

Falls, . . . Susan. *Clarity, cut, and culture: the many meanings of diamonds*. 216 pp., illus., figs, bibliogr. New York: Univ. Press, 2014.

In this very readable book, Susan Falls skilfully unpicks the symbolism and emotions associated with diamonds – discussing their value, as well as the romance, devotion, success, and respectability they convey – and the ways in which these can be reappropriated. Falls argues that despite their historical significance or any modern mass marketing campaigns, wearing and buying diamonds involves, and enables, creative agency on the part of the wearer/consumer. To prove this, she weaves a fascinating array of voices and viewpoints into her narrative in ways that maintain the character of each person and allow them to speak for themselves, yet which enable interpretation.

Having witnessed the multiplicity of ways in which people emotionally engage with, and explain, their diamond ownership, Falls explains that branding has ‘not been able to establish a privileged semiotic ideology by which consumers always interpret diamonds as symbols referring to the values that marketers promote’ (p. 10). She acknowledges, however, that branding provides a framework for thinking about how other people are using things as symbols. In other words, we may have our own reasons for wearing diamonds, but we still will be judged vis-à-vis the framework created by the diamond marketers. Whilst acknowledging that individual creative agency is therefore important, a greater acknowledgement of the power of those external structural judgements in the face of an individual's resistance would have strengthened Fall's argument. After all, if it matters only to a person and their friends, to what extent can resistance be seen as effective opposition?

In discussing the interviews that form the book's ethnography, Falls states explicitly that she did not request information about salary, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or the value of the diamonds in question. This is a refreshing way of not being bound by traditional sociological categories, but becomes an issue in the chapter on diamonds as ‘bling’ – a phenomenon often associated in the United States with black consumers. Falls states in chapter 5 that she is exploring white middle-class interpretations of bling and has not interviewed hip-hop artists owing to her interest in how celebrities influence consumers, rather than in how stars interpret their own diamonds. However, what about all the middle- or working-class black consumers who find ways to buy a cheap diamond? Surely they may be influenced by celebrities, and therefore their voices very much need to be heard here, especially as this may raise questions as to whether it is race or class that is most influential in the interpretation of bling.

That said, one of this book's strengths is the way it delves into and sensitively analyses diamond-wearers' complicated feelings. It remains the case, nonetheless, that these data cannot be quite as divorced from an analysis of the diamond industry as Falls argues. At certain points, interviewees spontaneously mention the industry's unethical aspects, and more emphasis on this and the ways in which such opinions affect the wearing and buying of diamonds would have been interesting. The Kimberley Process, an international certification system designed to ensure that jewellers are not selling ‘blood’ diamonds, is mentioned briefly, without considering the ways in which the consumer desire for diamonds still fuels an illicit diamond industry. Indeed, the explanation of how Sir Cecil Rhodes enabled de Beers to almost

completely take over the diamond industry makes for particularly interesting reading, especially as, beyond looking for profit, his aim was to recolonize Africa for Britain. The politics of this situation, in terms of both colonialism and capitalistic monopolies that continue to the present day, are downplayed.

Overall, this is an engaging account of a controversial commodity which not only pieces together consumer emotions and behaviour, but also analyses them through both classic and more recent anthropological theory. There are useful, accessible, and knowledgeable sections that explore classic gift/commodity and consumption models (i.e. Bourdieu, Mauss), alongside more recent thinkers such as Fred Myers and David Graeber. There is also a brief use of semiotics, with Falls celebrating Peirce's model for its ability to 'keenly embrace' subjectivity. Then there is a very interesting application of Russian Formalism and the concept of *ostranenie* (or defamiliarization) to bling. This makes for a well-informed and wide-ranging mix of references, applied to this case study in original ways that are engaging for the advanced scholar, and enticing for the less advanced one. There is no doubt that, as a whole, this book makes a significant contribution to the growing collection of literature on specific commodities.