

Non-Precious Material Jewelry Objects as Catharsis for Urban Socialite Women

Dhyani Widiyanti*

Postgraduate Program, Sanata Dharma University, Affandi Street, Mrican, Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta 55281

*E-mail of the corresponding author: dhyaniarts@gmail.com

Abstract

Urban socialite women are not only associated with the use of precious material jewelry but also exhibit a trend in the use of non-precious material jewelry. This research aims to analyze the utilization of non-precious material jewelry objects among a subset of urban women in Jakarta and its correlation with catharsis as a mechanism for emotional release and self-purification within the urban context. Employing a qualitative approach and case studies, this study utilizes the catharsis theory to analyze in-depth interview data from four informants who are urban socialite women with a penchant for collecting non-precious material jewelry. The research findings indicate that the motivations behind the usage of non-precious material jewelry are linked to economic support for local artisans, environmental consciousness, social status, belonging, and personal sentimental value. However, from a cathartic perspective, these motivations can be viewed as endeavors to seek consolation or escapism for urban women who consistently grapple with the challenges of adapting to perpetual change and self-reinvention.

Keywords: Emotional release, Catharsis, Non-precious material jewelry, Self-purification, Urban women

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1. Introduction

The concept of jewelry has undergone a notable evolution over time. Previously, jewelry was denoted as "precious material" closely associated with metals such as gold and silver, which are categorized as rare and possessed relatively high and stable intrinsic value. The intrinsic worth of such jewelry has rendered it objects of desire for the human physique since time immemorial. Renowned figures from antiquity, including legendary Egyptian queens like Nefertiti and Cleopatra, adomed themselves with an array of jewelry crafted from gold or silver, adorning their bodies from head to toe. These jewelry items were predominantly reserved for special occasions, serving the dual purpose of enhancing their attractiveness and exuding the regal splendor befitting queens (Tait, 1986).

In its evolution, particularly commencing in the 20th century, the materials employed in jewelry crafting no longer necessitated the use of precious materials such as gold or silver. Instead, non-precious materials, including shells, glass, ceramics, and even rubber, plastic, and fabric, came into vogue. A pioneer in the utilization of non-precious materials was René Lalique (1860 – 1945), a French Art Nouveau artist renowned for his work in stained glass and perfume bottle design (Ashelford, 1980). Lalique subsequently ventured into crafting jewelry employing materials that were unconventional for his time, namely shells and glass, amidst a society that remained captivated by gold, platinum, and diamonds as the primary materials for jewelry (Forrer, 1907).

Other non-precious materials such as wood, stone, horn, shells, fossils, cultural artifacts, ivory, and various minerals sometimes undergo processes that give them the appearance of precious metals like silver and gold. This transformation becomes particularly appealing when adopted by specific social groups, notably urban socialite women. The term "socialite" was first introduced in 1928 in Time magazine as "socialite" (Sumner, 2010). The roots of socialites can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily associated with individuals from royal or noble backgrounds. However, as we entered the 19th century and more prominently in the 20th century, the term "socialite" began to encompass famous individuals with wealth and influence. In the 21st century, socialites have become almost inseparable from celebrities.

This research endeavors to examine how non-precious material jewelry is construed by female socialites whose spheres of activity are urban in nature, with a primary emphasis on its role as a means of catharsis. Catharsis, originally a concept from ancient Greek drama, refers to the emotional purging or cleansing that individuals can



experience through the vicarious and intense emotional involvement with a work of art, literature, or, in this context, through certain personal practices or objects. Aristotle, in his *Poetics* first introduced the idea of catharsis as a purging of emotions like pity and fear, which an audience might undergo when watching a tragic play (Golden, 1962). In contemporary contexts, catharsis has been applied more broadly to describe the release or relief of pent-up emotions, stress, or psychological tension through various means, including creative expression, rituals, or engagement with symbolic objects, thereby achieving a sense of emotional equilibrium and renewal (Scheff, 1979). In the context of the study mentioned, non-precious material jewelry serves as a potential avenue for urban socialite women to achieve catharsis, suggesting that these adornments play a role in emotional release and self-expression within their urban lifestyles.

Meanwhile, the term "socialite" derives from the word 'Socialite,' which is a fusion of two other words, 'social' and 'elite,' denoting royal or aristocratic families in Europe who have always received special treatment. These royal and aristocratic classes have historically been granted privileges, such as exemption from queuing and waiting. Initially, the designation of a socialite was also bestowed upon individuals with a strong social conscience, such as those involved in social foundations or engaged in social activities. However, following modernization, the meaning of a socialite underwent a shift to encompass affluent women, including career-oriented women and wives of wealthy entrepreneurs. These women are commonly labeled as socialites due to their high social status, modern lifestyle, or their affiliation with officials and esteemed individuals (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 72).

In the context of this study, socialite refers to urban socialite women who reside in Jakarta and are actively engaged in its social circles. Consistent with the definition provided by Biressi and Nunn (2013), the subjects under investigation here are indeed women of high standing and independence, with some of them being married to entrepreneurs or holding high-ranking positions. Socialites in this context are not merely considered as individuals but are inseparable from the communities they are part of. As Biressi and Nunn also elucidated, these socialites often congregate within a specific community as a means of interaction and reaffirmation of their identity.

Another characteristic is that socialites are marked by discourse on beauty, which is inseparable from the construction of patriarchal culture. Whether acknowledged or not, what women present through their bodies is often what men truly desire to see. Influenced by the male gaze, women become the target of various beauty advertisements that depict the "ideal" female body (Prabasmoro, 2003: 54).

On the other hand, despite constantly being subjected to the "male gaze," urban women are also independent individuals who no longer feel compelled to adhere strictly to long-established gender roles, particularly those constructed by patriarchal culture. Women, whose traditional roles in patriarchal culture often revolved around household chores and childcare, no longer fit a rigid definition in the context of urban women (Wibowo, 2011: 358). Although these responsibilities are not entirely abandoned, urban women demonstrate their independence through dynamic activities, high mobility, consumptive attitudes to fulfill their desires, and a desire for continuous self-actualization (Mansyur, 1987).

Through the elaboration of the general characteristics of urban women mentioned earlier, this research aims to analyze the usage of non-precious material jewelry objects among a subset of urban women in Jakarta and its relationship with catharsis as a means of emotional release and self-purification within the context of urban life. The study will conduct in-depth interviews with four urban women selected through purposive sampling. Subsequently, the data will be analyzed using the theory of catharsis to uncover the hidden meanings behind the utilization of non-precious material jewelry among urban women.

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this research will discuss two concepts, namely, non-precious material jewelry and catharsis.

2.1 Non-Precious Material Jewelry

Amidst the backdrop of World War I, which triggered a scarcity of premium-quality materials suitable for both fashion and jewelry, Chanel embarked on a transformative journey by introducing more cost-effective materials into the luxury market. This marked a decisive departure from the conventional definition of luxury, which had long been synonymous with extravagant displays of material wealth (Arumsari, 2015). Vones (2018) sheds light on the 1970s, a period marked by a sudden surge in the global gold market, prompting the consideration of



alternative materials as viable options for crafting jewelry.

The integration of non-traditional materials and unconventional design elements in the realm of jewelry creation is intricately linked to the evolving tastes of consumers, heightened environmental awareness, the innovative expressions of artisans and designers, and a newfound appreciation for previously overlooked materials. Such jewelry pieces, marrying alternative materials with creative designs, carry profound cultural and regional significance, contributing to the financial independence of numerous artisans and cooperative endeavors (Bernabei, 2011). In the contemporary design landscape, the creation and communication of objects face formidable challenges necessitating the infusion of responsible practices throughout the creative process. Designers adeptly navigate the subtle nuances of each era and epoch, infusing their work with inventive techniques and alternative materials to fulfill the evolving aesthetic desires of their audience. Today's jewelry designers continuously stretch the boundaries of material usage and form, imbuing each piece with a unique identity by repurposing discarded elements from the environment (Arumsari, 2015).

Straliotto (2009) keenly observes that sustainability initiatives primarily revolve around the reconfiguration and recycling of materials, calling for fresh approaches to reutilize components of specific products in a bid to curtail the environmental repercussions linked to improper disposal. This paradigm shift extends across all phases of industrial product design, encompassing conception, material selection, manufacturing processes, utilization, reuse, recycling, and eventual disposal (Mansell, 2008). Vones (2018) illuminates instances where non-traditional materials, such as porcelain, clay, vitreous enamels, and glass, undergo various treatments, including molding, casting, carving, or adhesion to metal pieces, or are harnessed for crafting necklaces alongside gemstones.

Guilgen and Kistmann (2013) refer to Gomes Filho's taxonomy of non-traditional materials for product design, categorizing them into natural, naturally processed, natural polymers, synthetic polymers, and composite materials. In the realm of contemporary jewelry, frequently employed non-traditional materials encompass wood, bone, feathers, plastic, acrylic, cement, glass, paper, textiles, and electronic components. The utilization of these unconventional materials in jewelry construction, featuring unprocessed gems, distinctive gem settings, and blends of various metals, gives rise to a profusion of compositions and forms that inject a modernistic touch into contemporary jewelry (Santos, 2013).

The growing admiration for these atypical materials stems from their inherent appeal, intertwined with sustainability and innovation. The spectrum of possibilities is extensive, encompassing materials like metal seeds, wood, glass, plastics, coconut, bamboo, palm fiber, among a myriad of others. Base metals like copper and brass frequently meld into these innovative projects. Santos (2013) underscores the imperative of meticulous material compatibility consideration, given that many of these materials exhibit susceptibility to elevated temperatures and acid exposure, often necessitating mechanical fastening techniques, such as riveting and adhesive bonding, to ensure their structural integrity.

2.2 Catharsis

The term "catharsis" finds its origins in the Greek language, where it is translated as "cleansing" or "purification." Various definitions of catharsis highlight two fundamental elements: the emotional dimension, characterized by intense emotional expression and processing, and the cognitive facet involving insights, newfound realizations, and the transformation of the unconscious into conscious awareness, ultimately leading to positive change. Aristotle, for instance, conceptualized catharsis as the purging of the spirit from unhealthy and base thoughts or emotions through the observation of such emotions or ideas on a theatrical stage (Aristotle, 2001). Breuer and Freud (1974), on the other hand, described catharsis as an involuntary, instinctive bodily process, exemplified by actions like crying. Esta (2011) adhered to the psychodynamic tradition, defining catharsis as the process of diminishing or eliminating a psychological complex by recalling it into conscious awareness and allowing it to be expressed.

Emotional situations have the capacity to induce various changes in individuals, encompassing physiological, behavioral, cognitive, expressive, and subjective aspects. When individuals are affected by such emotions, they often turn to social interaction as a means of cathartically releasing their emotional experiences. Bernard Rimé has conducted extensive research on the patterns of social sharing following emotional episodes. His studies suggest that individuals seek out social connections as a way to modify the emotional impact of a situation and regain their personal emotional equilibrium. Rimé's findings reveal that a significant proportion, ranging from 80% to 95%, of emotional experiences are shared with others. Affected individuals tend to discuss their emotional encounters repeatedly with those around them over the course of hours, days, or even weeks.



Importantly, these patterns of sharing are not contingent on the emotional nature of the experience, gender, educational background, or cultural factors. Additionally, Rimé's research demonstrates that the propensity for social sharing of emotions increases as the intensity of the emotion escalates (Rimé, 2009).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, characterized by its methodology of exploring a phenomenon within a specific context using diverse data sources. It involves a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon from various angles to gain insights from multiple perspectives (Baxter and Jack, 2015). In the context of a case study, this research delves into a real-time phenomenon within its natural context, recognizing that the surrounding environment plays a significant role (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999).

To carry out this investigation, the study will conduct interviews with four representatives of urban socialite women, who have been selected using purposive sampling criteria. The criteria for purposive sampling include: (1) The participants must be urban socialite women residing in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, chosen due to the prevalence of socialite communities in this major urban area. (2) These women should have actively collected non-precious material jewelry for at least five years, reflecting a genuine interest in owning such jewelry rather than merely following trends. (3) The selected individuals must be willing to participate in the interviews. Through these qualitative interviews, the research aims to uncover the underlying motivations, meanings, and implications associated with the possession of non-precious material jewelry among urban socialite women who meet the specified criteria.

The four participants will undergo individual interviews employing the in-depth interview technique. Participants characteristics are described in Table 1. These interviews will encompass inquiries concerning their comprehensive life backgrounds, the significance attributed to jewelry in their lives, and their possession of non-precious material jewelry, including the underlying motivations for their usage. Each participant will be interviewed at least twice in a natural setting, facilitating the collection of information in a more fluid and candid manner. For data analysis, the researcher will adopt a novel ethnographic analysis approach as proposed by Paula Saukko, which underscores the idea that interviewing subjects is an endeavor to immerse oneself in their experiences and subsequently reflect upon these experiences within the researcher's own context (Saukko, 2003: 58-59). Saukko also advocates for accepting subjects' testimonies as a responsible foundation in scientific research. This analysis, influenced by Saukko's framework, will serve as a preliminary step preceding further analysis employing the concept of catharsis.

Table 1. Participants characteristics

Informant Code	Backgrounds	Description of Owned Non Precious Jewelry
Case ID #1	Aged 42, active in the Komunitas Perempuan Pelestari Budaya, a marine biologist, research scientist, and conservationist.	Crafted with a contemporary and distinctive design, this jewelry piece was purchased at a local artisan market in a Ubud village in Bali.
Case ID #2	Aged 45, active in the Komunitas Perempuan Pelestari Budaya, a technology entrepreneur operating a startup company in a bustling urban district, spouse of a university professor, and a parent to three teenagers.	The fundamental materials include fabric, wire, and artificial fur, obtained as mementos during a visit to Los Angeles from a retro boutique.
Case ID #3	Aged 46, active in the Komunitas Perempuan Berkisah, an art curator at a contemporary gallery in Jakarta, a passionate salsa dancer, partner to a travel journalist, and a mentor to aspiring young artists.	The fundamental materials are synthetic leather and stones, procured during a birthday celebration to augment the accessory assortment.
Case ID #4	Aged 32, active in the Perhimpunan Perempuan Lintas Profesi Jakarta, a wildlife photographer, a part-time yoga instructor at a community center in Cikini, spouse of a renowned chef in Kemang, and a parent to two teenagers.	The primary materials include leather and brass, acquired from a fellow colleague within the dance community to enhance the costume assortment.



4. Findings and Discussion

In the perspective of Case Study #1, the ownership of non-precious material jewelry is grounded in its relatively affordable cost due to the accessibility of materials compared to precious metals. Their customary approach to acquiring jewelry involves visiting remote villages in Ubud, Bali. They often directly engage with artisans and make purchases directly from the source, occasionally requesting custom-made pieces tailored to their preferences. From Case Study #1's viewpoint, this practice is carried out with the aim of advancing local artisans, enabling them to achieve greater prosperity and potentially promoting their work in both the national and international markets. This approach aligns with their commitment to supporting the local community and fostering sustainable economic growth in the region.

Meanwhile, in the perspective of Case Study #2, their frequent purchases of non-precious material jewelry are justified as part of their commitment to environmental love and the sustainability of nature. According to Case Study #2, non-precious material jewelry can be viewed as environmentally friendly and easily recyclable adornments. This perspective engenders a sense of tranquility as they perceive themselves differently from their peers who may be less environmentally conscious and continue to consume jewelry made from precious metals.

From the perspective of Case Study #3, the use of non-precious material jewelry is closely related to their social life. They understand that non-precious material jewelry may not hold significant intrinsic value when considered solely from a material standpoint. Instead, the value of non-precious material jewelry is derived from its social context and is appreciated by those who understand its significance, particularly within the socialite community. In the daily lives of socialites, there is often a competition to showcase unique and distinctive items that set them apart from the ordinary. The rarity and exclusivity of such items elevate their worth among the socialite circle. Consequently, non-precious material jewelry, in the eyes of Case Study #3, serves as a symbol of their ability to engage with their social environment. It allows them to interact with their peers in a way that reinforces their social status and sense of belonging within their community.

In the perspective of Case Study #4, the use of non-precious material jewelry is closely associated with personal and sentimental aspects related to the history of their life, which has a deep connection with non-precious jewelry. For instance, memorable moments shared with their children and spouse are intertwined with non-precious material jewelry, making their choice to wear such jewelry deeply personal and perhaps known only to themselves. Case Study #4 doesn't have a strong inclination to use jewelry made from precious materials, unless it is for specific significant events that demand luxury and recognition from others. Their preference for non-precious material jewelry reflects a desire to keep their personal memories and emotions alive, and these pieces carry a unique sentimental value that goes beyond their material worth.

Saukko's approach involves accepting the testimonies of subjects as valid and responsible scientific bases in research. The narratives presented in the paragraphs are treated as valuable testimonies that shed light on the motivations and significance of non-precious material jewelry. Each case study's perspective is considered as a valid and valuable source of information. The interview results indicate that motivations for owning non-precious material jewelry are multifaceted. These motivations encompass economic support for local artisans (Case Study #1), environmental consciousness (Case Study #2), social status and belonging (Case Study #3), and personal sentimental value (Case Study #4).

In the context of Case Study #1, when examining this perspective through the lens of catharsis, the act of endorsing local artisans and contributing to sustainable economic development in the region serves as a source of emotional release or alleviation. The individual may undergo a positive emotional transformation, experience a sense of achievement, or even cultivate a feeling of affiliation with the community they are actively supporting.

Relating the context of Case Study #2 to the concept of catharsis, it can be argued that the emotional satisfaction and tranquility experienced by Case Study #2 are indicative of a form of catharsis. Their commitment to sustainable and environmentally friendly choices provides them with a sense of emotional release or relief. This emotional transformation may involve positive feelings of alignment with their values and a sense of moral accomplishment, which can be considered as cathartic in nature.

In the context of Case Study #3, when examining this perspective through the lens of catharsis, it can be interpreted that the emotional satisfaction and sense of belonging derived from owning and showcasing non-precious material jewelry constitute a form of catharsis. This emotional release or relief arises from their ability to navigate and excel within their social environment, enhancing their self-esteem and emotional well-being. The act of presenting unique items and establishing their social status provides a sense of accomplishment and emotional transformation, aligning with the concept of catharsis.



Within the framework of catharsis, Case Study #4's inclination for non-precious material jewelry can be viewed as a form of catharsis. These jewelry items serve as tangible vessels that encapsulate their cherished memories and emotional connections, offering a means of cathartically revisiting and reliving those significant life experiences. The act of wearing these pieces allows for the expression and preservation of their personal history and sentimental bonds, leading to a positive emotional transformation, aligning with the essence of catharsis.

The entirety of these cases can be viewed through the lens of catharsis. However, it must be noted that catharsis is not necessarily tied to the true motives. It is not certain that Case Study #1 genuinely seeks to advance local artisans, Case Study #2 truly aims to improve the environment, Case Study #3 genuinely seeks to enhance their quality of life through social interactions, or that Case Study #4 truly desires to remain connected to their personal life history. Their unfiltered responses should indeed be validated as legitimate data from Saukko's perspective, but this does not imply they are beyond critique.

Catharsis can be perceived as a form of consolation or escapism for urban women who constantly navigate change, perpetually renewing themselves. These women simultaneously grapple with their inevitable aging, the risk of being abandoned by their partners at any moment, and the potential loss of their assets for various reasons. This underlying fear stems from the tension between their independence and their inclination to constantly adapt to the "male gaze" (Prabasmoro, 2003), signifying a conflict between independence and dependence that generates anxiety. To cope with these anxieties, these women create a form of solace, as if what they have been doing is not purely consumptive behavior or extravagant spending, but rather driven by loftier purposes. This is where catharsis comes into play.

In this context, catharsis functions as a coping mechanism. It allows these women to reconcile the tension between their independence and the need to conform, enabling them to find solace and purpose in their actions. It provides them with a sense of meaning and justification for their choices, alleviating the anxieties associated with their societal roles and the expectations placed upon them. Thus, catharsis serves as a psychological release valve, offering emotional relief and allowing them to navigate the complex landscape of urban life more comfortably.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn in relation to the research objectives:

- The ownership of non-precious material jewelry is motivated by factors such as economic support for local artisans, environmental consciousness, social status, and belonging, as well as personal sentimental value.
- These motivations can be understood as manifestations of catharsis, serving as coping mechanisms to address anxieties. They represent a form of consolation or escapism for urban women who continually grapple with the challenges of constant change and self-reinvention. These women face the dual pressures of aging, the ever-present risk of being abandoned by their partners, and the potential loss of their assets for various reasons. This underlying fear arises from the tension between their desire for independence and their tendency to adapt to societal expectations, particularly the "male gaze". This tension generates anxiety, and the motivations for owning non-precious material jewelry serve as mechanisms for managing and alleviating this anxiety.

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