

Opinion

No Ring In The Spring

By Nikki Wertz, Layout Designer

Spring is the season of new beginnings. The weather is warmer; flowers are in bloom and couples are getting engaged. Congratulations to all those newly engaged people, I suppose. You have much to think about before you sign that marriage certificate. However, if you're one of the millions who prefer to have a ring be a symbol of your love, you should be asking yourself where the diamond in your ring is coming from, because, more often than not, it's a conflict diamond, also known as a blood diamond.

Conflict diamonds are uncut diamonds mined in an area of armed conflict and traded illicitly to finance the conflict. These diamonds are often mined by child workers in developing parts of Asia and Africa, particularly in India and the Sub-Saharan region of Africa. According to the International Labor Organization, there over 168 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 years that either need or are forced to work. Thus far, there are two main areas within the diamond industry that profit off of the forced labor of these children: diamond mines in Africa and polishing factories in

India. Within both areas, children are forced to perform strenuous tasks; for example, carrying 50-60 kg of gravel in chemically hazardous conditions for more than 12 hours straight on \$30 or less per month.

Unfortunately, these conflict diamonds will continue to negatively impact the lives of thousands beyond extraction. Once they're sorted and valued, they're sold, mixed in with conflict-free diamonds and smuggled into other countries. The funds produced are immediately given to the local rebel movements. These conflict diamonds are then transported to the polishing factories, where laborers risk severe respiratory illness from diamond particle dust. The conflict diamonds are crafted into jewelry by manufacturers and retailers before finally ending up in the display case of a jewelry store.

What does this have to do with first-world consumers? Well, as long as we continue to be buyers of diamond jewelry, there will always be suppliers. We as consumers need to start questioning where, how and by whom our goods are produced. We have been unknowingly funding rebel militia that thrive on child

soldiers and tactics like rape and slavery for too long. Honestly, this confirmed to me that a sparkling engagement ring isn't worth it. A ring is supposed to symbolize love and new beginnings, but love shouldn't be based on how much money can be spent on a significant other. It definitely shouldn't involve snuffing out another's chances of a future while building up your own.

I must put aside my iciness towards everything romantic to admit that there are conflict-free alternatives to conflict diamonds. Synthetic diamonds and diamonds from antique rings and jewelry are wonderful options. Synthetic diamonds have an equally impressive shine without the mining process and human suffering. Diamonds from vintage jewelry can easily be reset into another piece of jewelry. Conflict-free diamonds, which are mined under strict standards, are a possibility. According to *Time Magazine*, you should consider purchasing diamonds from countries, like Canada, Botswana and Namibia. The magazine also suggests jewelers, like Hume Atelier and Brilliant Earth, that are apparently dedicated to

selling diamonds that are ethically mined. I'd still be wary of any diamond, however, as there is no way of knowing exactly where it came from or whether labor and environmental standards were followed during the mining process. If possible, *Time Magazine* suggests buyers question the jeweler about where it came from. The jeweler should be able to describe in great detail where the diamond was sourced if it was ethically mined.

Keep in mind that what I've written is not a reflection of the cultures or the people that reside in these areas. I am merely bringing light to the issue of modern slave labor as a call to action to my fellow human beings. To quote Lily Tomlin, "I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then, I realized I was somebody." I am not saying this is an easy issue to solve, but I believe we are all capable of making a difference. There is no special look, profession or personality trait that makes one capable of impacting lives. You just have to care enough to act and encourage others to act alongside you.

The Bachelor(ette)

By Ell Shelp-Peck, Staff Writer

The probability that you know someone who watches *The Bachelor* is high, but is that good or bad? The show is generally not the best model for healthy relationships for its young, impressionable audience of young women. The *Bachelor* began in 1999 when Mike Fleiss had the idea to take a very rich man and pair him with 50 women who were willing to be his wife and let him choose which he wanted to marry. The show did not end well, as the man and the woman he chose divorced quite soon after. However from this experience, Mr. Fleiss developed *The Bachelor* and its spin-offs. The show has been wildly successful with millions of viewers worldwide, but at what cost? In a *New York Times* article, Suzannah Showler, an academic, poet and an avid member of the *Bachelor Nation*, the name of the fan base for the show, says "that [*The Bachelor*] has always pretended to be about the production of fantasy, but is really about how people make do...under inadequate conditions." Showler explains how reality shows place their contestants into stressful situations that may even target their fears or insecurities to create drama.

Now when this is applied to real life, it becomes incredibly

unrealistic, which is why a connection can be drawn between *The Bachelor* and the speed at which American teens are dating. When asked about how she thinks the show has affected America's youth, freshman Taylor Houser responded with that "people might think the extravagant dates are what is needed to fall in love with someone. If this was not a show people would think it is absolutely crazy, but since it is entertaining no one seems to care what it is really showing and teaching people." These young people are being influenced by a

culture that values speed over quality, due to the fact that a majority of *Bachelor(ette)* couples do not stay together past all of the hoopla that is the show and wedding. Many teenagers are feeling the need to rush relationships because that's all that the media shows them. This not only harms their concept of dating and relationships for the rest of their life, but it also perpetuates the culture that *The Bachelor(ette)* creates. The show has become more accepting throughout the 23 seasons it has been on the air; however, it has always had the stench of the patriarchy

written all over it. By idealizing the large romantic gestures and disregarding homosexuality and the small intimate details of a successful relationship, the show continues to oppress groups of individuals who also show love. It continues to repress the needs of a real relationship by making relationships out of large expensive gestures rather than the connection between the people. So, where do we draw the line between entertainment and the health of society's relationships?

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