuitive, while males processing orientation is characterized as more logical and analytical.

More specifically, it has also been reported that females are more accurate at decoding nonverbal cues than men, as well as being more visually oriented, easily influenced, innately motivated and romantic (Darley & Smith, 1995). According to the selectivity model (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991), females attempt to understand all available cues and use a comprehensive strategy. Additionally, women are more likely to display a greater sensitivity to particular points of relative information while forming judgments, as well as engaging in a detailed analysis of the available information. Males, on the other hand, tend to engage more selectively in processing the available information as a basis for judgment and heuristic devices are commonly utilized for more detailed processing. These devices involve the use of highly available cues that apply to a single inference (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991). However, it should be noted that the way these researchers categorize women is not how today's advertisers see women as an audience currently. Studies mentioned from this point have a much broader perspective on gender segments in advertising.

Keeping these gender segment differentiations in mind, a discussion of the implications of gender for general consumer activities, gender-related variables (sex, gender-role attitudes, and gender identity) and their influence on gender-typed consumer behavior is appropriate. Fischer and Arnold (1990) surveyed 299 men and women on the effect of gender-related variables on Christmas-gift shopping patterns. The authors found that women are more involved than men in shopping related activities. However, men that held egalitarian, or more open gender-role attitudes were more likely to be more involved in gift purchasing. Overall, Fischer and Arnold (1990) concluded that Christmas shopping is most widely interpreted as "women's work." More recent studies, however, have focused on gender differences in online-shopping activities. Existing evidence from research shows the importance of gender differences in

influencing consumers' online shopping behaviors. Previous research has indicated that gender relates to the perception towards online shopping, influencing preferences and purchase decisions over the Internet. For example, Slyke, Comunale, and Balanger (2002) found that men's perceptions of the characteristics of online shopping were more favorable than women's. Men rated the compatibility, relative advantages and trustworthiness of online shopping higher and rated complexity lower than women did. Similarly, Rodgers and Harris' (2003) study revealed that men placed greater trust in Internet shopping and perceived the Internet as a more convenient shopping outlet than women did. However, interestingly, a study by Kim and Kim (2004) showed that gender was a significant predictor in determining consumers' online purchase intentions for clothes, jewelry or accessories. The authors found that female consumers showed greater online purchase intentions for clothes, jewelry and accessories than male consumers. This finding is important for future research considering the omni-channel experience we have today and how that influences and contributes to online jewelry consumption in regards to gender segments.

#### **2.4.2 Utilizing Sex Appeal**

Using sex appeal as means to promote a product is not a new phenomenon. Advertisements strive to be interesting, attention grabbing and memorable in order to serve the important commercial purpose of increasing product awareness (Parker & Furnham, 2007). This increased product awareness is, in turn, geared to the ultimate goal of increasing the likelihood that viewers will purchase the goods or service advertised (Bushman, 2007). More specifically, advertisers recognize that using sexual content in their advertisements can increase this effectiveness and sex in advertising is commonly utilized to this end with great success. For example, since viewers do not remember advertised content to which they did not pay attention,

sex related marketers often use attention grabbers as an effective tool (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). These attention-grabbing devices are based on three themes: (1) sexual attractiveness for the consumer; (2) likely engagement in sexual behavior (and enjoyment of these encounters); and (3) sex esteem defined as the feeling of being sexy or sensual (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003).

Most sex appeal studies define what appeals should be included, such as sexual behaviors, attractiveness and nudity (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). It has also been suggested that a sexually charged advertisement can lead to greater behavioral intentions to purchase the product (Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001). However, Schudson (2013) posits that sexual appeals are used to grab consumers' attention and not necessarily to sell a product. Although the majority of the literature suggests that sexually charged advertisements outperform their non-sexual counterparts, there are some contradictory findings. For example, Parker and Furnham (2007) failed to find an effect of sexual content on recall, and Fried and Johanson (2008) provided evidence to suggest that sexual content can be a distraction that interferes with the processing of the product information. Moreover, Fried and Johanson (2008) suggest that one possible confounding factor is the precise nature of the depiction of sexual activity and whether it is of a romantic or non-romantic nature and setting. This is difficult to control for in both advertisements and television programs and could in part explain ambiguous findings.

Also at risk when using sexual appeal is the audience's reaction. LaTour and Henthorne's (1994) study of consumers' reactions to sexual appeals in print advertising concluded that consumers reacted more negatively to overt sexual appeals. Their study documented the consumers' responses as a reflection of current societal attitudes and moral standards. LaTour and Henthorne (1994) also noted that sexual appeals range from overt sexual appeals from nudity to subtle sexual innuendos. They also suggest that advertisers grapple with balancing the

attention-getting sexual appeals with the potential negative responses to these appeals. One final issue they bring to light is the assumption of reactions from the advertisers' intended audience (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994). Although Kay Jewelers does not utilize overt sex appeal, they do indirectly use attractiveness and sexualize objects in a more conservative manner. With this in mind, the question arises whether these subtle sexual appeals are the reason for such effective advertisements.

### **2.4.3 Male Identity**

Some researchers argue that men experience tension between conforming to the social expectations of manliness and the desire to break away from the consumption of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Ourahmoune (2009) contends that society is going through a change in men's identity in private and public circles due to social mutations. Similarly, Shugart (2008) explored metro sexuality in popular culture, suggesting that metro sexuality serves as a crucial rhetorical function for the reconciliation of commercial masculinity with normative masculinity by organizing homosociality in strategic ways. She notes that some scholars assert that, "masculinity is the perceived feminine character of consumption and commodification" (p. 287). Clearly, consumption of advertisements plays a key role in the construction and representation of gender roles, but perhaps further research is needed to discover how companies use less normative demonstrations of masculinity and take a more feminine stance in order to appeal to male consumers in a unique context.

### **2.5 Ritual Advertising**

Theorist Erving Goffman (1976) has significantly contributed to media studies and is of great importance as an analyst of interpersonal talk and social interaction. He proposes that advertisements mediate the ritualized interaction orders of society in a way that anticipates and is

already adapted to the variety of readings it will be subject to. He described this emphasis on ideological meaning as “hyper-ritualization”:

The standardization, exaggeration, and simplification that characterize rituals in general are in commercial posing found to an exaggerated degree, often rekeyed as babyishness, mockery, and other forms of unseriousness...Advertisers conventionalize our conventions, stylize what is already a stylization, and make frivolous use of what is already something considerably cut off from contextual controls. Their hype is hyper-ritualization. (Goffman, 1979, p. 84)

Moreover, Goffman rejects the notion that television causes people to become passive recipients of advertisers’ fabrications and holds out little hope that illusion can ever disseminate.

As holidays filter in and out throughout the year, media advertisements cycle through traditional motifs, highlighting ritual symbolism, such as hearts, pumpkins, turkeys, Christmas trees, etc. Some scholars, such as McCracken (1986), have argued that advertising has the ability to influence ritual behaviors that have been shown to direct consumption. In order to explore this relationship between advertising and consumer rituals, Otnes and Scott (1996) provide a theoretical framework by tracing a set of ritual symbols through a collection of ads, illustrating the subtlety of influence that advertisements have on cultural institutions. By analyzing De Beers’ wedding advertisements, they argue that advertising often communicates that certain ritualized products are appropriate and even necessary in new ritual contexts. These ads also attempt to shape potential consumers ritual experience by portraying different artifacts as belonging together in a ritual context. I believe this to be remarkably similar to what Kay Jewelers is trying to achieve in their commercial advertisements by putting emphasis on the ritual experience by highlighting traditional values and norms.

An interesting aspect of ritual consumption to consider is the spectacle of marriage proposals that represents an important step in intimate relationships, shifting the nature of their rapport from casual dating down a path towards marriage. Schweingruber, Anahita, and Berns (2004) examined engagement proposals by interviewing 20 heterosexual engaged couples about their proposals. They found through their analysis that the proposals enacted by the couples were merely performances put on by the couples to communicate to each other, as well as family and friends, that they intended to be wed and were entering the engagement phase of their relationship (Schweingruber et al., 2004). In this sense, marriage proposals can be explained as a symbolic ritual enacted by social agents following socially accepted roles (Schweingruber et al., 2004).

Another aspect of ritual consumption to consider is how tangible gifts are used as key ritual elements in American dating. Television advertising creates appealing commercials that imply that words cannot fully express human emotion and that in order to communicate sincere feelings an aid is needed. For example, “say it with a bouquet of...” (King, 1991, p. 54), inferring that instead of simply saying, “I love you,” words should be accompanied by a romantic gesture, like bringing flowers or jewelry. Similarly, in Kay Jeweler’s commercials their tagline is, “Every kiss begins with Kay,” implying that at least a kiss is guaranteed from a significant other if the consumer buys their diamonds. Likewise, Belk and Coon (1991) see money and material gifts as symbolic vehicles that say what cannot be said in words. They sought to fill the research gaps that did not account for monetary and material aspects of relationships in Western society. The authors found that gifts given early in the relationship were a way to impress dates and say “thank you for going out with me.” In general, there was an agreement across all participants in the study that the nature of gift giving changed throughout

the course of the relationship. The longer the couple remained together, the less extravagant the gifts became (Belk & Coon, 1991), suggesting that the type of gift given is dependent upon situation and length of time together.

The act of gift giving can be seen as ordinary but special, with its own set of social expectations. Robles (2012) argues that individuals encounter difficulties in the process of offering assessments of gifts, and that such troubles are attributed to the problem of constructing positive assessments as authentically given. She explains that, “part of what makes gift-exchange occasions ritualistic in nature is that they have cultural norms or rules which guide how they are expected to unfold” (p. 755). Gifting is a moral constitution of ideologies based on how to demonstrate an appreciation for others. As Areni, Kiecker, and Palan (1998) found, gift exchange behavior has generally suggested that women are more concerned with giving gifts than men are. However, after reviewing the narratives given by women, they almost exclusively discussed receiving gifts rather than giving gifts when they were asked to describe memorable gift exchanges. This intrigued the researchers, concluding that perhaps the way the instructions were explained generated thoughts of unique exchanges among the female respondents. Additionally, Areni et al. (1998) suggest that men devote considerable effort to the task of giving gifts and that marketers would benefit from developing year-round, distinctive marketing programs targeted to males. In chapter four, I argue that Kay Jewelers does just that, marketing to a male audience using feminine appeals in order to give them insight into what their heterosexual partner might want as a gift from their store.

## **2.6 Patriarchy and the Nuclear Family**

Patriarchy is one of many forms of male dominance, embedded in the father figure role, and is often encircled in an ideology of protection and compassion, as well as power and control.

In the technical sense, patriarchy is a structure and is organized around three dyads and their different kinds of interaction: 1) the relationship between a patriarchal figure of some sort and other men; 2) heterosexual relationships among the men themselves; and 3) the relationships between men and women (Ortner, 2014). Moreover, in a more classical sense, Ortner (2014) explains that the patriarchal structure is comprised of a leader who rewards and punishes men; a body of men who compete for status and power within the group among themselves and the leader; and relationships and non-relationships with women, who are either excluded from the group, or included under the condition of being controlled and subordinated.

Ortner (2014) sought to bring focus and attention to the patriarchy of the twenty-first century American audience. She discusses ways in which feminism has fallen off the contemporary political agenda, leaving a political vacuum with respect to patriarchy as a system of power. Also, she used a number of films as texts to examine how patriarchy persists forcefully and brutally in contemporary society, not only as a single entity, but as a form of power intersecting and organizing with twentieth and twenty-first century capitalist institutions. She also reflects on the films as cultural texts, but more specifically, as political interventions that partially counter the post feminist tendencies. Through the three films she considered, *North Country* (Caro, 2005), *The Invisible War* (Dick, 2012), and *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (Gibney, 2005), she illustrates that patriarchy is still alive and well in the United States today and remains a damaging force. Additionally, she investigates the variety of harms that patriarchal order inflicts, not only on women but also on men and those persons who do not fit into a normative gender role, as well as how the model plays out both in itself and in intersectional relationship with other forms of power in advanced capitalist societies (Ortner, 2014).

Additionally, Ornter (2014) found that insofar as feminism has survived as a scholarly and/or political project, it is almost entirely concerned with women and/or gender. What she feels has largely disappeared is a concern for patriarchal power, a concern that was so central to early feminist work. Yet, in the course of watching a large number of American independent films she was intrigued by the degree to which patriarchy is still virtually everywhere. Her goal is to make patriarchy visible again and to show that it is not something that should be ignored. Overall, she illustrated not only how patriarchy works as a specific arrangement of power relations in its own right, but also how it is deeply enmeshed with other systems of power in this advanced capitalist society (Ortner, 2014). Many feminist scholars are doing work very similar to Ortner and these studies illustrate the problems that feminist scholars are trying to address today.

In regards to advertising, it has two primary functions. First, to create needs and desires that ensure the consumption of mass-produced goods (Strasser, 1989) and second, to educate consumers about their role in the production cycle (Ewen, 1976). As previously mentioned, critical advertising studies analyze commercial images to reveal the powerful ideological messages that are repeated across campaigns (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Scholars in this tradition argue advertising messages are more than a method to encourage consumption. Through the use of recognizable codes (Jhally, 1987), advertisements communicate cultural meanings and reinforce existing social order. Berlant and Warner (1998) posit, “the family form has functioned as mediator and metaphor of national existence in the United States” (p. 549). As a result, representations of the family in U.S. advertising are used to situate products in everyday situations that reflect cultural conditions (de Mooij, 2010). Studies of the depiction of families in advertising have tended to focus on representations of gender and the portrayal of children.

Goffman (1976) identified the nuclear family as a dominant cultural referent in 1970s advertising in a section of his study on gender representations in advertising. Moreover, Goffman (1976) found that many of the codes of gender present in advertising were particularly salient in portrayals of the family, with women and children often depicted in similar ways.

Also of importance, some studies have explored illustrations of families in advertising using the presence of children to determine whether or not an advertisement will be included for analysis. Brown (1981) notes that advertisers are obvious in their illustrations, arguing that viewers can discern whether a scene depicts a family. In addition to the subjective judgment of viewers however, Brown (1981) adds a series of clues that signal a family scene including “the presence of wedding rings, children, intimate apparel such as pajamas and underwear, family rituals such as shared meals and visiting, and personal activities such as bathing and sleeping” (p.18). The inclusion of several of these clues in Kay Jewelers advertisements support the argument that they utilize the presence of family ideologies as one of the ways in which they promote their products.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory**

### **2.7.1 Definition and History of Feminism**

According to Offen (1988) feminism should be seen as a concept that can “encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society (p. 151). Historically, as a social movement, there have been three waves of feminism in the United States. The first wave in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is associated with the suffrage movement, which emerged from liberal, socialist politics and an environment of urban industrialism (Rampton, 2014). The second wave, from the 1960s through the 1990s had an increasingly radical voice that unfolded in the

context of anti-Vietnam War and social rights movements. This wave was symbolized by the Equal Rights Amendment and was concerned with areas such as equal pay, contraceptive rights, and the prevention of violence against women. However, during this time the voice of feminism was found amid a plethora of other social movements, including Black Power and the efforts to end the Vietnam War (Rampton, 2014); therefore, it was viewed as a less pressing issue and was marginalized. Additionally, the second wave was criticized for having spoken only for heterosexual, middle-class white women; excluding lesbians, bisexuals, women of color, women of low socioeconomic status and women with disabilities (Boisnier, 2003; hooks, 1989; Mack-Canty, 2004; Reid & Purcell, 2004; Siegel & Baumgardner, 2007).

The third wave began in the mid-1990s and is informed by post-modern thinking. This phase destabilizes many constructs, including the notions of universal womanhood, body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity (Rampton, 2014). Also in this phase is a re-adoption of lipstick, high heels and cleavage exposure by young feminists that were once associated with male oppression in the first two waves. Pinkfloor discussed this new position by saying, “it is possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time” (cited in Rampton, 2014). The “grrl” feminism proved to be more multi-cultural and shunned artificial categories of identity, gender and sexuality. “Its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc., are celebrated but recognized as dynamic, situational and provisional” (Rampton, 2014, para. 12). The fact that there is not just one ideology associated with feminism is a sign that it is indeed flourishing and successful.

### **2.7.2 Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory, deriving from Marxist theory (Anderson, 2011), exemplifies vital contributions to contemporary thinking. According to Humm (1995), it encompasses complex

links between theory and practice and between public and private, which is unique to feminism. Similarly, in contemporary theory, certain terms are used to sum up what appear to be the key experiences of women: work, family, patriarchy, and sexuality. Moreover, these concepts help to reveal core social processes and to discover what continually reappears in various disguises throughout women's history. It also reveals the importance of women's individual and shared experiences and their struggles, as well as how "sexual difference is constructed within any intellectual and social world and builds accounts of experiences from these differences" (Humm, 1995, p.xxi). What is more, feminist activists examine how societal institutions shape privilege and power, especially along gender lines (Commeyras, Orellana, Bruce, & Neilsen, 1996). For example, patriarchy is the foundation of this power imbalance and serves as a structure for society's rituals and symbols (Ingraham, 1994).

When discussing patriarchy, it is important to note the perceptible cultural bias of consumerism and heterosexism. Humm (1995) explains that the concept of patriarchy was created in order for contemporary feminists to have a term for which they could express the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations that affect women and interestingly, each feminist theory finds that a different feature of patriarchy defines women's subordination. Heidi Hartmann (1976) defines patriarchy as a set of social relations within a material base operating on a system of male hierarchical relations and male solidarity. In other words, it is a male system, which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions, and within this notion that patriarchy operates as a sex-gender system, as well as a system of economic discrimination concurrently (Humm, 1995). From an economic standpoint, consumerism is evident in regards to patriarchy through the examination of couples, who otherwise successfully manage their finances, but are willing to spend beyond their means on an

event or artifact to symbolize their heterosexuality (Geller, 2001). Additionally, feminist theorists also agree that heterosexuality, as an institution and an ideology, is a cornerstone of patriarchy (Humm, 1995). The assumption of heterosexuality reinforces ignorance about LGBTQ perspectives, and begs the question if heterosexuality is the product of society or of a natural basis (Humm, 1995).

Another tool that plays a crucial role in feminist work in regards to human rights and development is intersectionality. Intersectionality is “an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (AWID, 2004, para. 2). Moreover, it is a feminist theory and is often used as a springboard for a social justice action agenda and aims to address the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structure the comparative positions of women (AWID, 2004). Intersectionality suggests that one should aim to reveal meaningful distinctions in order to overcome discriminations and have provisions in place for all people to enjoy their human rights to the fullest, not to portray one group as more victimized or privileged than another (AWID, 2004). Intersectional analysis also helps to visualize the merging of different types of discrimination- as points of intersection or overlap, as well as to understand the impact of these converging identities. Furthermore, as a theoretical paradigm, intersectionality allows us to see that “the claims women are making for their equal rights are not merely an instance of a self-interested group promoting its own interests, but instead fundamental to achieving the promise of human rights for all” (AWID, 2004, para.6). Overall, intersectionality aims to advance women’s rights and gender equality and when used correctly can be extremely empowering.

The remaining reasons why feminist theory is the most appropriate theory to justify my study can be explained by feminists' focus on gender. Gender been found to be a universal, organizing construct of culture that individuals use to organize their identities, roles, relationships and lives (Humm, 1995). For example, materialist feminists, a subtype of feminism, pay attention to what is invisible; they focus on what is missing, how certain questions are asked while others are suppressed, and how specific behavior is portrayed as natural or normal (Ingraham, 1994). This approach is useful when analyzing the exclusion of gays and lesbians in Kay Jewelers advertisements. Moreover, feminist activists call for the examination of how societal institutions are shaped by a power imbalance that influences people's lives by distributing power unequally on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity (Ingraham, 1999), which benefits my study in examining engagements and the act of gift giving. Furthermore, Humm (1995) explains that most feminist theories regarding advertising agree that Western advertising is sexist, ageist, racist, and homophobic. Also, socialist and Marxist feminists argue that advertising obscures identifications of class and gender, while radical feminists believe advertisements reinforce patriarchal ideas of the nuclear family (Humm, 1995).

As previously mentioned and discussed, feminist theory is the overarching framework used to understand and identify the messages that are illustrated in the commercial advertisements, which are marketed to men using feminine appeals, challenging the ideology of masculinity. This theoretical approach is helpful in revealing the lessons that viewers are besieged with in terms of ideologies of romantic love and marriage. What is more, feminist theory also assists in revealing and examining the ideologies of patriarchy, gender, and heterosexuality. As discussed throughout this literature review, numerous studies have examined various media of advertising. However, there seems to be a lack of research concerning

commercial advertising specifically, especially in analyzing the ideologies that they epitomize. To further the justification of this research, the next chapter will discuss an ideological criticism as a methodology.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study attempts to probe the ideologies of Kay Jewelers advertisements, as well as its greater meaning in the U.S. culture of consumption by drawing on a feminist theoretical perspective to reveal and discuss the themes that emerged from the research, including: the heteronormative assumptions maintained by the use of hyper-ritualized gift giving and their emphasis as necessary aids; the novel discourse of masculinity revealed by using feminine appeals in the advertisements, and highlighting the construction of nuclear families. This chapter explains the methodological framework that was employed for the research on Kay Jewelers advertisements. The primary methodological tool that was utilized in this study is an ideological criticism. An ideological criticism allows for consideration of all aspects of the advertisements content (visuals, dialogue, and text) in terms of their ideological implications. The primary goal of an ideological analysis is “to discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it” (Foss, 2004, p. 243). An ideological criticism suits this study as its methodological approach because the Kay Jewelers television advertisements serve as the source of the content, which allows for the evaluation of the symbolic beliefs constructed by both images and language represented in the ads.

#### **3.1 Why Kay Jewelers?**

Kay Jewelers was chosen as the artifact for this study because of several determining factors. First, it is owned by Signet Jewelers, who is the largest specialty retail jeweler in the U.S, Canada, and the U.K. (Signet Annual Report, 2015). Signet has been around since 1949, originally known as the Ratner Group, and after a series of acquisitions starting in 1987 its influence began to grow. They acquired Kay, Osterman, Westhall, and Weisfeld, as well as

various Sterling Jewelers brand groups. Signet further expanded their footprint when they purchased Jared the Galleria of Jewelry in 1993 and now undeniably holds the market after purchasing Zales Corporation (including Zales, Peoples, and Piercing Pagoda) for \$1.4 billion on May 29, 2014; their sales continue to grow at an annual rate of 12% (Lieber, 2015; Signet Annual Report, 2015). Second, because Signet has found success in targeting the midmarket jewelry segment. This encompasses items that sell for between \$100 and \$10,000 and according to Signet's chief executive, Mark Light, they claim to target this segment because it is where they anticipate long-term growth (Lieber, 2015). Light further explains that within five years, Signet wants to grow its visibility in the jewelry market and hit specific goals, including five strategic pillars: maximize the mid-market, best in bridal, best in class digital ecosystem, expand footprint, and people, purpose, and passion (Lieber, 2015; Signet Annual Report, 2015). These pillars are considered the guide to building a profitable market share for Signet Jewelers.

Finally, because Signet's spoken mission is to help guests "Celebrate Life and Express Love" (Signet Annual Report, 2015, p.5). While they do continue marketing activities throughout the year, Signet concentrates on periods of time where consumers are expected to be the most receptive to marketing messages, which are just before major holidays such as Christmas Day, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day (Signet Annual Report, 2015). A large portion of their budget is spent on national television advertising, used to promote the store brands. Within these advertisements, Signet also promotes certain products, particularly its exclusive and branded merchandise (Signet Annual Report, 2015). The Kay Jewelers television advertisements for their exclusive products that are examined in this study include: "Artistry Diamonds" collection, "genuine diamonds in an ultimate palette of colors"; "Charmed Memories" collection, "a create your own charm bracelet collection"; "Diamonds in Rhythm"

collection, “diamonds set at precise angles to allow for continuous movement of the center diamond and its amazing effect”; “Le Vian” collection, “the exclusive collections of jewelry famed for its handcrafted unique designs and colors”; “Leo Diamond” collection, “the first diamond to be independently and individually certified to be visibly brighter”; “Neil Lane Bridal”, “a vintage-inspired bridal collection by the celebrated jewelry designer Neil Lane”; “Open Hearts” by Jane Seymour, “a collection of jewelry designed by the actress and artist Jane Seymour”; and “Tolkowsky” collection, “an ideal cut diamond, invented by Tolkowsky, Perfected by Tolkowsky” (Signet Annual Report, 2015, p. 12). Although other brands, such as Tiffany’s, may have more prestige and status among the jewelry industry, when it comes to sales, even the most coveted brands struggle while Signet continues to prosper (Lieber, 2015). This can be attributed to how well Signet expresses emotion in their advertisements and the time frames in which they choose to market these messages.

### **3.2 Methodological Framework**

This study is an extension of a previous study which sought to investigate the ideological underpinnings associated with Kay Jewelers advertisements by exploring males as the target consumers, the utilization of heteronormative love as a means of persuasion, and artifacts as necessary aids to express and communicate sincere feelings successfully (Hill, 2014). The current study examined thirty-one Kay Jewelers commercials with advertisements that range from 2012 to 2015 and are a compilation of all the Kay Jewelers advertisements available on ispot.tv, a platform for brands, agencies, networks, and developers to track paid television media and measure ad effectiveness, optimize television media, and analyze competitors. To analyze these data, a technique of open coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) was utilized. The process of open coding is important because it allows the researcher to interpret the information from the

advertisements in a way that establishes themes in order to articulate and extend relationships between Kay Jewelers advertisements, the content derived from the advertisements, and the way the themes are categorized in order to offer a meaningful argument. Coding began with two to three viewings of each advertisement, looking for observable aspects of the artifacts that would answer the research questions. After locating each advert on ispot.tv and bookmarking the corresponding links, this initial stage of analysis consisted of recording a few brief comments for each ad, noting production elements, unique phrasings or dialogue, and/or immediate thoughts or associations. Additionally, a commercial list was generated noting the name of the ad, the line of jewelry it was advertising, the last date the ad aired, during what show and what network it was last aired on, and the number of total national airings. After viewing all thirty-one advertisements, additional notes were recorded to document initial impressions and perceived trends among the ads. The notes from each advertisement were arranged into groups by collection, numbered, and labeled accordingly. From there, an open coding process was used to produce a list of reoccurring themes across the commercials.

To document relationships between preliminary themes, the themes were collapsed into more concise categories that articulate the relationships among the themes that were emerging from the research. These themes include: advertising heteronormative love through the hyper-ritualization of gift giving, as well as through unique aspects of the discourse of masculinity and nuclear family constructs. The goal of this research was to discover, document, and understand how Kay Jewelers communicates traditional ideologies of romance and marriage through their advertisements, while excluding gay and lesbian couples or families that do not fit the conventional and more widely accepted mold.

Additionally, three coders were utilized for intercoder reliability purposes. According to

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005), reliable measurement in content analysis – and in any other research method is crucial. Moreover, without reliable measures, any analysis using these measures becomes meaningless. Utilizing coders in this project provided additional validity for quality assurance, helped to identify weaknesses in the coding process, as well as improved clarity in the coding system (Burla, Knierm, Barth, Liewald, Duetz, & Abel, 2008). In order to assess these analyses, coders reviewed and coded the same body of content, including all thirty-one Kay Jewelers commercials. This intercoder reliability evaluation consisted of several main steps adapted from Mouter and Vonk Noordegraaf (2012) of the TRAIL Research School: 1) *Determining the scope of the intercoder reliability check*, which involved defining the categories and subcategories that were most relevant to the study goals; 2) *Drafting the protocol*, which involves outlining the definitions and rules that operationalize the categories and subcategories that needed to be specified in the coding protocol. This protocol makes it possible for other researchers to interpret the results; 3) *Determining the sample to be coded*, in which it is common to limit the intercoder reliability test to a sample of the content and also depends on the characteristics of the data, how large the sample will be. For the current study, all coders will be responsible for coding all thirty-one advertisements; 4) *a) Executing the coding*, in which the intercoder reliability check consists of coding and comparing the findings of the coders; 5) *Assessing the results and drawing conclusions*, which involves determining if the coders findings were similar to the researchers findings (Mouter & Vonk Noordegraaf, 2012).

When my three coders were chosen I supplied them a brief abstract of the study. Although I had already set up the themes from the results of open-coding the advertisements, I wanted to be sure that my findings were reliable by establishing that the coders had similar findings to my own. When I received their notes and feedback from the

ads I checked for key words and phrases that I had also noted during the coding process. These terms include: “heterosexual couples”, “male as purchaser”, “support”, “once in a lifetime experience”, “family”, “portrayal of masculine gender roles”, “material items”, “tradition”, “targeting men”, “male viewers”, “perfect gift”, “affection”, and “ritualistic”.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the how Kay Jewelers' advertisements construct ideologies of romantic love, masculinity, family, and heteronormativity. Preston (2000) states that through deconstruction of the message, it is possible to see the hidden symbolic messages aimed to multi-target a wide range of consumers. Deconstruction of the advertisements helped identify the most prevalent themes: hyper-ritualizing the act of gift giving, unique discourse of masculinity, championing heteronormativity, and reinforcement of the nuclear family. Once these emerging themes were identified, the advertisements as a whole were examined to see how they conveyed traditional ideologies of romantic love, if they were reflected in a positive or negative way, and what aspects of society were being muted or ignored. Then, the potential implications of these representations were examined. I argue that Kay Jewelers emphasizes the idea that an artifact, like a piece of jewelry, is necessary in order to properly express true feelings and communicate the message effectively using heteronormative influences and excluding the American LGBTQ community, consequently hyper-ritualizing the act of gift giving and appealing to a masculine population by urging men to consider what women want. This in turn, creates a unique discourse of masculinity. Furthermore, this analysis reveals how Kay Jewelers advertisements reinforce the construction of nuclear families. The following analysis highlights and reviews the themes that emerged from the research, discusses the theoretical foundation for each theme, provides examples from the advertisements, and lastly includes concluding remarks about the ideological underpinnings of the advertisements.

#### **4.1 Theme 1: Hyper-ritualizing the Act of Gift Giving**

Erving Goffman (1979) was one of the first researchers to explore gender roles portrayed in advertisements by looking at the subtle details in the images. Goffman (1979) also thought that gender roles were defined by social situation and claimed that even the subtlest details of a social situation could have meaning and convey cultural ideals of both sexes. Goffman (1979) additionally explained that advertisers manipulated both the models and settings of ads in order to create “a pseudo-reality that is better than the real” (p. 23). He believed that images shown in advertisements did not reflect how men and women actually conduct themselves, but how they thought they should conduct themselves. Therefore, the content of the commercials provide a “social purpose of convincing (the viewer) that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be, not only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other” (Goffman, 1979, p. vii). Furthermore, these ritualized traces of behavior bring to question the differences between the scenes illustrated in the advertisements and scenes from real life. Goffman (1979) suggested that hyper-ritualization could be a possibility. From a feminist theoretical perspective, this type of advertising technique is where the strongest evidence of patriarchal ideology (Humm, 1995) can be uncovered. The rest of this section will delve into the inner workings of hyper-ritualization and the ideologies embedded within this type of advertising technique.

#### **4.1.1 The Omni-Channel Experience**

In order to set the tone for this section, I want to discuss the connection between contemporary forms of advertising, such as the “Omni-channel” experience, and Erving Goffman’s (1979) idea of hyper-ritualization. Presently, consumers are becoming increasingly more connected through a shift known as the “Omni-channel” experience. Through this approach, Signet Jewelers (Kay Jewelers parent company) was able to increase their 2012 holiday online sales an impressive 49% as compared with the same period of time in 2011 (Berg,

2013). The omni-channel experience is one that “incorporates many technologies and touch points to create a shopping experience that is an informative, effortless, and even sharable as possible” (Berg, 2013). Moreover, this allows retailers to advance into a proactive model of consumer-empowerment and seamless interaction (Berg, 2013), creating a 24/7 digital world in hyper-ritualizing the act of gift giving, while building a fantasy in the minds of consumers that becomes even more common and effortless.

Signet Jewelers explains that there is a huge trust factor that is unique to the jewelry market due to its infrequency of purchase, high emotional content, and higher price-point purchase as compared to other retailers (Signet Annual Report, 2015). Furthermore, they convey the importance of engaging with their guests in order to make sales, especially with men.

Many of our guests, especially men, are unfamiliar with jewelry and perhaps even intimidated by the prospect of buying jewelry. Therefore, the efforts and expertise of our sector-leading team members are complemented by a very strong Signet online presence...Creating and maintain compelling, engaging websites, web content and social media platforms has proven to be critical to our company’s success. (Signet Annual Report, 2015, p. 5)

Moreover, Signet (2015) explains that although much of jewelry research is done online, a human communication element is required when it comes to committing to a purchase. Even the customers who buy the product online will choose to come pick it up in store in order to ensure that they are completely satisfied with the merchandise (Signet Annual Report, 2015). What this means for hyper-ritualization is that now this standardized and simplified way of shopping is not only hyper-ritualizing the product in solely an advertising sense, but is also in the way we are expected to shop. For example, the merchandise is being flowed from one medium to another

(commercials, print ads, websites, social media, in-store tablets/other related technology, etc.), exaggerated and hyper-ritualized at each interval. However, the “Omni-channel” experience is not the only way in which hyper-ritualization can be seen in regard to Kay Jewelers marketing techniques. It can also be viewed in the television advertisements themselves. The following subsections will focus on this aspect of hyper-ritualization.

#### **4.1.2 Fantasizing the Fantasy**

The scenarios presented in Kay Jewelers advertisements construct situations in which consumers can picture themselves performing the same acts that are being carried out on screen and present obvious elements of the ideology of romantic love. The ads pressure male consumers to live up to the moment and make it known that Kay Jewelers can correctly exhibit how to effectively carry out a proposal or express a particular emotion with the perfect gift, which they can provide. This is apparent in the 2012 “Neil Lane Bridal” collection commercial that explains, “It’s the moment when forever begins. Kay Jewelers presents the ring that lives up to the moment... forever begins here” (Kay Jewelers, 2012). The ad begins with a man and woman standing side by side on an outdoor patio overlooking a large city. There is a romantic table for two, set with candles and champagne nicely arranged. The man then gets down on one knee and the woman smiles. The male displays confidence in his nonverbal behaviors and seems certain that he already knows the answer to the question he is about to ask. There is a fantasy aspect that is strong in this commercial because of the display of confidence, all the elements of the romantic setting, and verbal communication here seems unnecessary because he can already tell from her reaction what her answer will be.

In 2014, Kay Jewelers released an advertisement for their “Diamonds in Rhythm” holiday line titled “The Penguin Kiss”. This ad also uses a fantasy scenario, which advertises

Kay Jewelers products as the best choice of merchandise to ensure a partner's happiness. In other words, not just any company's jewelry can be bought if the goal is to make her happy; it *needs* to come from Kay. "The Penguin Kiss" advert is a significant example of how Kay creates a fantasy for the male consumer for a positive outcome with gift presentation. The first piece of evidence for the claim is seen in the narrative description of the ad itself. "Upgrade your gift from the traditional pebble to the Kay Jewelers 'Diamonds in Rhythm' necklace. Your favorite penguin will thank you" (Kay Jewelers, 2014). What this is suggesting is that all other brands can be considered pebbles compared to the quality of a Kay Jewelers diamond. This depiction also communicates that the loved one will thank the giver, but only if it is a piece of jewelry from Kay. Kay Jewelers bases the value of the relationship on what brand of jewelry that is purchased.

The presenting of a pebble in penguin culture is an important symbolic act. It is their way of communicating love and commitment, considering they have no means of verbal communication. The way that Kay Jewelers manipulates this process is ideologically significant in that it takes an animal ritual and alters it to apply to the traditional beliefs and values we hold in today's consumerist society. The scene opens with the male penguin approaching a female penguin with a pebble in his mouth. He sets it down at her feet and the narrator explains, "A typical male penguin shows his love by offering the female a pebble" (Kay Jewelers, 2014). The female penguin then looks at the male penguin, tilts her head slightly, as if she is confused, and waddles away from the male penguin. In the distance there is another penguin couple and the narrator exclaims, "Some male penguins, however, are a little smarter than others" (Kay Jewelers, 2014). The second male penguin is shown pushing a Kay Jewelers box towards the female, revealing a "Diamonds in Rhythm" necklace. The female nestles up against the male's

chest and kisses him, displaying complete satisfaction with the diamond gift she has received as opposed to a traditional pebble. Kay Jewelers hyper-ritualizes this gift exchange to emphasize the importance of the quality of its diamonds by comparing it to a symbolic ritual performed by penguins, the presenting of the pebble. In this scenario, the male consumer buys a Kay Jewelers diamond that makes his female romantic interest fall in love with him and makes him feel superior to other consumers that are not buying from Kay.

Another way in which hyper-ritualization can be viewed is through marriage proposal advertisements. Eight Kay Jewelers marriage proposal commercials were studied for this research ranging from 2012 to 2015, and emerged as a way in which the fantasy element is perpetuated. When determining if this set of advertisements displayed aspects of romantic fantasy, this study looked at the setting, suggestive language, and the hyper-strong emotions utilized to bolster these romantic relationships seen in the advertisements. The setting for each advertisement varied but were usually situated around a traditional area associated with romance, i.e. a fancy restaurant or wooded area in the fall. However, one setting in particular stood out as a strong fantasy setting in which there were real people in a fantastic place. This 2015 commercial is titled "Red Carpet Proposal" and advertises for the Neil Lane Bridal collection. The description of the ad states, "Whether you're on the red carpet or at a romantic dinner for two, nothing beats wearing a piece of Neil Lane Bridal collection from Kay Jewelers" (Kay Jewelers, 2015). The fantasy element lies in this scenario where real people are getting engaged on a red carpet, with flashing lights and fabulous people surrounding them, and through the creation of a fantastic and unknown world to most, especially for the middle-class, which is the target market for Kay.

Language also plays a powerful role in developing the fantasy element. For example, common phrases throughout the commercials include statements such as, “When Hollywood’s premiere jewelry designer, Neil Lane creates a ring for today’s *biggest stars*, he designs it to look *fabulous* from every angle, and for his collection at Kay Jewelers he does the exact same thing” (Kay Jewelers, 2015). Additionally, other suggestive phrases are, “for the woman who shines the brightest,” “true beauty,” “now he designs for the star in your life,” “uniquely beautiful,” and “vintage glamour.” What Kay Jewelers accomplishes with phrases such as these, is a creation of situations in which men can fantasize about buying the perfect gift that will make his significant other feel like a star and can fantasize about their reaction when they say “yes.” Kay wants men to believe that they can pull off this over-the-top proposal that is presented in the advertisements as completely realistic.

Finally, strong emotions play a key role when it comes to advertising a fantasy scenario. In the majority of the ads there are visibly exaggerated non-verbal cues, such as gasps and extremely surprised facial expressions, and touching of an artifact (the jewelry) to show case it. For example, in a 2014 commercial highlighting Kay Jewelers favorite bridal bands, a man gets down on one knee to propose and the woman looks absolutely stunned, clasping her hands together and placing her hand on her chest in utter shock. She doesn’t even have to say “yes” in this commercial, her hyper-exaggerated emotional state says it all and he stands to kiss her without any verbal confirmation necessary. The next sub-section discusses women as the sole receivers of gifts in Kay Jewelers advertisements. This seems to be a characteristic of hyper-ritualization that is quite unique in advertising, since the main focus of all the ads in this case are women and this is not a common occurrence in the majority of advertisements.

#### **4.1.3 Women as the Sole Receivers of Gifts**

In all thirty-one Kay Jewelers advertisements that were analyzed for this study, females were the sole receivers of gifts in every one of the scenarios, no matter the age or race of the actors. The first set of Kay Jewelers advertisements that were analyzed regarding this sub-theme market the “Neil Lane Bridal” collection and the “Leo Artisan Diamond,” both popular lines of engagement rings sold at Kay. Although it is not surprising to observe an engagement ring being given to a woman, it is, however, an important example for the promotion of the heteronormative ideology of romantic love, considering that there are no gay or lesbian couples represented in any of Kay’s commercial advertisements.

Ideologically, there is significance in what it means for men to be the gift giver of these types of gifts and women as the recipients. Holidays, for example, provide valuable opportunities to explore societal values and normative conceptions of behavior and identity (Cote & Deutsch, 2008). Cote and Deutsch (2008) found in their study on gender construction through Mother’s Day and Father’s Day celebrations that holiday gendering was revealed through more stereotypical gifts associated with these holidays than others, such as birthdays and that the hegemonic notions of the gendered nature of motherhood and fatherhood were also reflected (Cote & Deutsch, 2008). Similarly, Kay Jewelers commercials that were analyzed pertaining to Mother’s Day, specifically the “Charmed Memories” collection, portrayed women as the primary care givers, depicting motherhood as their central identity.

The third set of Kay Jewelers advertisements that were analyzed market the “Open Hearts” collection and the “Charmed Memories” collection. Collectively, ten advertisements from these collections were evaluated ranging from 2012 to 2015 and are lines of necklaces, pendants, and charm bracelets sold at Kay. The “Open Hearts” symbolize the idea that by keeping one’s heart open love will find its way in, while the “Charmed Memories” are

handcrafted Italian bracelets that customers can customize themselves with hundreds of charms to choose from. These advertisements present Mother's Day gifts, thank you gifts, Christmas gifts, and an adoption celebration gift. Once again, all women were recipients of the present from their heterosexual partner with the exception of one. Although it is still a male to female exchange, one of the "Open Hearts" commercials is the story of a man getting ready to marry a single mother and offers an "Open Hearts" necklace to her daughter as a way to show his happiness of them becoming a family. He says to the little girl, "I'm so happy to be marrying your mom. You know that right? I know this hasn't been easy for you and I'm happy you're in my life too" (Kay Jewelers, 2014). This once again emphasizes the importance that Kay Jewelers puts on the symbolization of their artifacts (the jewelry), as well as also on heteronormative nuclear families.

#### **4.1.4 Unusual Gift Exchanges**

Three Kay Jewelers advertisements revealed rather unusual gift exchanges, which highlight gifts as necessary aids, hyper-ritualizing them in the process. The first example is from the 2012 commercial titled, "Graduation," and is advertising the "Open Hearts" collection by Jane Seymour. It begins with a Caucasian, heterosexual couple and their daughter coming together after the male (the husband) has graduated. He hands her a Kay Jewelers box with an "Open Hearts" necklace inside and says, "When things were tough, you kept believing in me. You helped make this happen, thank you" (Kay Jewelers, 2012). The daughter then exclaims, "you did it daddy," in which he replies, "WE did it." The couple kisses and the "Every kiss begins with Kay" tagline is sung. This is considered an unusual gift exchange because although it is the husband who is graduating, it is the wife that is receiving the gift for *his* accomplishment. Because of this unusual circumstance, the gift comes off as a necessary aid because it is not the

wife giving a gift to her husband for his accomplishment; it is the man feeling the need to use a gift as appreciation for her support. This commercial hyper-ritualizes by taking a standard act of saying “thank you” and turning it into a reason to buy an extravagant gift.

The second example is from the 2014 commercial titled, “Dad’s Room” and is also advertising the “Open Hearts” collection by Jane Seymour. It begins with a Caucasian, heterosexual couple discussing the Dad’s room. The woman is repositioning a picture of an older couple in the bedroom. The man states, “Hey, dad’s room looks great.” The woman then replies, “and after we get Sara some headphones it will be perfect.” At this point, the commercial is a little confusing given the indistinct nature of the commercial so far. However, the man goes on to say, “honey, thank you for making our home his home,” to which she responds, “Our home *is* his home.” The man then hands his wife a Kay Jewelers’ box. When she opens it, it reveals an “Open Hearts” necklace. The woman puts the necklace on and is looking at herself in the mirror, touching the necklace on her chest. She turns to look at her husband and they kiss. The commercial ends here with the tag line, “Every kiss begins with Kay.” This commercial is considered an unusual gift exchange because it is not a type of occasion where one would typically give a gift. The man’s father is simply moving into their house, yet she is apparently receiving a gift for understanding. The gift is portrayed as a necessary aid because it seems as though he did not know how else to say thank you other than buying a necklace from Kay Jewelers. Once again, this is taking a standard act of compassion and turning it into a reason to buy a material item, consequently hyper-ritualizing the act.

The third and final example is from a 2014 Kay Jewelers commercial advertising Citizen Watches. The scene opens with a view of kids running around with toys and older family members sitting on the couch. The grandfather is hit in the foot with a remote control car, in

which he exclaims, “Kids today, it’s all gadgets and Internet. Everything needs a battery.” The grandfather then witnesses his grandson giving his girlfriend a gift by the Christmas tree. When she opens the Kay Jewelers box to reveal a Citizen Watch. “It looks like we’ve got ourselves a young man here,” the grandfather says. The young couple kisses and the commercial ends with the tag line, “Every kiss begins with Kay.” This is considered an unusual gift exchange because it is unusual to see a woman receiving a big bulky watch from her significant other on Christmas that was purchased from a jewelry store. The watch that is given to her is quite masculine; however, from her exaggerated non-verbal cues, she appears to be enthralled with the watch. This particular commercial does not have the necessary aid element, given that it is a holiday and that is a typical occasion to give a gift. However, this commercial is clearly hyper-ritualized due to the exaggerated non-verbal cues being communicated by the young woman receiving the gift. The next theme will look at the unique aspects of masculinity found in Kay Jewelers commercials, which challenge the ideology of masculinity. The hyper-ritualization of gift giving attracts the masculine population by conveying the appearance of feminine appeals. In other words, a unique discourse of masculinity is created through advertisements that are suggesting to men what women really want.

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Unique Discourse of Masculinity**

A “unique discourse of masculinity,” refers to how the traditional ideology of masculinity is disrupted in Kay Jewelers advertisements. According to Robert Heasley (2005), hegemonic masculinity is represented culturally in the icons of religion, sports, the entertainment industry, etc., and in these arenas, males are assumed to be straight and hold stereotypical values unless they present themselves as something else. The males who do not conform are problematized and are often seen as odd. Moreover, Heasley (2005) explains that many straight men

demonstrate “queer masculinity” which is defined as “ways of being masculine outside heteronormative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine” (p. 110). Similarly, Adam Jones (2006) discusses what he describes as a “lethal” gender role, which he calls the “feminized” male who “has adopted or had imposed on him a cultural identification with traditionally feminine roles or behavior” (p. 453).

These types of males are those disrupting the heteronormative constructs of masculinity and consequently, disrupting what it means to be straight or gay (Heasley, 2005). Heasley (2005) discusses his encounter with a group of college age males at a private liberal arts college who had formed a men’s discussion group on campus. They were called The Multi-Orgasmic Men’s Society (MOMS), and the main purpose of their discussions was to talk about sex from a non-homophobic, feminist perspective. This group was a way for these male students to come together and cross the borders of gendered sexuality. Similarly, Kay Jewelers advertisements cross this same border of gendered sexuality within their commercial advertisements by advertising romance and sensitivity as a way to attract male consumers. What this means from a feminist perspective is that although it is said that “masculinity is not constructed on the basis of man’s *real* identity and difference but on an *ideal* difference constituted most essentially in the cultural differentiation of Man from his Other” (Humm, 1995, p. 163), it seems as though this *ideal* difference, which is constituted by cultural differentiations, are bringing the masculine and feminine closer together, rather than farther apart in this particular sense, as we move into an age of acceptance.

#### **4.2.1 Evidence of Targeting Male Viewers**

As previously discussed, Kay Jewelers aggressively markets on major American holidays, including Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas (Signet Annual Report, 2015). During the beginning stages of exploration it was discovered that the last airdates for the ads were in the months of February (ending between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>), May (ending between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup>), and December (ending between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>) on networks that include: *CMT, The History Channel, TruTV, TNT, Spike TV, NBC, FX, SYFY, ION, A&E, Psych, ABC, Comedy Central, The MLB Network, The Golf Network, and CBS* (iSpotTV.com, 2015). The shows include: *Party Down South, The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved, Lost in Transmission, Pawn Stars, Law and Order, Constantine, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, T.I. and Tiny Holiday Hustle, Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian, Criminal Minds, The Listener, Anything but Christmas, Good Morning America, Baseball, and The Golf Central Special* (iSpotTV.com, 2015). What this reveals is an obvious link between Kay Jewelers' target audience, and types of shows and networks that are chosen to present the advertisements. There is an evident preference for networks and shows most likely to be viewed by males.

#### **4.2.2 Marketing Romance and Sensitivity to Men**

One interesting aspect of the Kay Jewelers advertisements was that they seem to appeal to heterosexual men by conveying that it is ok to be open to expressing their feelings and listening to their significant others, and to be comfortable with women and in a woman's space. Also that it is acceptable to discuss topics that are often more appealing to women. Kay Jewelers markets in an intimate and vulnerable manner in their television advertisements that does not represent the typical norms that usually describe or represent stereotypical masculine males and the ideology of masculinity. What we see instead is an appeal to romantic masculine males, as opposed to hegemonic masculine males. For example, in a 2014 Kay Jewelers commercial titled,

“Look Up,” advertising the “Diamonds in Rhythm” collection, the expressed purpose of the ad is to “give her a reason to look up from her cell phone with a gift from Kay” (Kay Jewelers, 2014). The scene opens with a heterosexual, Caucasian couple sitting at a table across from each other in a coffee shop. The woman is texting on her cell phone and as the man looks around the room, it seems as though everyone has been overrun by their technology; he notices various individuals on their cell phones, tablets, and laptops. He then unsuccessfully tries to get her attention by calling her “honey,” in which she responds, “yeah?” but he still does not receive eye contact. However, he does not seem upset by this, he just smiles and texts her, asking her to look up. When she finally does, she is surprised to see a Kay Jewelers box. He tells her happy Valentine’s Day as she opens the small rectangular case, revealing a “Diamonds in Rhythm” necklace. The woman gasps at its beauty and the ad pitch begins:

This Valentine’s Day, spend less time communicating and more time connecting.

Discover the new Diamonds in Rhythm collection at Kay Jewelers. A shimmering center diamond is always in motion, continuously catching light from every angle and right now you can save up to 30% on Diamonds in Rhythm at Kay, the number one jewelry store in America. (Kay Jewelers, 2014)

The scene then cuts to a view of the store located in a mall and then cuts back to the couple in the coffee shop. The man takes a selfie of him and the woman kissing with his cell phone. The commercial conclusively ends with Kay Jewelers signature tag line, “Every kiss begins with Kay.”

The evidence of a unique discourse of masculinity in this commercial lies in the lack of respect the woman seems to have for the male, who is not bothered by her lack of attention. Heterosexuality produces a hierarchy in which men are the privileged group and women are the

exploited group (Ingraham, 1999). Therefore, in a traditional sense, a woman would not be disrespectful to her male husband or boyfriend who is supposed to be the privileged head of household and authority. The man in this commercial is very laid back and is oddly unconcerned for the lack of respect he receives from his partner. Furthermore, it seems that the message communicated is that in order to be worth her attention, she needs the perfect gift from Kay Jewelers. In addition to this display of romanticism, Kay Jewelers also show men as expressively emotional and vulnerable to their female partners; constructing masculinity through how men think that women want them to be, i.e. romantic.

The next commercial represents a unique discourse of masculinity in that the man is displaying a strong level of vulnerability as well as a visible passion for his wife and future baby. In May of 2015, Kay Jewelers launched a commercial titled, “New Memories,” advertising for the “Charmed Memories” collection. In this ad, a couple gets married and tracks all of their new memories together over the years, conveying that the best way to celebrate these memories is with a charm bracelet from Kay. The ad follows the woman as she paints and hangs her pictures on the wall, gets ready for her wedding and shares a kiss with her new husband, and as she becomes pregnant with their first child. The man states, “she sees the world a little differently and by some miracle she actually said yes to me...and she will be the best mom ever” (Kay Jewelers, 2015). By the end of the commercial he has given her a Kay Jewelers box with a charm bracelet inside, decorated with charms that are supposed to represent the things she loves most in life and represent memories that she has made with her husband (paint pallet, love charm, etc.). The commercial ends with the couple kissing and the popular tag line, “Every kiss begins with Kay” being recited just as in all other Kay Jewelers commercials.

During the commercial the gets down on his knees to kiss his wife's pregnant belly, displaying a subordinate position and creating an emotionally exposed situation that is not often seen in advertising targeted to male audiences. This sensitive male persona is also evident in the language used in the commercial. For example, "she actually said, "yes" to me" and "she will be the best mom ever." By complimenting his significant other and expressing surprise for her acceptance of his proposal, he demonstrates a unique discourse of masculinity and presents an image that men think they are supposed to be because this kind of romanticism is what women want.

The last example of a unique discourse of masculinity can be seen in two Kay Jewelers advertisements that were aired exclusively on Spike TV titled, "Men of Action." These examples differ from the others in that there is an evident display of hyper-masculinity, which Kay Jewelers is making fun of; suggesting that asserting manliness is silly and is not what is going to impress the girl. In 2013, Kay Jewelers began releasing commercials specifically for the network Spike, popularly known as Spike TV. Spike is a general entertainment channel, offering a variety of television shows and movies. Two of these commercials found on ispot.tv were analyzed which advertise two different collections; the first markets the "Diamonds in Rhythm" collection and the second markets the "Open Hearts Collection." The first evident display of a unique discourse of masculinity can be found in the descriptions of both advertisements on the ispot.tv website. The "Diamonds in Rhythm" commercial description reads:

Some guys think being faster and stronger than everyone else proves them worthy of a woman's love. However, others know what them ladies like—these guys shop at Kay Jewelers, the number one jewelry store in America. After all, the Diamonds in Rhythm collection is way more impressive than this guys suit. (ispot.tv, 2014)

The “Open Hearts” collection description reads:

An intelligence team is in position and ready to move in on a suspect. Wait a minute; is that the Open Hearts by Jane Seymour collection? Turns out he was just putting together the perfect gift instead of espionage, or whatever. (ispot.tv, 2013)

These descriptions communicate that being hyper-masculine does not properly demonstrate adoration, but that buying the perfect gift from Kay Jewelers is more effective in attempting to be worthy of a woman’s love.

The second evident display of a unique discourse of masculinity is in the dialogue exchanged between the actors during the commercials. The “Diamonds in Rhythm” dialogue illustrates that woman will be more impressed by a man’s ability to select the perfect gift and exhibit vulnerability, than by his “macho” masculinity. The scene opens with one male in an army uniform (Man #1), the second male has a robotic arm and is blowing something up at the start of the commercial (Man #2).

Man #2: “I am faster and stronger than everyone!”

Man #1: “Can I ask, why did you do this?”

Man #2: “To impress a special woman in my life.”

Man #1: “You know...you could have just gone to Kay Jewelers.”

Man #2: “For a cybernetic suit?”

Man #1: “For diamonds, the things ladies like.”

Man #2: “Is it popular?”

Man #1: “Yeah! Kay Jewelers is the number one jewelry store in America. “

He then proceeds to pull out a Kay Jewelers box and necklace.

Man #1: “They have the Diamonds in Rhythm collection. With a shimmering center diamond that’s always in motion to catch light from every angle, which is, no offense, more impressive than that suit.”

Man #2: “What?”

Man #1: (Singing) “Every kiss begin with Kay.”

The “Charmed Memories” dialogue reads as follows:

The scene opens with two men (Man #1) and (Man #2) dressed in all black attire and spying on a man wearing a grey suit and exiting a vehicle.

Man #2: “Subjects on the move.”

Man #1: “Track it, wait, he stopped. What are you up to?”

Man # 2: “We got to move in, call it in!”

Man # 1: “Ok, on my count. In 3, 2, ohhhhh that’s nice.”

The man in the suit that the two men are tracking opens a Kay Jewelers box to reveal an “Open Hearts” necklace.

Man #2: “It’s the Open Hearts by Jane Seymour collection from Kay Jewelers.”

Man #1: “So this entire time...”

Man #2: “He’s been buying the perfect gift for that special woman in his life.”

Man #1: “How do you know so much about Kay Jewelers?”

Man #2: “Because they’re the number one jewelry store in America...and I’m an amazing man.”

Both men then sing, “Every kiss begins with Kay.”

In these two examples (description and dialogue) there is a display of hyper-masculinity, which is an exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as an emphasis on physical

strength and aggression. In this case, Kay is making fun of traditional masculinity and is conveying that asserting manliness is not what is going to impress the girl. Rather, material items and gifts are what is most important and is what will set real men apart from the less impressive, hyper-masculine males. There is witticism, or pun element involved in these commercials' way of demonstrating hyper-masculinity. Kay Jewelers suggests that a woman will be more impressed by a man's ability to select the perfect piece of jewelry and his ability to exhibit vulnerability, than by his masculinity. By exaggerating masculine tendencies, Kay Jewelers presents traditional masculinity negatively and encourages men to be more compassionate and considerate by purchasing what women really like, diamonds and jewelry. This clearly demonstrates how a unique discourse of masculinity is being utilized in these particular advertisements.

Additionally, although we can observe a romanticization that diminishes traditional masculine traits. there is also an underlying sense of female objectification that goes hand in hand with all of the commercials discussed in this section, and could also fit under the theme of hyper-ritualized advertising. According to Marxist feminism, objectification from a Marxist materialism viewpoint describes the way a person is part of a work process and its products (Humm, 1995). Therefore, in this instance, women seem to be a major factor in the process of convincing men to purchase Kay Jewelers products. What is more, women are used as a selling point of the products by reinforcing that women prefer material possessions. For example, in the Spike TV: "Diamonds in Rhythm" commercial previously discussed, Man #1 explains, "You know... you could have just gone to Kay Jewelers...for diamonds, the things ladies like" (Kay Jewelers, 2014). In this sense, women are objectified by being displayed as part of the process of selling Kay Jewelers products.

Kay Jewelers markets romance and sensitivity to men, providing an outlet in which men can evaluate relational stresses of modern life (i.e. engagement/marriage) and have an opportunity to find strength and confidence in expressing these feelings of love and devotion, while avoiding being completely overwhelmed by the situation. In other words, men have the ability and the courage to discuss and express their feelings openly and do not conform to the social pressures of what traditional masculinity is “supposed” to be, and the ads express to men that it is ok to be sensitive. However, despite this discourse of romance and sensitivity, qualities of traditional masculinity can still be found. Men in the advertisements are still seen as the breadwinners and the pillar of the family, providing both emotional and financial support to their prospective nuclear families.

#### **4.3 Theme 3: Reinforcement of the Nuclear Family**

The traditional nuclear family consists of a father, a mother, and their dependent children. This is societally considered the ideal family and these familial ideals are a primary source of gender ideology because they define and rest upon men and women’s essential natures, the relational aspect of gender roles, and the connections between gender, sexuality, and reproduction (Bem, 1993; Smith, 1993). In regards to its connection to feminism, Marxist feminists believe that there is a division of labor that is related to gender role expectations such as that it is a female’s job is to give birth and a male’s job is to support the family. The following five examples represent the reinforcement of the nuclear family construct in Kay Jewelers advertisements.

The first example of the reinforcement of the nuclear family construct is seen in the 2012 Christmas commercial titled, “Kid Santa,” advertising the “Charmed Memories” collection. The scene opens with a little boy dressed as Santa Claus coming into the living room with his dog

following closely behind wearing reindeer ears. The parents are standing by the Christmas tree and the boy enters saying, “Ho, ho, ho!” The father then exclaims, “Oh look, honey, it’s Santa!” The boy then says, “Mom, I mean... Mrs. Nelson. I have the perfect gift for you.” The mom bends down to be at eye level with her son and takes the Kay Jewelers box that he is handing to her. She opens it revealing a “Charmed Memories” bracelet. She stands back up and looks passionately at her husband and says, “Oh, Santa.” The commercial ends with a view of the cookies and milk arranged on the table with a sign that reads, “For Santa.” The boy picks up the plate of cookies and asks, “these are for me right?” The parents smile and turn to one another and kiss. Then, the tagline “Every kiss begins with Kay” finishes off the advertisement. This advertisement offers a picture perfect family in which all of its members are involved in the gift giving process, even the family dog; reinforcing the nuclear family. The parents display passion for one another and the child seems incredibly excited to be assisting his father in giving the gift to his mother.

The second example of the reinforcement of the nuclear family constructs is seen in the 2014 Mother’s Day ad, advertising the “Charmed Memories” collection. The scene opens with a father getting a baby out of a crib while the mother watches on the video monitor. The man begins speaking to the baby, “What’s that? You got mommy a Mother’s Day present?” The baby begins to babble and as the mom walks into the baby’s room the father says, “Oh, I totally agree. She’s the best mommy ever.” The father then turns around to face his wife, revealing a Kay Jewelers box with a “Charmed Memories” bracelet inside. “It’s beautiful,” she exclaims, and the commercial ends with the couple kissing with the baby in between them, and the tagline “Every kiss begins with Kay” is sung. The nuclear family is being reinforced here in that the father is taking an active role in the new baby’s life; he is devoted to his family and giving this Mother’s

Day gift to his wife allows him to materially show that devotion. He also uses the baby (who is visibly too young to talk yet) to compliment her on what a great mother she is, bringing the nuclear family aspect full circle, given that the whole family is involved in the presentation of the gift.

The third example is from a 2015 Mother's Day ad, advertising the "Diamonds in Rhythm" collection. The scene opens with a mom playfully chasing her son throughout the house. The father scoops him up once they reach the kitchen and that is when the mom opens a Kay Jewelers box containing a "Diamonds in Rhythm" necklace. Touched by receiving the gift, the mom showers her son with kisses to say thank you. The commercial ends with the tagline, "Every kiss begins with Kay." Again, this ad offers a picture perfect family only this ad's main focus is on the son and mother; the father doesn't really come in until the end of the ad when the gift is opened. However, the father displays affection towards both the son and the mother, symbolizing their importance in his life and reinforcing the nuclear family.

The fourth example is from a 2014 advertisement for the "Open Hearts Waves" collection. This commercial involves a family celebrating their adoption story. The scene begins in an adoption center and in the distance is a view of a couple sitting in a waiting area. They are looking at each other nervously when the man says, "Well, mom..." The woman sighs with tears in her eyes, "Mom, I can't believe this is finally happening." The man then states, "Before our daughter gets here...here" (implying that before their daughter is brought out to them, he has a gift for his wife). He hands her a Kay Jewelers box, which contains an "Open Hearts Waves" necklace. She smiles and looks up at him. The commercial concludes with the adoption center worker walking out holding a baby and hands her to the woman. She looks down blissfully at the baby girl. "Let's go home," she exclaims. The couple kisses and the tagline, "Every kiss begins

with Kay” is sung. The nuclear family reinforcement is visible here in that the couple is very nervous and excited to have an adoptive addition to their family, as would also be displayed in birthing a biological child as well. By the mother saying, “lets go home” after the baby is given to her is implying that their household is now complete with this new addition and they can now start their lives together as a family.

The fifth and final example is from a 2013 advertisement for the “Open Hearts” collection. This commercial involves the start of a new relationship and strengthening of another. A soon to be stepfather and his soon to be stepdaughter are sitting on a swing set in the backyard; the mother is standing in the background. The stepfather says to her, “I’m so happy to be marrying your mom, you know that right?” The stepdaughter nods and says, “Uh huh.” He then explains, “I know this hasn’t always been easy for you and I’m happy that you’re in my life too.” He hands her a jewelry box and she opens it revealing an “Open Hearts” necklace. She smiles and turns to look at her mom. “It’s just like yours, mom,” as her mom walks towards her touching her own necklace, dangling noticeably from her neck. The stepdaughter then hugs her stepfather to say thank you. The mom then turns to her future husband and also says, “Thank you,” and they kiss in each other’s embrace. The commercial ends with the signature tagline, “Every kiss begins with Kay.” The nuclear family reinforcement is apparent here in that the stepfather appears to be putting forth the effort to be supportive and understanding, and is attempting to strengthen the important relationship that he will soon be having with his stepdaughter once he and her mother are married. Although in the ad the focus is on the stepfather and stepdaughter, the mother is present and therefore involves the whole family.

In all five of these examples, although the family structure changes, the families are seen as a primary unit. When looking at the patriarchal elements, what was particularly interesting

was examining the roles that were being played in the nuclear family system. Mothers are traditionally responsible for refining relationship and emotional response skills of their children, which enable them to create strong relationships as they grow up. The traditional role of the father is to teach general handiwork, sports, and other various competitive skills. These types of assistance are supposed to be nurturing situations and experiences for their children. However, the findings of the research did not discover the traditional ideology of patriarchy to be strongly present in these specific advertisements, in the sense that women were not largely excluded, but rather the main focus of the advertisements. In other words, females received the most attention in the commercials. Moreover, the males in these Kay Jewelers ads also appear to be putting forth the effort to be emotionally supportive and attempting to strengthen important relationships. The best example of this would be in the “Open Hearts” advertisement that focuses on the stepfather and stepdaughter. Nevertheless, what could still be seen in moderation is the male or father being head of household considering that he is the one ultimately making the purchase of the jewelry and also by taking the initiative in bringing their new family unit together. When looking at the type of nuclear family couples, it was easy to identify that all the couples represented are heterosexual. What is more, the family structures seemed to all be slightly different. I observed two ads with biological children, one with an adoptive child, and lastly one with a stepchild. This reveals that Kay Jewelers seems to value all definitions of nuclear family and supports this particular set of family ideals. What is more, these ads suggest that men should be good fathers by showing how much they value the children and the children’s mothers’ through giving the gift of Kay Jewelers jewelry. Hyper-ritualized advertising and championing heteronormativity were the themes most commonly found. The following section discusses aspects of heteronormativity that have yet to be addressed and that are also an

important constituent in the representation of the nuclear family (heteronormative assumptions), as well as the exclusion of the gay and lesbian community.

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Championing Heteronormativity**

This theme is particularly important in that elements of it were found in the other themes as well, such as heteronormative assumptions and romanticization. Heteronormativity, as a concept, is derived from queer theory as a critique of feminist movements and theories that reproduce gender as the heterosexual norm (Warner, 1991). Not only does Kay Jewelers reinforce social expectations, but they also romanticize heterosexuality and use it as a way to define heterosexuality in the media. As a highly ritualized and organized practice, heteronormativity creates unconscious assumptions and presents it as the norm (Ingraham, 1999). An exclusion of the gay and lesbian community from the advertisements is apparent. Because elements of heteronormativity have been highlighted across the other themes as well, this particular section will focus on the heteronormative assumptions that were discovered during this research and evidence to support the exclusion of gays and lesbians.

##### **4.4.1 Heteronormative Assumptions: Symbols of Adulthood**

What I mean by heteronormative assumptions is that the advertisements seem to maintain the idea that heterosexuality is correct and normal, that traditional definitions of gender, sexuality and family should be upheld as the system of privilege. Additionally, the ads follow the symbols representing adulthood: dating, marriage, and parenting. Woman as nurturer and men as provider roles can best be seen in the advertisements used as evidence for the nuclear family constructs (Theme 3). First, in the advertisement depicting a stepfather and his soon to be stepdaughter, he is taking the initiative as the new man of the house to find a way into her heart with a necklace from Kay Jewelers. He is showcasing that he will be able to provide for her and

her mother and be a reliable addition to the family. All three symbols of adulthood are present in this advertisement. This is important because this is a textbook representation of the normal and traditional behavior of a heterosexual family.

Next, an example of how Kay Jewelers advertisements maintain women as nurturers can be seen in the advertisement that celebrates a family adoption. When the adoption worker comes out with the baby she is handed to the mother, not the father. This highlights the mother as the caregiver, which is traditionally described as a role that comes more naturally to women. Moreover, the baby is offered to her instead of her husband because it is what is expected of her. The symbols of adulthood are represented here because they have taken the customary sequence of events in order to get from a dating relationship to a place now where they are married and starting a family by adopting a child. It is still the traditional behavior of a heterosexual family, even though they do not have biological children; the fact that they are a heterosexual couple still qualifies them as a normal heteronormative family.

#### **4.4.2 The Obvious Exclusion of the Gay and Lesbian Community**

Because heteronormativity views relationships between members of the opposite sex as the norm, it is clear that there is erasure of non-heteronormative individuals. In Kay Jewelers' advertisements, members of the LGBT community are not openly shamed, however, they are clearly excluded from all of their advertisements, which reinforces heterosexuals' cultural dominance. Although same-sex marriage has been legalized in all fifty states and is bringing more same-sex couples into stores to buy engagement rings (Wells, 2014) and other jewelry items, this is not reflected in Kay Jewelers' advertisements. David Bouffard, vice president of corporate affairs for Signet Jewelers, has declined to answer questions concerning outreach to same-sex couples in the ads; however he did give a brief and vague comment saying that they

“Treat all customers equally and with the same outstanding customer-service levels” (Bouffard, cited in Wells, 2014, para. 8). While they do say that they treat all customers equally, this is far from an admission of acceptance of those who don’t live a heteronormative lifestyle.

The results showed overwhelming reinforcement of all four themes: hyper-ritualized acts of gift giving, unique discourse of masculinity, reinforcement of nuclear family constructs, and championing heteronormativity. These four themes represent the ideological values that Kay Jewelers holds and presents to their audience. The advertisements especially reinforce the ideologies of family and romance; impacting viewers perception on what it means to be in love and to have a family. Although the nuclear family constructs were found to be supported by the ads, the ideological values associated with patriarchy were not entirely represented. While the family structures were determined to be heteronormative in nature and supported the patriarchal set of family ideals, it was found that the traditional ideology of patriarchy was not as strong of a presence as predicted because women were the main focus of the advertisements. Because females received the most attention in the commercials and were never largely excluded, the ads diverged from the traditional notions of patriarchy. It was also discovered that in some illustrations, women displayed a level of disrespectful to their male counterpart. In this sense, the ideology of patriarchy was disrupted in that men are supposed to be the privileged head of household and authoritatively submitted to. What is more, women seem to be a major factor in the process of convincing men to purchase Kay Jewelers products. Women are used a selling point of the products by reinforcing that women prefer material possessions. This dynamic of female objectification was found by observing the feminization of masculine traits.

I also explain that Kay Jewelers reinforces social expectations and also romanticize heterosexuality, while using it as a way to define heterosexuality in the media. Because of this,

the exclusion of the gay and lesbian community is evident. Moreover, although there is no direct shaming of the LGBT community, there seems to be some level of discrimination towards non-heteronormative individuals since they are clearly left out, reinforcing the cultural dominance of heterosexual's. The advertisements also maintain the idea that heterosexuality is 'correct' and 'normal' and uphold the traditional definitions of gender, sexuality, and family as the system of privilege.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Final Thoughts

During this research project, I first explained how jewelry commercials, specifically Kay Jewelers, are widely consumed due to their frequent appearance on television, especially during holidays such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas (Signet Annual Report, 2015), which makes them a prominent media influence in U. S. consumerist society. Although romantic love has not always been viewed as an important aspect of relationships, the media now have a strong influence in regards to viewers' beliefs and perceptions of romantic love (Medora et al., 2002) and are emphasized in Kay Jewelers' television commercials. Advertisements of this nature were chosen in order to determine how they contribute to the perpetuation of idealistic, traditional beliefs. Additionally, a brief history of engagement rings, wedding rings, and their symbolization was given in order to discover the evolution of their construction, as well as to explain how through effective marketing strategies, the diamond ring has become a very significant expenditure for men. This led into a discussion about copywriter, Frances Gerety, who coined the term "A Diamond is Forever" in 1947 while working for N.W. Ayer and Son in Philadelphia (Sullivan, 2013). Gerety helped their main account, De Beers Jewelry, transform from a failing market into a necessity during a time of economic turmoil. Furthermore, Gerety and fellow colleagues were able to successfully create a degree of emotional attachment to the diamond ring (Sullivan, 2013). Because of the De Beers diamond campaign, diamonds went from being seen as a waste of money to being a psychological necessity.

Kay Jewelers is part of a much larger company, Signet Jewelers, which encompasses other well known jewelers including Jared the Galleria of Jewelry, Zales, Gordon's, Piercing

Pagoda, etc. With their ever-increasing omni-channel experience, consumers are becoming more connected because of their access to multiple shopping channels, making it easier to create a trust based rapport with their customers. Signet not only conveys the importance of having a confident customer base (Signet Annual Report, 2015), but also the importance of their customers perceptions and experiences of their products. I have argued that this is evident in Kay Jewelers depictions of traditional ideologies of heteronormative romantic love in their advertisements. Furthermore, target demographics suggest that Kay directly markets to households with an average yearly income of between \$35,000 and \$100,000, more specifically, males over the age of 30 (Signet Annual Report, 2015). One of my expressed goals was to examine how Kay Jewelers markets the ideologies of romantic love and marriage to men through their commercial advertisements. Additionally, I sought to explore these aggressive marketing strategies that are targeted towards straight male shoppers and evaluate whether they are useful, as well as discuss how the gay and lesbian community remain removed from these mainstream advertising campaigns.

Next, I provided literature that addressed the role of mass communication and advertising within the institutional structures of contemporary capitalist societies; more specifically, the existing approaches to the critical study of advertising (Harms & Kellner, 1991). The main aspects of the critical theory of advertising that were discussed included: (1) to analyze its economic functions as a manager of consumer demand and of market share, as well as its impact as an ideological force in social reproduction; (2) to provide methods and examples of reading advertising critically, which shows how ads are rhetorically constructed, how they communicate and manipulate, and how individuals can resist their seductions and fascination; (3) to draw on the most advanced work in semiotics, post-structuralism, feminism, hermeneutics, and other

methods of interpretation and ideology critique, as well as on critical social theory; (4) to operate from a standpoint of human emancipation from unnecessary and unjust forms of domination; and (5) to attempt to ascertain the effects of advertising on the economy, politics, culture, and everyday life and propose remedies for its harmful effects (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Through the examination of this literature, it better explains the need for more actively regulated content and how limits need to be set to reduce the harmful effects of advertising that has been described as a burden to contemporary capitalism (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

The role of romantic love in advertising also played a key role in this study. Eva Illouz, (1997) explains that romance is undergoing two different interconnected processes: the romanticism of commodities and the commodification of romance. The romanticism of commodities is a visual idea of love as spectacle that has been transmitted by mass communication to the public as production and consumption have continued to expand. Romanticizing commodities occurs when the media portrays certain products and services as necessity through fantasy (Illouz, 1997). For example, a three-course candle-lit dinner at a five star restaurant is considered romantic but a cheap fast-food meal is not. As previously explained, these images of how romance *should* be portrayed through the media perpetuate traditional romantic ideals. Additionally, Bell (2008) and Sprecher & Metts (1999) explain that the romantic ideal is a set of beliefs about the power of love and the perfection of romance, and is generally comprised of the following four themes: love can overlook flaws; love can seek out the one perfect mate; love can happen instantaneously; and love can overcome all obstacles. Moreover, Medora et al. (2002) sought to discover the differences in levels of romanticism in U.S., Asian-Indian, and Turkish young adults in their study. The authors were also interested in investigating gender differences among these young adults' perceived attitudes toward romanticism. This area

of study helped to place the U.S.'s high level of consumerism into perspective and explain how romantic love can be used as a persuasion tactic.

My analysis described Kay Jewelers persuasion tactics, which I categorized into four themes. The various common themes found within data collection, included: the heteronormative assumptions maintained by the use of hyper-ritualized gift giving and their emphasis as necessary aids, the novel discourse of masculinity revealed by using feminine appeals in the advertisements, and highlighting the construction of nuclear families as superior, essentially excluding the gay and lesbian community. Through my analysis, I demonstrated how feminist theory helped to support my findings as the advertisements were deconstructed to discover the traditional ideological elements that were situated within them. Discussed in Theme 1: Hyper-ritualizing the Act of Gift Giving, was how the omni-channel experience creates a 24/7 digital world of marketing interaction in which hyper-ritualizing the act of gift giving becomes incredibly common and effortless. I also explained how fantasy situations are used in Kay Jewelers advertisements, which hyper-ritualize the ads by constructing situations in which consumers can picture themselves performing the same acts that are being carried out on screen and are presenting noticeable elements of the ideology of romantic love. Next in this theme, I discussed women as the sole receivers of gifts in the advertisements and the importance placed on the symbolization of the artifacts. I also explained that ideologically, there is significance associated with what it means for men to be the gift giver of these types of gifts (jewelry) and women as the recipients, including societal values and normative conceptions of behavior and identity. Lastly for this theme, I discussed unusual gift exchanges, which highlight gifts as necessary aids. Demonstrated in these examples were hyper-ritualizing standard acts, like saying, “thank you” by purchasing an elaborate gift.

Also touched on was the tradition of heteronormativity. It was explained that heteronormativity, as a concept, originates from queer theory as a critique of feminist movements and theories that reproduce gender as heterosexual norm, as Michael Warner explained in his introduction of the journal of *Social Text*, titled *Fear of a Queer Planet* in 1991. Also discussed was Judith Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix, as well as how ideological, ritualistic patterns pervade the culture at large in everything from commercials and magazines to television. Through these media we can observe how television has helped to uphold heteronormative customs, continually reinforcing traditional gender roles, while standing watch over sacred institutions, such as marriage (Tropiano, 2009). Moreover, the construction of heterosexuality depends upon erasure of homosexuality. This lead into a discussion of the work of Oswald (2001), who found that weddings could produce a sense of "outsiderness" for members of the LGBT community when the rituals are manipulated by heterosexist religious practices. In regards to the current study, the most important take away is whether less normative demonstrations of masculinity used in advertisements like Kay Jewelers commercials is effectively appealing to male consumers, and if so, why is this more feminine stance so successful.

To examine this further, Theme 2: Unique Discourse of Masculinity, discussed how the traditional ideology of masculinity is disrupted and challenged in Kay Jewelers advertisements. I additionally discussed the evidence of the targeting of male viewers by investigating the networks and shows that the commercials aired on. Furthermore, I explained how Kay Jewelers market romance and sensitivity to males and how the commercials appeal to heterosexual men by conveying that it is ok to openly express feelings of love. The vulnerable manner of the advertisements does not represent the typical norms that usually describe or represent

stereotypical masculine males and the ideology of masculinity, which suggests that masculinity is being downplayed and feminized in order to effectively promote the products. What is more, women seem to be a major factor in the process of convincing men to purchase Kay Jewelers products. Women are used as a selling point of the products by reinforcing that women prefer material possessions. This dynamic of female objectification was found by observing the feminization of masculine traits.

Also discussed in the literature is the ideology of patriarchy. As patriarchy is one of many forms of male dominance embedded in the father figure role and is often encircled in an ideology of protection and compassion, as well as power and control, the work of Ortner (2014) sought to bring focus and attention to the patriarchy of the twenty-first century U.S. American audience. She discusses ways in which feminism has fallen off the contemporary political agenda, leaving a political vacuum with respect to patriarchy as a system of power. To further examine patriarchy in Kay Jewelers advertisements, Theme 3: Reinforcement of the Nuclear Family, unearthed the patriarchal elements that were signified in the advertisements. Although the family structures were discovered to be heteronormative in nature and supported the patriarchal set of family ideals in this sense, it was found that the traditional ideology of patriarchy was not as strong of a presence as predicted because women were the main focus of the advertisements. Females received the most attention in the commercials and were never largely excluded which varies from the traditional notions of patriarchy. Moreover, it was also discovered that in some instances, women were even being a bit disrespectful to their male counterpart. Men are supposed to be the privileged head of household and authoritatively submitted to, so also in this sense, the patriarchy ideology was disrupted.

Finally, Theme 4: Championing Heteronormativity, discussed heteronormative concepts

that weren't discussed in the other themes, considering that elements of heteronormativity can be found in all four themes examined in this study. I explain that Kay Jewelers reinforces social expectations and also romanticizes heterosexuality, while using it as a way to define heterosexuality in the media. Because of this, the exclusion of the gay and lesbian community is evident. Moreover, although there is no direct shaming of the LGBT community, there seems to be some level of discrimination towards non-heteronormative individuals since they are clearly excluded, reinforcing heterosexual's cultural dominance. The advertisements also maintain the idea that heterosexuality is 'correct' and 'normal' and uphold the traditional definitions of gender, sexuality, and family as the system of privilege. I also discuss the symbolic representation of adulthood: dating, marriage, and parenting. This was found in the examples that maintained natural roles of women as nurturer, men as provider. Moreover, the literature explained that through the use of recognizable codes (Jhally, 1987), advertisements communicate cultural meanings and reinforce existing social order. It was found that studies of the depiction of families in advertising have tended to focus on representations of gender and the portrayal of children. Goffman (1976) identified the nuclear family as a dominant cultural referent in 1970s advertising in a section of his study on gender representations in advertising. Moreover, Goffman (1976) found that many of the codes of gender present in advertising were particularly salient in portrayals of the family, with women and children often depicted in similar ways. In the current study, the women were the main focus of the ads and therefore were not being depicted similarly to the children; giving them more of a principal role in the advertisements, even over their male partner.

## **5.2 Future Research**

This study analyzed television advertisements from one company over a timespan of four years. In order to obtain a more thorough analysis, it is recommended that future research sample advertisements from multiple jewelry companies, as well as possibly including print advertisements in order to obtain results from more than one medium. This would also provide an even broader view of how heteronormative ideologies are perpetuated in advertising. Additionally, it is recommended that future research focus on how class (economic status) and race influence these types of advertisements, as well as the issues that arise from their presence or lack thereof. High-end jewelers, such as Tiffany's, do not rely on television advertisements to promote their products but do utilize magazine advertisements. It is interesting that mid-level jewelers rely on television marketing to attract middle class customers to their stores. It is as if to say that television is a "low" class form of advertising, while magazines are regarded as high end. Moreover, in regards to race, the Kay Jewelers advertisements examined for this study represented either white (Caucasian) or African American families, with a clearly identifiable "ethnic exclusion." There seems to be a subtle prejudice in these advertisements, however, instead of seeing exaggerated cultural differences (i.e. aggression in African American males, white women as sex objects, etc.) that seem to be common in consumer culture, we see marginalization, not only in the area of race but also in sexual orientation.

Therefore, another note for future research would be to focus on the exclusion of the LGBT community in these types of advertisement. A concentration of this area could help better inform companies on how to avoid the alienation of this particular population. Finally, an interesting and unexpected finding was that women are objectified by being displayed as part of the process of selling Kay Jewelers products. Women were observed being a major factor in the process of convincing men to purchase Kay merchandise and used as a selling point to reinforce

that women prefer material possessions as opposed to everyday ordinary gestures signifying love and adoration. This area, too, is recommended for future research.

Through conducting this research I learned how to think more critically about advertising and television media by identifying such issues as feminism, traditional ideologies, and the lack of inclusion of the gay and lesbian community. Moreover, it was confirmed that heteronormative ideologies are used in Kay Jewelers television commercials to market their products to male viewers. I also became more informed on the lack of television advertisements in communication studies and as a result of this study I additionally became more familiar with theoretical concepts of ideology in regards to communication. For example, many different ideologies emerged from the research conducted in this study, including: romantic love, patriarchy, masculinity, family, gender, and heterosexuality. Furthermore, this study contributed to both marketing and communication research, as I was able to determine that heteronormative romance and family ideologies drive the meaning behind the television advertisements. Moreover, this research provides justification that feminist theory is valuable in understanding television commercial advertisements. I submit that this study provides further knowledge about jewelry advertisements and the ideologies that they perpetuate that might be unknown to scholars, consumers, and the overall population of television viewers.

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## VITA

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This thesis was typed by Chelsea Nedlyn Hill