

# Embracing the tall poppy: overcoming tradition in customer jewellery design preference

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## Abstract

This case study examines the role that Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) plays within the New Zealand jewellery industry. One company's attempt to subvert tradition and encourage personalization of milestone jewellery such as engagement rings and wedding rings has led to insights about Kiwi jewellery purchasing behaviours. The mass-market jewellery industry in New Zealand is heavily invested in producing jewellery designs that have existed for upwards of 50 years. Kiwi customers are on average less adventuresome in their preference for jewellery styles, and often purchase traditional jewellery designs because they believe such designs to be stylistically safer. This paper provides a detailed case study that examines how the Auckland-based boutique jeweller K. Amani Fine Jeweller designs against convention and consistently encourages tradition-minded customers to embrace personalized jewellery styles. This is accomplished through communicating to customers the personal design aesthetic of K. Amani's jeweller, as well as through non-standard solutions to traditional jewellery manufacturing such as Computer Aided Design (CAD), 3D rendering, and 3D printing. Likewise, dedicated face-to-face consultations and a keen understanding of customer personality types help to raise awareness of jewellery design possibilities, and provide customers with a greater sense of security in order to opt for custom or non-traditional designs. This approach consistently results in customers electing personalized touches to their jewellery designs, and encourages lifetime loyalty to K. Amani who can create custom designs, versus jewellers that only provide stock items.

## Introduction

In certain cultures and industries, tradition plays a significant role in the purchase decisions of consumers. In the realm of fashion, and the fine jewellery industry in particular, tradition not only influences individual taste, but also the design aesthetic of mass-manufactured jewellery. In this way, tradition can be a reciprocal and self-reinforcing process. While there is tremendous innovation and stylistic revolutions among jewellery *auteurs*, large companies that specialise in producing significant quantities of jewellery - commonly tens of thousands of copies of a single design - are hesitant to invest in new design styles that lack a proven record of profitability. To that end, there are a number of common, traditional, "safe" designs that appear in virtually every jewellery store, and especially stores that are supplied by mass manufacturing. The ubiquity of these designs has a reinforcement effect on customers: for example, the belief that an engagement ring is *meant* to look a particular way, and that a design that ventures outside of a particular standard may attract ridicule, or be seen as a poor investment. The same may be said of fashionable clothing, but there is a significant difference in the degree of financial investment between the two: while an avant-garde dress may challenge some people's sense of taste, the cost and emotional investment of a ring is generally several orders of magnitude greater. This can result in a customer who is much more hesitant to take design risks when purchasing jewellery.

Culture also plays a role in a person's willingness to wear jewellery. New Zealand culture is commonly perceived to have an ingrained "Tall Poppy Syndrome" (TPS), whereby people who are high achievers or who have conspicuous signs of wealth, status, or success are subject to criticism, rebuke, and/or sabotage among their peers and friends (Kirkwood, 366). One means of becoming a

"tall poppy" is by adorning oneself too ostentatiously and thereby signifying elevated wealth or status. The degree of ostentatiousness varies from culture to culture, and within New Zealand even modest fashion choices can be judged as extravagant. This applies to one's choice of jewellery, as well, and the knock on effect is a market tendency to cater to subdued jewellery designs in New Zealand.

This paper examines how K. Amani Fine Jeweller (hereafter: KAFJ), a boutique jewellery store in Auckland, New Zealand, manages to encourage customers to embrace designs that sit outside the standard Kiwi aesthetic of safe, traditional jewellery. This paper utilises a case study as a method of qualitative research, and contextualises the case study within an existing body of research into Tall Poppy Syndrome. This paper examines a specific Kiwi demographic that is least likely to be affected by TPS and most apt to be open toward non-traditional jewellery designs. Finally, this paper proposes a marketing strategy that targets this demographic.

## Tall Poppy Syndrome

In the research surrounding Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS), *tall poppies* are "people who are conspicuously successful and who have high status by virtue of their achievements, rank, or wealth" (Feather, 1991, p. 121). The term *tall poppy* carries an invidious connotation as "a person who is conspicuously successful and (frequently) as one whose distinction, rank, or wealth attracts envious notice or hostility" (Ramson, p. 494). Tall poppy is identified as Australian in origin (Mouly & Sankaran, p. 285), but the term is "often described as being ingrained in New Zealand's culture" (Kirkwood, p. 366). Most people wish to avoid being seen as tall poppies due to the likelihood of a "poppy clipper" (Peeters, cited in Mancl, 2006, pp.4-5) demeaning them with the goal of lowering their social status (Mancl, 2006, pp. 4-5).

The justification for this behaviour may exist in a perceived power struggle between the poppy clipper and the tall poppy, whereby the competitive poppy clipper seeks riddance of any direct rival (Mancl, 2006, p.5). This form of envy among poppy clippers appears to correspond to a low level of self-esteem. Thome (1993, p.30) uses the analogy of "crabs in a barrel" to describe this behaviour. When there are two or more crabs in a barrel, as one crabs starts to climb out, the other crabs pull it back down. Mancl (2006, p.10) suggests that "envious individuals are prone to feel that others deserve *less* than they do and they wish to protect their own status by distorting others' successes."

"When a woman is perceived as being on the fast track to success, other women feel as though she is 'breaking rank,' or deviating from the 'norm.' Not only that, the high achieving woman (tall poppy) is often perceived as 'raising the bar' and increasing expectations for other [women]" ( Chesler, cited in Mancl p. 17).

While the research into TPS is sparse, Mouly & Sankaran and Deverson confirm that New Zealanders are familiar with the concept of TPS and can often speak from experience about how it affects their lives or the lives of others they know. This is also confirmed by this author's experience. Anecdotally, Kiwi women seem to be especially aware of TPS, and the fear of being seen as a tall poppy strongly influences their choices in fashion, including clothing and jewellery.

But what do Kiwi women fear will happen if they are singled out as a tall poppy? They are likely to worry about the social ramifications of being clipped. This would include social exclusion, outright derision, or reputation-demeaning gossip (Mancl, 2006, p.2). Despite these reactions originating from self-worth issues of the poppy clippers themselves, the tall poppy may rationalize

that she is responsible for sparking their ire by standing out (or above) from the rest of the group. This is especially likely among tall poppies who themselves have low self-esteem and who rely on their acceptance within a group. While many Western cultures glorify the accomplishments of the individual person, some other cultures value interdependence and collective effort. Feather and McKee (1993, p.65) write that:

“[In Western cultures], self-worth is viewed in terms of individual accomplishment, and this construal of achievement carries over to affect the way a person reacts to the achievements of others. The high achiever who obtained success by personal and independent effort then may be admired.”

Among cultures who value collective effort, the group dynamic generally promotes “solidarity, proper rules of conduct, and harmony between group members,” with emphasis placed on “conformity to group norms” (Feather and McKee, 1993, pp. 65-66). In a group that values interdependence, an individual who stands out risks condemnation. Chesler (2003) argues that even in Western cultures, girls are taught to value relationships over individual success or being right. Mancl (2006, p.18) states that “[s]ince women are socialized to maintain a harmonious atmosphere, women may not strive to perform at high levels for fear that their female peers may exclude them.”

Urban New Zealand - Auckland in particular - is extensively multicultural, with large populations of Asian and Pacific cultures (46%), including Maori who are indigenous to New Zealand. Many of these cultures function from interdependent relationships. This is in contrast to the primarily European-origin Pakeha culture of New Zealand (56%), which embraces the Western ideal of individual accomplishment. (It is important to note that in the New Zealand census a person can claim more than one ethnic group, in which case they are counted in each applicable group) (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). As a result, there is relatively equal representation of independent and interdependent cultural attitudes in Auckland.

It is common in New Zealand for individuals who have achieved high-status to forgo purchasing expensive assets, or freely displaying them to colleagues, clients, or friends (Kirkwood, 2007, p.373). This can range from expensive cars to expensive jewellery. Mancl (2006, p.1) argues that successful and talented women “play small” in order to avoid social exclusion, an observation that is especially true among Kiwi women. This “playing small” is both the practice of practicing “faux humility,” as well as denying themselves “deserved accolades” (p.20). Such accolades could easily include jewellery items, and especially flashier, more expensive jewellery pieces. Therefore, at the risk of being perceived as a tall poppy, the successful Kiwi woman often downplays both her success and her fashion. By doing so, in the case of jewellery, she is more apt to seek out traditional jewellery styles that are less likely to garner invidious notice. These traditional styles are readily available from the well-established mass manufacturing jewellery stores which serve as the touchstone for many Kiwis' appreciation of jewellery.

## **Case Study Research**

Case studies can form valuable insights and in-depth analysis about the efficacy of business practices within a given industry context. Often in business, and among small businesses especially, the management of the day-to-day operations provides little time for the type of data-gathering, analysis, or reflection that larger companies employ specialists to carry out. Yin (2014) documents the case study as a well-established method of qualitative research. The case study allows researchers to examine “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when... the

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1981, p.59). The qualitative nature of the case study enables multiple sources of evidence to be called upon where standard experimental data-collection is not feasible (Yin, 2011, p.9).

This case study's investigation of customer purchasing habits in light of TPS can only be understood within the context of the jewellery sales and manufacturing industries of New Zealand, and specifically within Auckland, the country's largest city with 1.4 million people (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). While KAFJ provides all New Zealanders with the ability to purchase jewellery from the company's website, the vast majority of sales are conducted in person at the physical store. As a result, most of KAFJ's Kiwi customers are either Aucklanders or visitors to Auckland from elsewhere in the country.

This study's assessment of Kiwi attitudes about jewellery is based on the experiences of KAFJ's managing directors, and therefore function as anecdote more than evidence. In order to reach conclusions about the influence of designs (traditional versus non-traditional) on the purchasing behaviour of customers, each sales record was cross-referenced with a record of the customer's ethnicity or country of origin, as well as any record of whether the person was New Zealand-born or a New Zealand immigrant.

### **Designing as a tall poppy**

The KAFJ case study is an initial investigation into the jewellery purchasing decisions of Kiwi women. The company's eponymous jeweller and managing director is herself a tall poppy. Because of this, and as a result of her mixed heritage background of both independent and interdependent cultures, her personal jewellery aesthetic is both non-traditional and highly personalized. A challenge for KAFJ has been developing a business strategy that encourages tradition-minded Kiwi women to expand their jewellery taste and embrace non-traditional jewellery designs. This strategy has achieved varying degrees of success, and has been highly informative in determining the purchasing preferences among different Auckland demographics.

Auckland's lower Queen Street is the high-end designer fashion hub of the city's CBD, featuring recent additions of internationally-recognized stores such as Louis Vuitton, Prada, Guess, and Dior. Numerous jewellery stores line the street, as well, including brands such as Michael Hill, Walker & Hall, Pandora, and Partridge Jewellers, among others. In a small area, lower Queen Street is saturated with high-end specialty fashion options, with a notably high number of jewellers. This section of the city is in immediate vicinity to both the cruise ship docks and Britomart, the main transport hub of Auckland for both trains and buses. The cruise ships' passengers are frequent customers to this area throughout the summer and early autumn months (November through April). The Britomart Transport Centre delivers tens of thousands of city workers and visitors each day, many of whom are frequent customers of the lower Queen Street stores.

Nestled among the iconic fashion and jewellery stores is the historic Queens Arcade, one of the oldest buildings in the city. The arcade is preserved through heritage status and its interior reveals architecture from the early to mid-20th Century. The Queens Arcade caters to professional urbanites who are more interested in quality, niche goods as opposed to mass-manufactured, value items. The Queens Arcade managers are adamant about including only "destination stores" in the arcade, and KAFJ is one of two jewellers among them. This location is key to understanding the combined demographic of local office workers and international tourists that frequent the arcade.

The biggest point of difference between KAFJ and other nearby jewellers is that KAFJ is a manufacturing jeweller specialising in custom jewellery designs. KAFJ was founded in 2009 as an online jewellery store under the name Jewellery Online. In 2012, the company moved into the Queens Arcade to establish a bricks and mortar store, as it was evident that selling jewellery online without physical proof of establishment was unsustainable in New Zealand. In 2013, the company rebranded to K. Amani Fine Jeweller, and has since expanded into a section of the Queens Arcade five times larger than its first store. The company is also young in terms of its two managing directors, who are 29 and 32 years of age. This younger age often catches customers by surprise who expect that jewellers are well into middle age or older. The design of the store, including the jeweller's workbenches, tools, and large range of self-designed jewellery stock, provides evidence of our abilities. Likewise, since the majority of couples who get engaged are young themselves, we are able to communicate at a more immediate level with them, as well as be more up to date with current fashion, jewellery, and pop culture trends.

Being a manufacturing jeweller provides other benefits to customers, as well as points of difference from nearby competitors. Most CBD jewellers are jewellery retailers only, whereas KAFJ provides jewellery repair and remodelling services, which comprise at least 30% of its business. KAFJ's remodelling process allows customers with old jewellery to create new designs for their gemstones, while providing trade-in value for their metal. The option to remodel existing jewellery appeals to customers who

- Are looking for ways to save money on finished jewellery
- Have been gifted heirloom jewellery and want to remake it into something more personal or modern
- Have been previously married and wish to recover the value in their old wedding jewellery
- Are environmentally-conscious individuals who have concerns about mining, but who still enjoy jewellery

## **Overcoming TPS**

When KAFJ first opened its doors, its managing directors intended to provide its customers with a range of jewellery styles that could not be found in other Auckland jewellery stores. This was the result of designing jewellery according to the jeweller's personal aesthetic (informed by modern jewellery trends, as well as her own Indian-Nepalese-Persian-Fijian-Kiwi ancestry and identity). It soon became apparent that while customers were often enthralled with the designs, they were unwilling to purchase them for their own collections. Fortunately, this range of designs served as an inroad to converse about KAFJ's custom jewellery design service, which serves as the largest part of its business. However, the initial idea that by simply providing alternatives to traditional stock-standard jewellery would be enough for customers to embrace these designs was obviously flawed. Most of KAFJ's Kiwi customers are not willing to step beyond the simplest of jewellery designs. Many of these same people cite fears about not wanting the jewellery to be "too flash," "too blingy," or "loud." As previously mentioned, the designs in question are considered modest elsewhere in the world, so these appraisals are influenced by New Zealand mores. This is further evidenced by the fact that European and North American customers (travellers and expatriates) are much more likely to purchase KAFJ's stock jewellery or commission unique custom designs.

The managing directors' initial expectation was that they could subvert Kiwis' traditional jewellery aesthetic by providing them with a range of more dynamic design choices. When this assumption proved incorrect, they reconfigured their business strategy based on the observation

that most Kiwi customers ended up purchasing traditional rings that they personalized in small ways. Such personalization often takes the form of engraving, initials, design flourishes, cultural motifs, subtle changes to design facets, materiality, or swapping of diamonds for gemstones and vice-versa. Their business strategy adapted from attempting to subvert traditional jewellery style to enabling Kiwis to personalize traditional styles. The use of traditional styles combined with personalization provides their Kiwi customers with familiarity and a sense of uniqueness in the finished design that avoids concerns about perceived ostentatiousness and associated TPS. The key to closing the sale is to get customers so excited about the personalizations that they can no longer legitimately consider a stock-standard ring alone. Since price remains one of the chief determinants in a customer's decision of where to purchase a ring, KAFJ instructs its customers that in most cases they can personalize the ring design with little or no extra cost. This builds in a greater sense of value and ownership, whereby the customer believes that a custom designed ring from KAFJ has more value than the stock items from jewellery retailers.

### **State of the jewellery industry in New Zealand**

While the global jewellery industry is quick to innovate and experiment with new designs and manufacturing practices, the New Zealand jewellery industry lags behind. Most small, independent manufacturing jewellers in New Zealand are owned and operated by Kiwis at least 40 years of age and older. These jewellers apprenticed at a time before modern manufacturing techniques were common (or available), and since then many of these jewellers have not adopted modern techniques. Such modern techniques include computer-aided design (CAD) drawing, 3D visualization, and 3D printing for lost-wax casting. The slow uptake of these modern techniques has been the result of a number of reasons. The small size of New Zealand jewellery industry had, until the 2008 global recession, allowed for traditional jewellery manufacturing methods to remain viable. As a result, there was less desire to invest in new technology and production practices when business was strong, followed by less ability to do so when the economy weakened. Also, many established jewellers have a strong prejudice against any jewellery design that is not completely hand-drawn and handmade, and therefore they refuse to adopt modern manufacturing techniques. This is undoubtedly reinforced by a lack of fluency with the technology used in modern practices, or by outright technophobia, as well.

The large-scale mass manufacturers and retailers in New Zealand have established themselves throughout malls and city centres as a price-focused commodity. These retailers feature a large number of stock items that are subtle variations of a very limited range of jewellery designs. However, to the average Kiwi, these mass manufacturers are the epitome of their jewellery understanding. For example, as of this writing the most prolific engagement ring design is the diamond solitaire, featuring a princess-cut diamond in a four prong setting on an 18K white gold band. The large jewellery retailers feature variations in the diamond's carats, but very little (if any) variation in the ring design itself. Quite simply, such a ring is just about as generic as possible. However, these companies sell thousands of these self-same designs. Ironically, these designs are all created using modern manufacturing techniques, which serve the mass manufacturers especially well.

When shopping for an engagement ring, price is often a key determinant for Kiwis' purchasing decisions. The mass manufacturers are keenly aware of this, and provide a large range of low priced items. However, the average Kiwi customer (especially the average *male* Kiwi customer) is completely inexperienced in assessing the quality of the materials used in the jewellery. This is especially true of diamonds, but also impacts on setting quality, finishing quality, and design

aesthetic. There are four determinants of a diamond's quality: the cut, carat, clarity, and colour. The mass manufacturers expect to sell on cut and carat, as they are the two most immediately obvious aspects of a diamond. Many customers are only interested in getting the largest diamond possible for their money in the assumption that carat will have the maximum positive impact on their proposal. Second to this is the cut, as many people have a preference for the shape of a diamond. Clarity and colour are more difficult to determine with the naked eye, but both play a significant role in the value of a diamond. The mass manufacturers typically supply a large range of diamonds with visible inclusions (resulting in poor clarity) and yellowish tinges (resulting in poor colour). These companies often provide visual guides and sales pitches that adjust customers' expectations of diamond quality. As a result, many customers walk away believing they have received a top-grade diamond at a great price. What they don't realize is that they have purchased one of the lowest possible grades of jewellery-quality diamonds, whose appraised value is below the purchase price. Due to the ubiquity of mass manufactured jewellery with lower quality materials, these types of diamonds and rings become the jewellery precedent for Kiwis. By lowering the bar of expectation, Kiwis who are design-savvy and quality-conscious find it increasingly difficult to wear designs that would be modest elsewhere in the world without fear of invoking TPS.

### **Setting the example as a tall poppy**

Among jewellery retailers in New Zealand, a price-driven focus has led to deteriorating quality in jewellery materials. Unfortunately the New Zealand public has a lack of knowledge about the difference between jewellery retailers and jewellery manufacturers. For this reason, manufacturing jewellers who stuck to traditional manufacturing practices are losing business. These manufacturers are less frequently called upon to produce new jewellery, and instead are becoming repair hubs for the retailers' mass manufactured jewellery.

In order to buck this trend, KAFJ implements the following strategies to distinguish itself from other jewellers and strengthen its hold as a custom jeweller:

- **Traditional and modern manufacturing techniques**

KAFJ established itself as the sole manufacturing jeweller in Auckland CBD, nestled among other high-end designer fashion stores. KAFJ's manufacturing process combines the design, experience, and handmade skill of a traditional jeweller with the versatility of modern manufacturing techniques, including CAD, 3D rendering, and 3D printing. Customers are provided in-person design consultations with initial design concepts drawn on the spot. Once an agreement about design direction is reached, a 3D model of the jewellery is designed and presented to the customer as a high-quality 3D render. This visualization allows the customer to see a realistic preview of their jewellery design, and enables the jeweller to make swift edits to any design facets of the customer's choice. Once a piece is fully approved, the design is formed in wax resin using an industry-specialized 3D printer. If the customer still has any concerns about the jewellery design, the 3D print can be given to the customer to try on. The printed wax is then delivered to a fine metal casting company in Auckland to be cast in sterling silver, gold, palladium, or platinum. Once the casting is complete, the jeweller uses traditional hand skills to assemble, clean up, and polish the piece.

- **On-site repair and remodelling services**

Despite the large number of other jewellers in the Auckland CBD, only KAFJ provides on-site

repair services. Another key difference between KAFJ and other CBD jewellers is its remodelling service, whereby customers can use the materials in old jewellery to create new custom jewellery. Additionally, the on-site jewellery benches and manufacturing equipment provide visible proof of authenticity to customers.

- **Focus on coloured gemstones**

Most of the Auckland CBD jewellery retailers focus on traditional engagement and wedding ring stock that is almost exclusively diamond-oriented. Some retailers provide a small range of coloured gemstones, generally featuring only the most common types such as rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and tanzanites. As a point of difference, KAFJ is dedicated to specializing in a large variety of coloured gemstones, both domestic and international. KAFJ displays a collection of both rough and cut gemstones ready to purchase as part of a collection or to be set in a custom jewellery design.

- **Storytelling through control of the production process**

Between the managing directors, KAFJ is able to control nearly every aspect of the jewellery production process. This includes sourcing and cutting gemstones, designing jewellery, 3D printing, assembly, stone setting, jewellery cleanup, and finishing. (The only missing process is casting, which is handled by a specialized third-party facility.) As a result, KAFJ is able to tell the story of each piece of custom-made jewellery, including the provenance of its materials. Customers are more likely to believe a piece of jewellery is special, unique, and valuable if it has a story. After all, notable jewellery pieces from history have stories. The story of each piece of jewellery includes the origin of the gemstones, who made it, and why it was made in a particular way with its particular materials. As is often the case, the form of a gemstone dictates the design of the jewellery into which it is set. As an example, a large uncut piece of blue topaz may require a custom cut that is angular in order to minimize wastage of the stone. To KAFJ's jeweller, this angular shape may suggest a sting ray, which could be designed to fit as part of a breastplate necklace. Angular motifs could be introduced throughout the design, along with other blue gemstones to suggest water. Finally, to emphasize the singular nature of this piece, a small booklet would be printed that documents the entire design process that went into the creation of this piece. The booklet would be displayed with the piece as a sales tool, and would be provided to the customer upon purchase - thus preserving the story with the jewellery.

## **Target audiences**

Given that many Kiwi customers fear TPS, and given that TPS plays a significant role in New Zealand jewellery retailers' choice to stock predominantly traditional designs, how does an innovative and design-focused company like KAFJ successfully market its business to customers? While the main jewellery retailers seek to target the largest possible market of customers, this by no means encapsulates everyone. Likewise, although TPS is ingrained in New Zealand culture, it does not affect every Kiwi's purchasing behaviour - the very fact that stores like Prada, Dior, and Guess exist in the Auckland CBD is testament to this, as well as the high number of luxury sports cars frequently seen throughout the city. Additionally, due to New Zealand's status as a destination country, customers in the CBD are not exclusively Kiwi, but instead comprise a large population of immigrants and tourists, many of whom come from countries where non-traditional jewellery designs are more common.

As a result, KAFJ's marketing targets people who specifically are less concerned about TPS, which include:

1. highly competent achievers who value "the expression of [their] own unique internal attributes" (Feather & McKee, 1993, p. 66); and
2. people raised outside of New Zealand in Western cultures.

In both cases, an emphasis on a personal sense of independence is present. Feather (1991, p.121) describes highly competent individuals as more likely to "categorise themselves as high achievers, seeing themselves as belonging to the tall poppy group," and more likely to "want to see tall poppies rewarded for their achievements." An independent construal of self entails "behavior... organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feeling, and actions of others" (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p.226). This independent construal of self is more common in Western cultures than non-Western cultures (Feather & McKee, 1993, p. 66).

Given the Queens Arcade's location and appeal, many wealthy, high-achieving, cosmopolitan people frequent both the area and the Arcade. However, there are many more people who visit the arcade who are New Zealand-raised and less confident in expressing their personal uniqueness. The trick is in finding ways to convert such people to customers once they walk through KAFJ's door. This comes down to the managing directors building a keen awareness of personality types and methods for engaging with each type. While there are myriad personality types, two will serve as examples here. The following discussion is based on jewellery marketing advice provided by James de Groot (2012a, 2012b), a veteran jewellery store manager, salesman, and director of the website *jewellerystoretraining.com*. de Groot's personality assessment criteria contains four personality types that he believes compose each person. The way a customer speaks and holds his or her body generally reveals one of these personality types, which has an effect on the way the sales conversation will be carried out. The two most pertinent personality types are discussed below:

- **Control-dominant:** customers with control-dominant personalities typically focus on accomplishment and appreciation for what they do, have high senses of self-worth, are achievement-focused, project strength and intensity in their body language and words, like to talk but not listen, speak to the point, are results-oriented, and provide direct answers (de Groot, 2012a). This equates well with the first marketing demographic from above: highly competent achievers who value expressing their uniqueness. Control-dominant personalities typically request highly-personalized, one-of-a-kind pieces. These customers are usually the easiest to convert into sales and the least likely to be affected by TPS. They are also the rarest.
- **Peace-dominant:** customers with peace-dominant personalities are generally relaxed and low-maintenance, are often smart, talk and project low intensity, have little variance in their spoken pitch, are family-oriented, are slow to change their minds, are concerned about order, give simple answers, and often require more than one appointment. Peace-dominant personalities typically look for traditional designs (de Groot, 2012b). These customers are more difficult to convert into sales, the most likely to be affected by TPS, and are the most common.

A customer's personality type can often be gauged by their body language, their comfort with speaking, as well as the physical distance the customer maintains to a salesperson. In order to make the customer comfortable and to create the best opportunity to learn about the customer's

dominant personality type, the managing directors of KAFJ try to engage customers in a meaningful conversation that has nothing to do with jewellery at first. Once a dominant personality type is established, the conversation gradually returns to jewellery, along with an expectation of a customer's willingness to conform to or break from tradition.

When dealing with a peace-dominant personality, the customer's main objection is often that KAFJ's custom designed jewellery style is too bold for his or her taste. There is little that can be done to change a customer's mind about this, but an alternative strategy proves effective. By having a range of jewellery design styles in stock, KAFJ's staff can ask a customer to indicate which designs are the most appealing. If the customer chooses a safe, traditional design, KAFJ can still offer the customer ways to personalize that piece of jewellery. Often times these personalizations cannot be seen during normal wear - for instance, custom engraving along the inside of the band. Past examples of other inconspicuous personalizations include:

- modification to the under gallery of a ring's setting so that the metal supports form the couple's initials
- subtle design flourishes that represent a cultural motif of the wearer - e.g.: a tiny fleur-de-lis on either side of a ring
- custom engraving in non-Latin-based scripts - e.g.: Farsi, Cyrillic, or Tengwar
- swapping a diamond for a birthstone or other gemstone
- minor changes to design facets - e.g.: the thickness, width, or profile curve of a ring for comfort
- the type of metal - e.g.: changing white gold to rose gold, or using more than one colour of gold within the same piece
- modifying the design of an existing wedding ring design to fit around a customer's engagement ring
- matching the gemstones in an existing wedding ring design to match the gemstones in a customer's engagement ring

Many customers believe that when they walk into a jewellery store, their only options are the existing stock in the display cabinets. In fact, this is often the case in many of the well-known jewellery retailers. KAFJ's strategy is to ensure that customers realize that personalizations are possible on any piece of jewellery on display, and the degree of personalization is entirely up to the customer. This creates a stronger bond between the customer and a given piece of jewellery, and helps the customer to realize that what he or she receives will be singular, and not just another piece of mass-manufactured stock jewellery.

### **Conclusion: personalizing tradition**

This case study opens a discussion about the role that TPS plays in the purchasing decisions of jewellery customers in New Zealand. TPS has a significant impact on the type of jewellery designs stocked by jewellery retailers, with traditional designs being far more common than elsewhere in the world. This ubiquity of tradition in turns reinforces many Kiwis' misguided belief that such traditional designs are the epitome of jewellery designs elsewhere in the world. In this mistaken belief, non-traditional jewellery designs considered modest elsewhere in the world are often considered rogue, "flash," and *avant-garde* in New Zealand, and therefore subject to TPS rebuke.

KAFJ's initial business model believed that Kiwi attitudes about traditional jewellery could be altered by giving customers a better range of modern design choices. In practice, this mostly proved

incorrect. While KAFJ has established itself as a high-end jeweller specializing in custom jewellery designs, the customers who request custom designs are most often non-Kiwi. Instead, these customers are predominantly European or North American, and almost exclusively from Western cultures. Often when Kiwi customers are presented with options for custom-designed jewellery, they acknowledge such designs are very pretty, but that they could not personally wear it for fear of the design being construed as "too much." Phrases such as "too much", "too flash", and "too blingy" are code words that signify a fear of being singled out by TPS.

In order to combat fears of TPS while still positioning itself as a custom design specialist, KAFJ empowers tradition-minded customers to add discreet personalization facets to traditional jewellery designs. Such personalizations escape general notice, but they help the customer to identify the piece as one-of-a-kind. By providing this service and understanding customer personality types in light of TPS, KAFJ differentiates itself from other Auckland CBD jewellers whose primary focus is on selling only traditional, lower-quality stock jewellery.

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