

The rules of engagement

Throw convention out the window and get engaged on your terms

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Are you tired of the worn out trope that before you get married a man must get down on one knee and ask a woman to marry him, provided that he has spent at least two months salary on a diamond ring that he picked out all by himself?

Many women and men around the world are deciding to take ownership and shake up tradition. If you're exhausted of this tired tradition then here are a few ideas to put a pin in cliché engagements.

1. Involve each other

"I think that engagements should be more of a project that two people work through together," says Jennie Palmer, co-host of "Yeah, She Said That," Calgary's only feminist radio talkshow on CJSW. "(Traditional engagements are) something that you wait to happen to you, rather than be an active participant in the decision. I don't think that's very empowering for women."

It sounds remarkably simple, but women can get involved in the engagement process as well. Many couples today go ring shopping together to pick out the perfect engagement ring. They discuss different options for proposals and many will create a budget together as well.

Once you're married you will have to make many decisions together that will highly impact one another. Why should this one be any different? You could even call it practice.

2. Split the cost

Engagement rings are expensive, yet the man is assumed to fork over the cash and common "knowledge" says that he's required to spend at least two months salary on it.

Krystal Walter, a professional matchmaker who brings couples together in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Toronto says, "I think it depends on how the couple gets engaged. If they plan the engagement together, they may decide together that's a cost that they want to share." She notes that most of the engagements that she sees are "traditional," with the man surprising the woman with a ring that he purchased himself.

"The wedding and the ring is one day," Walter says. "If you want to be together and spend all that money, then at the end of the day it's gone. However, there are a lot of people who don't have a lot of money for a big wedding, and they want to be logical about how they're spending their money.

"I like the idea (of splitting the cost), but I think it depends on the couple and what their situation is and how they get engaged."

3. Change up the gem

Diamonds are also expensive, and, to be honest, not as rare or expensive as we're led to believe. The popular science website (and television show) How Stuff Works took a look into diamonds and their value. Author of the article "How Diamonds Work," Kevin Bonsor, writes: "In truth, diamonds are no rarer than many other precious gems. They continue to demand higher market prices because the majority of the diamond market is controlled by a single entity."

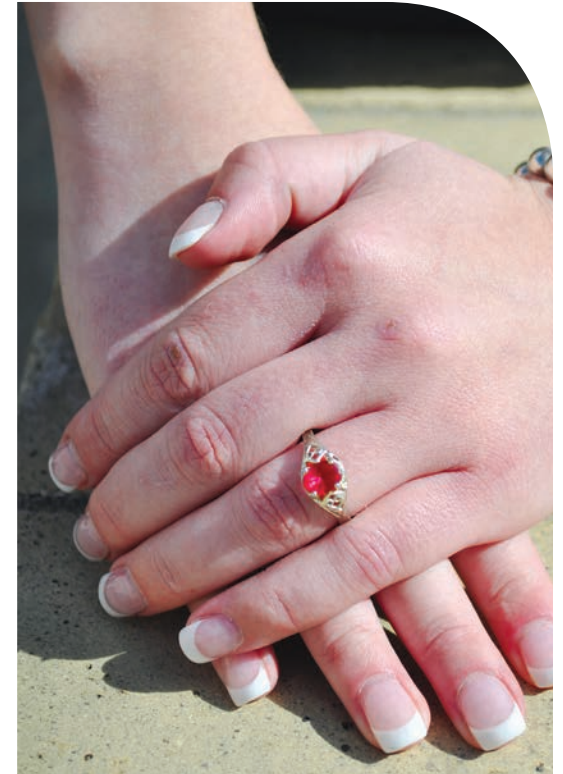
Supply exceeds demand, but since diamonds are essentially a monopoly, false scarcity is created and diamonds are heavily marked up. Due to excellent public relations work by international diamond cartel, De Beers, most of us believe "A diamond is forever." However, you can get the flawless-diamond look from lab-created gems such as moissanite that are less expensive than a diamond but have the same brilliance and strength at a fraction of the price.

Or you could go completely different and pick a coloured gem such as ruby or sapphire. It doesn't really matter, you can decide whatever you want for your ring, because it's your ring.

4. Rings for men

Why should women get all the bling, and why do men not need to show society their relationship status?

Palmer says that although she's not opposed to the concept of engagement rings, she does feel that traditionally they're a little one sided. "It's like this giant symbol that flashes and everyone can see it, and it basically says, 'Don't talk to me, don't come near me, I'm taken,'" Palmer says. "But, the man (traditionally) wears no such symbol. It's almost like he has permission to still keep his eyes open and look for someone else. Then the couple is engaged for two or three years and the woman wears this thing that says 'I'm taken, I'm property,' for two or three years and then the man wears nothing? It's just not fair."



Who needs a diamond? Change up your engagement ring by going with a coloured gem instead. PHOTO BY APRIL LAMB/CALGARY JOURNAL

There are plenty of nice rings out there for men, and many jewellery stores now even have male engagement ring sections.

If you want to be extra bold you could go the route of Johnny Depp and wear a female engagement ring. Although he recently went on the Late Show and admitted to David Letterman that the ring was simply too large for his fiancée, Amber Heard, but decided to keep the larger one for himself. "I put it on," he said. "She has the other one that fits."

5. Forgo the ring entirely

For some, the idea of the engagement ring is too entrenched in patriarchal tradition for them to even bother with the engagement ring. Feminist writer Emily Heist Moss writes about her feelings towards engagement rings in an article posted on RoleReboot.org: "It is a symbol that she is no longer a single woman, 'bagged and tagged' as my roommate says. Both partners have made this formal commitment, but only he is required to pony up the dough, and only she is required to display her changed status in a public fashion."

At the end of the day, it is personal preference on what you do for your engagement. Engagements are about two people: you and your fiancé.