

# Apprehensions: On gaining recognition as middle class in Madurai

Sara Dickey

---

*In this article, I examine everyday ways in which residents of Madurai, Tamil Nadu work to gain and maintain recognition as middle class. In the intersubjective production of identities, people define not only what it takes to be a member of a specific local class category, but also what it means to be treated as fully human. I explore the critical importance of visibility and recognition in daily life, and the modes and meanings of the consumption through which people strive to achieve them. Focusing on two key consumption practices—presenting oneself in public according to local standards of ‘decency’ and marking class belonging through one fetishised consumer good, the cell phone—I consider the relationships among visual apprehension, counting as a social being and dignity.*

---

**Keywords:** middle class, consumption, class anxiety, dignity, mobile phones, south India

## I *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

When scholars study the impacts of class, we frequently look at the ‘big’ things: the dramatic, the monumental, the long-term. We examine life chances, life histories and longitudinal data. The object of our work might be class movements, famous strikes, changing consumption patterns, the role of debt in impoverishment, the impact of educational attainment on occupation or (in my own case) the role of marriage in reproducing class

---

<sup>1</sup> Small portions of this article have appeared in similar form in Dickey (2005, 2012). Here I elaborate on the topics of visibility and recognisability raised in these earlier publications.

---

Sara Dickey is at the Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, USA. Email: [sdickey@bowdoin.edu](mailto:sdickey@bowdoin.edu)

---

***Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, 2 (2013): 217–243**  
**SAGE Publications Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC**  
**DOI: 10.1177/0069966713482963**

(Dickey 2010). Class is indeed played out, experienced and negotiated in these ways. But class is also lived in and through highly mundane processes. Examining the everyday ways in which class identity is negotiated and enacted allows us to scrutinise the symbolic meanings that underlie 'larger' class systems. More significantly for my interests here, it helps us to comprehend the meaning and experience of class in everyday lives.

In this article, I consider quotidian, often fleeting, interactions with known and unknown others that can be crucial to people's sense of well-being. I focus, in particular, on the drive to be *apprehended* that shapes those interactions. In Madurai, a city in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, people remark frequently on how the display of consumer goods affects the treatment they receive by others, and how they work to present themselves in ways that gain approbation from a salient audience. This of course implies that they too are judging others to identify those whose opinion matters or is irrelevant (cf. Frøystad 2006). What most people desire is to be *recognised* as social beings by those others whom they have already assigned that status, and to gain the dignity that recognition bestows.

Hugo Gorringer notes cogently that 'some groups have the capacity to *identify* others' (2006: 238). Such 'identification by others', as Richard Jenkins argues, 'has *consequences*. It is the capacity to generate those consequences and make them stick which matters' (2008: 42–3). In this intersubjective production of identities, people define not only what it takes to be a member of a specific local class category, but also what it means to be treated as fully human. They thereby define one kind of the 'social value' that forms the theme of this issue. In this article, I examine the critical importance of visibility and recognition in daily life, and the modes and meanings of the consumption through which people strive to achieve them.

## II

### *Dignity and class*

'Dignity' in my usage is an acquired or contingent dignity (Meyer 2002: 197; Schaber 2011: 152), not the essential human dignity discussed in much contemporary human rights literature (see, e.g., Kaufmann et al. 2011; Kretzmer and Klein 2002). It is much more closely related to the intangible qualities of esteem, and especially regard and recognition, that have recently been taken up by a small number of economists and political sociologists (see Brennan and Pettit 2004; Castleman 2011; Offer

2006; Sayer 2005). Feelings of dignity, like the most mundane of social interactions, however, are rarely foregrounded in class analysis. Yet, as Gorringer argues, 'poverty cannot simply be measured in economic terms. Consideration must be given to the intangible goods of self-esteem, pride and dignity' (2010: 62). Dignity is not part of the material sources or even the symbolic signs of class that are usually examined in class studies; it is closer to affect. In Madurai, the primary way of articulating this desire for dignity in everyday discourse has to do with class more than with any other form of identity.

In the scholarly literature on Tamil Nadu, discussions of dignity appear primarily in two bodies of work: studies of the Self-Respect (Non-Brahman) Movement, and studies of scheduled castes. The use of the concept in the Self-Respect Movement was an egalitarian call for all people to recognise and act on their own dignity (*mānam*, honour or respect; and *cuya-mariyātai*, self-respect)—akin to the category of essential human dignity (see, e.g., Price 1996; Ram 2009: 505–06)—rather than to accept a differential sense of worth based on caste. One of the primary aims of the movement was to advance a group's sense of self-worth and social value—by according self-worth through markers other than those of an externally imposed hierarchical system—instead of a gambit to find a place *in* that hierarchical system.

Treatments of dignity closer to my own work are found in historical and ethnographic studies of rural scheduled castes' attempts to gain dignity by decreasing stigma and refusing degrading transactions (see, e.g., Gorringer 2010; Kapadia 1995; Mines 2005; Mosse 1994). (These caste groups were not a primary part of the Non-Brahman Movement.) David Mosse, for example, discusses a range of strategies that involve refusing or modifying exchanges, duties, demands and transactions in a village in southern Tamil Nadu (1994). Because many of these duties have been tied to agricultural seasons, life-cycle events and periodic rituals, the deployment of strategies to circumvent them is more intermittent than the everyday attempts to be recognised that I discuss in this article.

The struggle for dignity emerges in Madurai residents' talk about their interactions with others and in behaviours that aim to elicit regard from others. Finding a way to count in the social body, and to have that standing reflected back through cordial regard, is a striking issue for people in all class positions. Yet, dignity remains a topic rarely raised in studies of class, despite its critical impact on behaviour and well-being. One of the

aims of my work is to demonstrate the importance of attending to such intangibles if we are to apprehend the quality of everyday life in a class society. I return to the importance of dignity at the end of this article.

### III

#### *Showcasing class anxiety*

Questions over whether one will be visible as a social person often create a degree of anxiety among Madurai residents. Such anxiety manifests among people of all classes, since virtually everyone possesses a set of peers and higher-ranked social members for whom cordiality matters, and also because the processual nature of class means that one's standing is never set forever; it must continuously be reproduced. In my experience, this anxiety is greatest, however, among people in the middle class, who, consciously locating themselves between a lower and a higher class, feel themselves to be heavily scrutinised as they perform in the public eye (see Dickey 2012).

In 1999, as I was beginning to investigate local concepts related to 'class' in Madurai, I interviewed my long-time acquaintance Jayanthi, a retired domestic worker who is a monolingual Tamil speaker, about class terms and identities. We were discussing which Tamil words were closest to the American English concept of 'socioeconomic class'. Jayanthi eventually settled on *takuti*, a word that connotes, among other things, the social level ascribed to a person by others.<sup>2</sup> In Madurai, she and many other residents contended, *takuti* is determined primarily by money and the goods that it buys. Showing me how the term can be used, Jayanthi explained that people who meet her might ask, 'What *takuti* are you in?' Surprised, I asked, 'Don't they already know that by looking at you?' 'When we are outside', she said, 'we put on a "showcase" exterior. I can look fine, but really I'm suffering, so people who meet me ask what *takuti* we are in'.

A 'showcase' is the glass-fronted display case in the front room of most middle-class homes. In it, people show off goods—plastic flowers, ceramic figurines, Barbie dolls, small electronics, folk art—and with them, they make a public claim to economic, cultural and often social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The showcase is an apt metaphor for the surface, material performance that is enacted outside the home for a *takuti*-ascribing public.

<sup>2</sup> Other meanings of *takuti* include qualification (as in educational qualification), level, standing and honour.

As Kathinka Frøystad has argued for the North Indian city of Kanpur, urbanites who encounter one another in public are ‘heavily dependent on visual criteria both when making class judgements of others and when attempting to communicate their own status’ (2006: 179). In my work, the ‘public’ can include anonymous people in the city, one’s neighbours and acquaintances and even extended family members—anyone who evaluates one’s standing and communicates judgement by (not) seeing and by (not) addressing.

In this article, I consider how consumption is deployed to negotiate middle-class recognisability in a social field. Madurai residents who define themselves as middle class state, often in so many words, that social existence depends on critical consumption practices. That is, a person who does not display key material goods not only is unrecognisable and invisible but, in crucial ways, does not exist. To be visible, to be seen, to be known (all condensed in the Tamil verb *teri*) are to count as a social being, to be a person of substance—and not just to be accorded inclusion in the middle class but, in this rendition, to be recognised as human. Here, a social person is one who is deemed worthy of positive apprehension—of recognition—by a relevant evaluating public.<sup>3</sup> Recognition is a transaction that constitutes social substantiveness.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing from close to two years of fieldwork carried out between 1999 and 2009 in Madurai (and, more briefly, in Chennai and Coimbatore), I examine how people who wish to be acknowledged as middle class present themselves, and how anxieties and self-critiques circulate around these behaviours and exchanges of apprehension. By ‘middle class’ I mean those residents of Madurai who identify themselves as such.<sup>5</sup> This apparent circularity—that people who already call themselves middle class

<sup>3</sup> For other ways of defining the social person or social body in southern India, see Osella and Osella (1996) and Staples (2005).

<sup>4</sup> The goal of being recognised is to create belonging in the same ‘society’ vis-à-vis which the youth described by Constantine Nakassis in this issue position themselves as exterior. Interestingly, much of the status production in both cases takes place in ‘public’ realms—here, meaning outside the home—though the people I quote are searching for recognition while youth are avoiding it, and my respondents largely emphasise their *passage* through the public realm while young Tamil men congregate *in* it. Moreover, class standing is produced by my respondents in both domestic and non-domestic realms, while youth, by definition, are outside of the domestic.

<sup>5</sup> On earlier ‘self-fashioning’ projects of the ‘middle class’ in India, especially in relation to the use of consumption, see Haynes and McGowan (2010).

must nonetheless aim to be accorded this status by others whom they see as middle class—is a reflection of the constant work it takes to be of a certain class, part of the process by which class identities and relations are constructed. It also underscores the intersubjective and interactive construction of class identities.

Madurai has a population of about one million, with a primarily mercantile economy based in agricultural products and other local trade. It is depicted as a socially conservative city, both by its own residents and by those of Tamil Nadu's more self-consciously modern cities (generally agreed to be Chennai and Coimbatore). The conservatism refers primarily to norms of gender, marriage arrangements and religious and familial duties.

In Madurai, the number of people who identify as middle class has grown substantially since economic liberalisation. They generally refer to themselves as 'middle class' when speaking English, or in Tamil as *naṭṭaramānavāṅka* or *naṭṭara kuṭumpam* ('people in the middle' or 'middle family', terms that were rarely used before the 1990s). This group of people varies widely in occupation, education, assets and other markers of class status, but most middle-class people feel they are rather precariously and often anxiously situated between the destitute poor and the unrestrained rich (see Dickey 2012). They include certain daily wage earners (such as taxi and autorickshaw drivers), small business owners and professionals (teachers, health workers, civil servants).<sup>6</sup> Although this wide-ranging group constitutes a larger set of people than those included in standard scholarly and policy definitions of the middle class (see, e.g., Desai 2007; Deshpande 2003; Fernandes 2006; Lakha 1999; Sridharan 2004), they are nonetheless a minority of Madurai's population, outnumbered by those who have less economic security (in colloquial Tamil, *ēlai makkaḷ* or *illātavāṅka*, 'poor people' or 'those who don't have'). Smaller still is the group of people identified as 'wealthy' or 'upper class' (*periyavāṅka*, big people; *paṇakkārāṅka*, moneyed people; or *vacatīyānavāṅka*, people with resources).

Soon after my early conversation with Jayanthi, I began to explore the notion of a showcase exterior, asking people why it felt crucial to present

<sup>6</sup> Thus, the local Madurai category (or even categories) of the middle class would exclude the 'professionals' who are the target consumers of the luxury housing developments that Llerena Searle describes in this issue. Searle's discussion of this carefully circumscribed category underscores the importance of examining the many Indian 'middle classes' within their local cultural, political and economic contexts.

themselves in particular ways in public. This conscious self-presentation is one of the tropes used to talk about the everyday experience of class relations and the construction of a class identity. Another frequent mode of conversation, which serves sometimes as a critique of oneself and sometimes as a critique of others, is commentary on the role of specific consumer goods in constructing a social self. Both of these topics are discussed in this article. Consumption is one process in the constitution of individuals' and groups' identities. As Daniel Miller argues, our use of material culture helps us to understand ourselves in new ways, just as our use of those objects (and our incorporation, or 'sublation', of them into our identities) changes our understanding of the objects themselves (Miller 1987, 2010). These processes will be clear in the accounts below. I am less concerned, however, about the identity that material culture helps to produce, than about the deployment of objects in enjoining others to *confirm* that identity.

Since my research period covered a decade of changing consumerism, there have predictably been shifts in the material goods utilised in these modes of self-presentation. More intriguingly, there have also been striking consistencies. Through these years, the discussions I focus on here—of self-presentation and of the role of consumer goods in creating a social self—were each dominated by a specific topic: in the first case, the importance of looking 'decent' when going outside the home (a concern primarily of lower-middle-class and poor people, for whom appearing decent requires disproportionate effort and expense); and in the second, the signifying value of one fetishised good—cell phones—which provides a frequent item of conversation among people throughout the middle class. These foci illustrate two striking features of contemporary modernity in Madurai, both heightened since liberalisation: (a) control and discipline of the body; and (b) the role of material goods in defining a person. Of all the forms of cultural capital that are used to claim and interpret class identities, these two appeared most frequently in the commentaries I heard in the 1999–2009 decade, while they had been absent from widely condoned practices previously. In both cases, it is not just the material goods that signify, but also the knowledge of how to deploy them as markers of status (see Bourdieu 1984).

To introduce the dynamics by which social visibility confirms or denies a person's status as someone who counts, as well as to anchor the anxieties and the interactive dynamics of middle-class members and aspirants,

I begin with brief excerpts from interviews with several people who could not even hope to be seen as middle class. Their observations illustrate three key issues: (a) the importance of money/class as a source of respect; (b) the critical significance of being seen to the marking of a person's class standing; and (c) the range of others who act as a scrutinising audience in events of such marking.

The first interview was held in 2004 with Indira, a construction worker (*cittāl*) I had met as she walked to work down my street, and with her neighbours Rajkumar and Mallika. Rajkumar and Mallika are Thevars; I never knew Indira's caste.<sup>7</sup> Rajkumar is a butcher, operating a stall in an outer area market two days a week, and Mallika did agricultural (*kūli*) labour before she and Rajkumar married. (She was unemployed at the time, by her husband's and in-laws' choice.) Indira is married with one grown son, and Mallika and Rajkumar have two young sons whom they had not yet been able to send to school for financial reasons. After talking about the long stretches of difficulties in their lives, they turned to the treatment they receive from passersby, customers, neighbours and family.

Indira: Here, it's all like, well-off people will only talk with us if we have *vacati* (resources) too.<sup>8</sup> Even when they see us, they look at us like we are disgusting.

Mallika: They only give us respect if we have money.

<sup>7</sup> I include caste identities in this article because they are closely tied to consumption practices and attitudes, and because caste and class interact in a number of other ways as well. Caste groups vary in their attitudes toward consumption—such as which kinds of consumer goods and practices are most valuable and prestigious, and to what extent those goods and practices should be displayed and enacted in public and at home. Caste also affects the value that families place on education, and the historical privileges of and discrimination against particular castes that continue to affect access to education and occupations (Béteille 1991; Da Costa 2008; Desai and Dubey 2011; Desai and Kulkarni 2008). See Dickey (2012) for an extended discussion of the intersections of class and caste in Madurai.

The castes of respondents cited in this article are ranked roughly as follows, from 'lower' to 'higher': Chakkiliyar, Pallar, Nāḍār, Thevar, Acari, Naidu, Chettiar, Pillai, Brahman. A number of people I quote have different positions in the class hierarchy than they do in the caste hierarchy.

<sup>8</sup> *Vacati* means both 'resources' and 'convenience', and is often used to refer to key consumer goods that distinguish people of different classes. As noted above, one of the terms for relatively wealthy people in Madurai is *vacatiyānavāṅka* (people with *vacati*). For an incisive discussion of *vacati* in another Tamil Nadu city, see Tolen (2000).



Rajkumar: Now, it's only money that's really important. Before, people put more importance on relationships and behaviour, but now only money is important. Even the children we bear respect us, even the siblings we were born with will look at us and visit us, *only* if we have money.

Indira: Money is the most important thing in Madurai, even more than *jāti* (caste).

Rajkumar: If a person is well off, people will look at them respectfully, no matter what their *jāti* is.<sup>9</sup>

This discussion highlights the operation of vision in determining respect. In addition, it centres on the fundamental importance of financial means—and the kinds of cultural capital they generate and that generate them in turn—in determining social relations even with those to whom one is most closely tied, a point that recurs frequently in current discourse about social relations.

The importance of being seen and addressed was also highlighted by Vijayalakshmi, an impoverished thread-factory worker belonging to the Acari caste. Vijayalakshmi, who in 2004 was 30 years old, is widowed and lives with her parents, two brothers, one sister and the sister's husband and six-year-old daughter, all in a rented one-room home. The men are goldsmiths. Vijayalakshmi's niece is the first female member of the family to attend school. Vijayalakshmi complained that when she and her family members go out in messy or torn ('not-decent') clothing, rich people 'won't speak with us. They glance right past us and scuttle off (*viruvirunṇu pōyituvāṅka*). We have nothing, and they have a lot, right? So they hustle away'.<sup>10</sup> Here, 'rich people's refusal to see' is a refusal

<sup>9</sup> These assertions about the relative significance of caste and money are important as a form of contemporary discourse, but they cannot necessarily be taken at face value.

<sup>10</sup> Even today, the relationship that the poor have with the material culture of consumer goods can differ from that of wealthier people. A sense of (potential) loss, for example, may shape the affect and meaning attached to goods that cannot be replaced when they wear out, or that may have to be pawned or sold to finance bigger needs. Banerjee and Miller (2003: 54–5) describe the sadness that poor women feel when the one decent sari kept in a trunk for 'going out' becomes too worn to be respectable. Skuse, who explores the 'social life and death' of radios in Afghanistan, writes that 'the meanings and memories invested by the poor in items of material culture can be perceived as highly fluid, their experience of consumption being as closely associated with feelings of loss and alienation as with the pantheon of meanings invested through acts of consumption' (2005: 124). Skuse argues that such loss and divestment can create a potential 'realienation of things' (*ibid.*).

to ratify and substantiate them as full social persons. Like Rajkumar, Mallika and Indira, Vijayalakshmi emphasises the near-impossibility of getting wealthier people to mark her as worthy of respect through visual accord.

Social exclusion can take place through a number of means. Steffen Hermann cites spatial segregation, enforced lack of participation and practices of misrecognition (2011: 134–5). To these we should add the practice of *non* recognition. This is the systematic refusal to recognise a person as who she claims herself to be, or to accord him the identity he claims for himself. These experiences of denied existence are the stuff of middle-class fears.

#### IV

#### *Appearing decent: Passing class thresholds*

If self-presentation to the social body is shaped by the desire to gain social standing, one of the fundamental means of gaining the approving gaze is looking ‘decent’ to the public eye. In urban Tamil Nadu, decency encompasses neatness, cleanliness and modesty—qualities imbued with moral value. ‘Decency’ is one of the primary attributes assumed to distinguish middle-class people from those below them, and thus to mark entry into the middle class.<sup>11</sup> It is the quality that lower-middle-class people most often invoke when explaining how they try to present themselves to a watchful public.

In 2004, I was talking with three friends, all in their late 20s or early 30s, about how the everyday world had changed since their childhoods. Anjali, whom I have known since 1985 when she was seven, and her husband Sundaram own a small printing and graphics design business; she is Pillai and he is Thevar. Murugan is a videographer who runs his own business, and his family is Nāḍār. Murugan and Anjali met in the mid-1990s when they worked in adjoining offices. They are both economically better off than their parents were (Anjali’s father drove a bicycle rickshaw and Murugan’s father was a car driver), and they achieved solid middle-class standing in their adulthood. Sundaram, whose father was a civil

<sup>11</sup> On definitive concerns about cleanliness and order, see also Searle in this issue. For a discussion of similar standards for clothing and self-presentation, see Frøystad (2006: 166).

servant, is perhaps less economically secure than his father was, but not drastically so. I asked them what it means to be ‘decent’, a standard that by 2004 had become widely shared. Because, by then, it had also become a highly taken-for-granted concept, they found it hard to articulate what ‘decency’ meant. Shifting tactics, I asked them to describe how someone who is *not* decent looks.

Murugan: It’s someone whose clothing is dirty, unironed, torn, and unwashed, and whose hair is unoiled. They have no neatness (*nīṭṭas illāma iruppāṅka*).

Sara: What do you mean by neatness?

Murugan: Good clothes, new clothes.

Sundaram: If we wear old clothes, we feel really uncomfortable.

Anjali: We feel like we need to wear new clothes. If we’re going out,<sup>12</sup> we’ll wear the newest clothing we have.

Sundaram: If I went out to meet you, and didn’t have a nice outfit on, I’d be embarrassed and feel like I should have worn nice clothing.

Trying to get at the behavioural consequences that underscore the importance of looking decent, I asked them, ‘What would happen if you went out without looking decent?’

Murugan: If you’re standing across the road from us, you’ll think, ‘Poor things, they are suffering’ (*pāvam, kaṣṭappaṭṭirukāṅka*), and we mustn’t have people think that way. They’ll think, ‘Why did these people come out looking like this?’

Sara: How would you feel?

All three in unison: Ashamed.

Anjali: We don’t want anyone to know we are suffering, so we go out looking neat.

<sup>12</sup> To ‘go out’, a phrase frequently repeated, means going shopping, or going out of the immediate neighbourhood or going to meet anyone other than one’s closest neighbours, including the households of family members. It involves passing through and presenting oneself to the scrutiny of others.

Sara: If you are suffering, why shouldn't anyone know?

Murugan: They'll respect us less. If someone is suffering, no one respects them. They dismiss them, they think that person is beneath them (*ikalcci nenepānka, tālvu nenepānka*). Their behaviour won't be very nice.

Sara: How so?

Anjali: They won't show much respect.

Murugan: Not from everyone, mostly just from some people—it's worst with relatives. Now, in our house, we have a girl who is ready to get married. (If we aren't decent) no one would ask for her to marry their sons. Lots of people are like that.

Here we see that, whereas certain kinds of consumption make a person 'count' in society by making that person visible to a spectatorial public (see also Liechty 2003: 140–45; Srinivas 2002), the reverse situation—to lack and therefore be unable to deploy certain consumer goods in public—makes a person simultaneously pitiable and socially invisible. Murugan, Anjali and Sundaram emphasised the dismissal, lowness and invisibility that improper or inadequate consumption results in, and the immediate and long-term consequences of these. In Tamil, *pāvam* means both a pitiable person and the act of sinning, both of which are associated with poverty. (This association underlies Indira's observation before that any glance people give her is one of disgust.)

People who are middle class, or who desire to be, often emphasised their consequent strategies for gaining visibility in public. They noted, for example, the need to keep at least one set of presentable clothing aside for shopping, visiting or dealing with officials, because otherwise they will not be 'seen' by the people they pass through and approach. Chellamma, a Chakkiliyar woman in her 20s whose husband is an electrical worker, visited me often in 2004 and 2005 after her third child was born. I had known Chellamma since her childhood, and her second child was my son's age. She said that when she left her home to come visit me, and any other time she 'went out', she would dress herself and her children in their best clothing, because otherwise 'people won't see us' (*avaṅkaḷukku eṅkaḷai teriyātu*, which literally translates as 'we will not be visible to them') and 'they will not treat me with respect' (*mariyātai*

*kuṭukkamāṭṭāṅka*).<sup>13</sup> Like the others, Chellamma's aim was to be neat and clean and presentable, not to be fashionable. In these cases, fashion is far less critical than decency.

Fundamentally, then, a person has to be decent in order to be recognisable, to be worthy of respectful interaction—in sum, to count in the public eye. (There are also negatively coded ways of interacting, as these accounts suggest, but as I discuss below, other evidence reveals that reciprocal interaction usually indicates that a person merits being seen.) The structure of this encounter deserves some attention. Those who go out, wishing to be seen, are already 'seeing' others as social beings. In the process of recognition, there is a reciprocal visual interaction, just as in *darśan*. 'Taking darśan' is the practice of seeing and being seen by a deity in Hindu (and sometimes Christian) worship, an 'exchange of vision' (Eck 1981: 6) and 'visual intermingling' (Pinney 2002: 364). People can also take darśan of other humans, as they frequently do when viewing political and religious leaders or celebrities, and Madurai residents' descriptions of presenting themselves to be 'seen' by empowered others resembles this practice closely. As with worshippers, people who are 'going out' in Madurai represent themselves as the initiators of what they hope will result in a visual transaction. Vision accords recognition when it is an exchange; it need not be egalitarian, but it must be reciprocated.

## V

### ***Displaying cell phones: Substantiating class belonging***

While being decent is often understood as the minimum standard for counting as a social being, it is insufficient for ensuring a solid position in the middle class. Other kinds of consumption, especially fashion-based consumption (and by this I mean simply keeping up with or ahead of trends, whether they be of clothing, technologies or rituals), are necessary

<sup>13</sup> This is especially interesting in Chellamma's case (as with Sekaran below), since proper consumption makes her 'count' despite her Chakkiliyar caste (a scheduled, or dalit, caste). For both Chellamma and Sekaran, in this urban social field (and as Indira and Rajkumar claimed above), class may compensate to some extent for caste standing. Chellamma is invoking both known and anonymous observers, only some of whom will know her caste, whereas Sekaran most frequently refers to people in his neighbourhood and his co-workers, who are certain to know his caste.

for being counted—or standing out—in smaller reference groups within the middle class.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, discourses around such practice often highlight the connection between consumption and *existence*.<sup>15</sup>

Of all the wide range of material goods that signify middle-class standing and its gradations—including clothing, televisions, refrigerators, motorbikes, gold, housing, etc.—the one that has caught the public imagination and appears most frequently in discussions of consumption and identity is the cell phone. Cell phones are easily carried (thus of course ‘mobile’) and displayed on one’s person, and they signify taste and technological literacy, social networks and relative wealth (and thus cultural, social and economic capital).

India is reported to have the second highest number of mobile phone subscriptions in the world,<sup>16</sup> and cell phones are now owned widely across classes. Both cell phones and calling options became relatively inexpensive in the mid-2000s, resulting in a surge of ownership. The explosion of cell phone subscribers has meant a sharp rise in ‘teledensity’—the ratio of phone subscribers to population—in India over the past decade. Robin Jeffrey and Assa Doron have charted the growth of telephone ownership and access in India.<sup>17</sup> In 1987, they note, India had three phones for every 1,000 people (including individual landlines and pay phones). By 1999, there were close to 23 phones per 1,000 people. In early 2010, the ratio had jumped to 510 to 1,000—a ratio of more than one telephone for every two people—and, significantly, more than 90 per cent of those phones were then cell phones (Jeffrey and Doron 2011: 399). The most recent data as of this writing show that by late 2012, teledensity was 768 to 1,000, 97 per cent of it cellular. Nationwide,

<sup>14</sup> The distinction between being decent and being fashionable is a locally meaningful if slippery difference—neither necessarily implies the other, but to the extent that both aim at inclusion within a group and the exclusion of those who do not or cannot comply, both have to do with meeting or exceeding a threshold.

<sup>15</sup> Although the range of goods available for consumption has increased since liberalisation—and so too the fineness of differences that can be established through consumer goods—ties between consumption and status are certainly not new in South Asia. See, for example, Banerjee and Miller (2003); Greenough (1995: 221); Haynes et al. (2010); Liechty (2003: 99); McGowan (2009); Srinivasan (2003); Venkatachalapathy (2006).

<sup>16</sup> Mobithinking.com, ‘The insider’s guide to mobile Web marketing in India.’ Available at <http://www.mobithinking.com/guide-mobile-web-India>. Accessed on 7 January 2013.

<sup>17</sup> They draw from data from the Indian Department of Telecommunications and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Also see Jeffrey and Doron (2012: 64, 69).

there were 904,230,000 mobile phone subscribers and 63 per cent of these subscribers were in urban areas.<sup>18</sup>

Cell phones are not only widely owned, they are also finely graded in terms of quality and taste, making them useful for marking and imagining identities. This remains as true in Madurai today as it was a decade ago. Such durability is rather remarkable, given the pace at which consumption signifiers change in contemporary India. The cell phone has both a 'material presence' (Banks 2001: 81, 86–87) and a communicative function, along with other 'inherent' uses such as information storage (Miller 2010: 111–13).<sup>19</sup> That material presence includes the location in which the cell phone is displayed on or near the body, the phone's appearance, its features, the data kept in it and the sounds that nearby people hear when the phone 'rings'. In their talk about cell phones, Madurai residents tend to emphasise the phones' materiality, though their use as communication devices does play a role in determining who should or should not be allowed to use a cell phone, as I discuss below. Like decent clothing and grooming practices, cell phones are incorporated into their users' selves and both shape and communicate an identity.

Murugan had a cell phone. Anjali and Sundaram did not, at that time.<sup>20</sup> When I interviewed them together in 2004, we talked about the increased availability of consumer goods since liberalisation, which they all viewed as a positive change. I asked them which goods are most important to own. Murugan cited his cell phone and his motorbike. Then, glancing at his friends, he quickly added that while he needs these for his business,

<sup>18</sup> TRAI. 2012. 'Highlights on Telecom Subscription Data as on 31st October 2012', p. 1. Available at [http://traai.gov.in/Content/PressDetails.aspx?PRESS\\_REL\\_ID=2010&pg=0](http://traai.gov.in/Content/PressDetails.aspx?PRESS_REL_ID=2010&pg=0). Accessed on 7 January 2013.

<sup>19</sup> In other words, cell phones play both 'instrumental and symbolic roles' in India (Donner et al. 2008: 333), as elsewhere. These roles go well beyond those I focus on in this article. They include, to cite a small sample of possibilities, sending a signal through "missed calls", taking pictures, checking prices, downloading screen savers, doing pujas' (Jeffrey and Doron 2011: 398; see also Doron. 2010. *India's Mobile Revolution: A view from Below*. Inside Story. Available at <http://inside.org.au/india-mobile-revolution>, 10 February. Accessed on 3 May 2010).

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, mobile phones had been important in Anjali and Sundaram's history. They were able to keep their developing 'love relationship' secret from their families, and avoid the risk of meeting in person, for a number of years by communicating over their friends' mobile phones (Dickey 2010; see Donner et al. 2008 for a discussion of cell phones' place in maintaining 'romantic relationships' in Bangalore, and Doron 2012 for Varanasi). As of 2009, Sundaram and Anjali both owned cell phones.

‘people who work in offices don’t require cell phones’. Despite this attempt at saving face, there was some embarrassment all around.

Later in the conversation, when I asked them what kinds of goods and resources (*vacati*) people typically acquire as they move from poverty to relative comfort and in what order, they began with the basics of shelter and minimal household appliances such as a radio or television or blender. Then these three young adults—all familiar in some way with poverty—moved to the next levels of acquisition:

Murugan: Before buying a house itself, the last important *vacati* would be a fridge.

Anjali: And after that, things for showing off (*āṭampara jāṁān*). People won’t use those things, they’ll just buy them and keep them at home or carry them around. Like a cell phone—it’s for showing off. {Laughs}

Sara: A cell phone is just a show, for some people?

Anjali: Yes, it’s just a show. They won’t *use* a telephone, they’ll just keep one for others to see.

Sundaram then echoed Murugan’s earlier statement by saying, ‘People who work in offices don’t need them’. Given the status enhancement that cell phones provide, I began to understand further why Sundaram and Anjali had rationalised not having a cell phone.

The striking symbolic value of the mobile phone was evoked even more strongly by people who are positioned *higher* in the middle class. Renganathan, a Chettiar advertising company manager in his mid-50s, talked in 2005 about why he needed a cell phone:

Because I’m in marketing, I need a mobile phone. I may receive calls at any time. But frankly, owning a mobile has become a fashion, a status symbol. Like a car—if you are rich, you have a car. If you are middle class, you have a two-wheeler. And you also have a mobile phone, whether you have any reason to get calls or not. You need a certain brand, a colour monitor, all that. It means you are modern, and then people will respect you. Only if you have these things, you are *recognised*. You *exist*, for them. Otherwise you are not recognised, you don’t exist.



Renganathan's experience condenses Murugan's and Anjali's observations about cell phone functions into a unified critique. Making an even more sardonic point, Sekaran, a 40 year old linguistics professor who is Pallar, said in 2009 that to lack up-to-date goods such as expensive cell phones means that 'you don't get people's attention, you don't get their respect, and then you are just like a small insect crawling around'. Both of these men see themselves as upper-middle class. For them, to lack consumer goods means to be unrecognised and invisible—even less than human—while to display them is to make a claim to a social presence and to matter in the social body.

This equation between consumption and existence was brought out in another way during my conversation with a group of post-baccalaureate students who were working towards a credential in medical transcription. In 1999, as outsourcing was just beginning to appear in Madurai, these students hoped that this new occupation would provide a more substantial income than their parents had as shop owners, farmers and civil servants. When I asked why they wanted a job in transcription, two of them answered half-jokingly, 'To eat'. Rajendran, a Nāḍār man in his 20s, elaborated on this. He said that if you lack the income to buy the consumer goods required for being seen as middle class, and

if you (still) want to be in the middle class, you don't eat. Really, you can't stay in that status. You'll have to change, you won't be able to buy things, you will feel very bad (*manacu kaṣṭamā irukkum*, your mind will suffer). 'But look, they don't have money, the children are starving', that's what people will think.

Like all the other speakers quoted in this article, he evoked witnesses to their imagined desperation as they cling to their hold on a place in the middle class.

Rajendran and his classmates argued that they cannot 'survive' in the middle class without an occupation like medical transcription. Rajendran's poignant association of starvation with the lack of middle-class capital was hyperbole, but it was telling. He and the others suggested that if they cannot buy what they need to maintain their standing, they will be written off as if they are poor and pitiable. They imply that in their social world, those who cannot acquire and maintain the *visible signs* that legitimate middle-class standing will become as socially invisible, insignificant and

despised as the poor—which is precisely the way that poor respondents described themselves.

All these accounts produce a portrait of people self-consciously consuming in ways that they hope will produce recognition of them not simply as proper social beings, but more fundamentally, as beings who are fully human. If you do not consume in proper ways, you are not seen, perceived, or known (*avaṅkaḷukku eṅkaḷai teriyātu* glosses in English simultaneously as ‘they do not see us’, ‘we are not visible to them/perceived, by them’, ‘they do not know us’). People ignore you because you are beneath them (*tālvu*, a term that refers both to physical height and social treatment), suggesting again that you are not within their field of vision. They dismiss you (*ikallcci kuṭuppāṅka*) because you do not count as worthy of recognition. You are less than human. If, however, your inadequate consumption abilities *are* noticed, you are pitied (*pāvam*), a desperate, immoral, despicable condition. Recognisability requires both basic economic and cultural capital, in order to be decent and neat; and more finely graded forms of capital are required to substantiate oneself further. If you perform class properly, you will be recognised by a relevant audience and you will be extended *mariyātai*, a term that means distinction and respect but also, just as significantly, denotes inclusion within a reference group (Mines 2005: 92). Being positively apprehended creates dignity, self-worth and belonging.

## VI

### *Further apprehensions*

One of the anxieties of middle-class life is, of course, the scrutiny that provides the necessary field for visibility. Behaviours are watched closely, judged in particular for signs of moderation or excess. Middle-class people often speak of themselves in Goffmanesque terms, as acting on a stage surrounded by a critical audience (Dickey 2012; Goffman 1959). As a recently married Brahman factory clerk put it in 2001, ‘In the middle, there are all these expectations to show that you belong where you are, and it is very hard to be able to afford to do everything right’. Another clerk, a middle-aged Thevar man who works in a university office, also said that ‘middle people’ must do everything right: they cannot drink in public, they must wear clean clothing and they must marry within their caste, because otherwise ‘everyone will talk about them’.

Another anxiety linked to the idea of visibility is the fear of attracting the attention of others in ways that will draw *kaṇ tiruṣṭi*, a force usually translated somewhat misleadingly as the ‘evil eye’. As Melanie Dean discusses in this issue, observers who focus on, admire, compliment or desire something that is attractive or appealing can draw misfortune to the bearer or owner of the good or quality, or to the object itself. It is important to be recognised and included, rather than being invisible on the social landscape, but standing out—performing too well—can cause harm. *Kaṇ tiruṣṭi* is usually a threat when a person stands out in some way. Anjali, for example, once broke her wrist after being knocked down in the street by a bicycle, just days before opening her own business after years of working towards achieving it, and she knew that this was because her neighbours were envious. Of course, even simply managing to appear decent, the minimal criterion for recognition as middle class, can elevate a person above others.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, what is proper consumption for one middle-class person may be thought improper for another. Age and gender commonly determine appropriate consumption within or across caste, religion and class groupings. Lower-middle- and middle-class young men, for example, demonstrate ‘style’ with branded clothing that, in its mild transgressiveness, marks them as liminally located between children and adults, and on the margin of ‘society’ (Nakassis, this issue). For adults, gendered differences can appear in, for instance, norms of technology use. Darshini, a Nāḍār woman in her 40s who teaches in a high school and runs a tutoring business, pointed out in 2004 that she was criticised for carrying a cell phone. She said,

A man can have it, but a woman? She has to keep it inside her purse. One (autorickshaw) driver asked me, ‘Why do you want to keep it in your hand? Why can’t you keep it in your bag?’ I said, ‘Why *can’t* I have it in my hand?’ and finally he kept quiet. My sister’s husband challenges me also. They think it is something like women’s equality. They don’t want women to speak anything in the public, other than with their relatives or their husband.

In this socially conservative city, the same consumer good that produces status and belonging for men can lead to charges of immoral behaviour for

<sup>21</sup> See Dean (2011) for examples among lower- and lower-middle-class residents of Madurai.

women.<sup>22</sup> When I recounted this story to Anjali, she rationalised women's pattern of carrying phones in concealed places, by saying it was just a matter of women not having shirt pockets, so they put their phones in their handbags instead.<sup>23</sup> Then she added that women are criticised for using cell phones because unlike men, who 'will attend to their calls and finish their business quickly and switch them off, ladies will keep talking for a long time, and disturb the people around them'. Unrestrained, unmonitored communication for women is, at the least, a social nuisance, and possibly a social danger. Doron (2012) describes a similar understanding in Varanasi, where mobile phones symbolise social networks outside the control of patriarchal authority. Restricting women's access to mobile phones is used there to 'reinforce and reconstitute gender ideology' within the marital household.<sup>24</sup> Here, concerns for decency overlap with concerns to display fetishised consumer goods, as women's improper use of cell phones is characterised as indecent. Such examples indicate a gendered dimension to visibility, just as there are age, caste and religious dimensions, among others.

Thus, the same markers that can give one the edge in performing to a group can attract attention or envy and draw *kañ tiruṣṭi* or verbal criticism, and the markers that are successful for one person may draw censure for another. It is a difficult balance. But what kind of balance? I would not argue that there is a single register or spectrum of visibility, in which an individual strives to be sufficiently but not excessively visible. Rather, people need to feel seen and recognised, to be accorded presence, in order to feel dignity and self-worth (see also Mines 2005; Sayer 2005). Simultaneously, many do not want to stand out dramatically—at least not to particular audiences, at particular times. Only certain people, in

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Donner et al., who note that for some conservative Bangalore housewives, 'modesty . . . meant not owning a mobile phone' (2008: 332). The authors argue that 'rejection of mobile ownership reflects the traditional gender directive for modest women to stay close to the home' (ibid.: 333).

<sup>23</sup> Melanie Dean (personal communication) has noted that the tailoring of men's clothes supports other display as well, such as the stylish pens tucked into shirt pockets along with cell phones. On the other hand, she points out, fashions have developed to enable the (visible) concealment of women's portable consumer goods, such as discreet mobile phone bags to accompany matching silk saris.

<sup>24</sup> There are other gendered patterns linking cell phone use and concerns for decency. One example is men's use of cell phones to share pornography, which must not take place in the presence of women and elders.

certain circumstances, wish to draw attention to themselves in this way, as Dean and Nakassis argue in this issue. To a great extent, the desire to be seen is the desire to be recognised by a larger public, both known and unknown. Here, it is worth remembering the generalised references to ‘people’ and ‘them’ that Sekaran and Renganathan make when referring to observers evaluating their consumption practices, and the non-specific ‘they’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ invoked by Murugan and Anjali, all connoting a rather diffuse social body (cf. Nakassis’s discussion in this issue of youth apprehensions of ‘society’). On the other hand, the attempt to rise in status by fashionably standing out may be a bid directed to a specific and known group of peers.

## VII *Conclusions*

I have examined two of the most consistent themes in Madurai residents’ discussions of middle-class membership: the critical importance of appearing decent in order to reach the lower threshold of the middle class, and the crucial significance of consumer fashions—particularly the cell phone—to signal belonging and exclusion for people at all levels of the middle class. Such observations, concerns and anxieties lie fully in the realm of the mundane. The hopes for recognition and the acts of judgement seem so small that they are easy to dismiss. Yet, they make up a good deal of the daily experience and impact of class for many people. Economist Avner Offer recognises the fundamental nature of this desire when he writes that ‘interaction is driven by the grant and pursuit of regard’ (2006: 77), citing a passage from Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

What are the advantages which we propose to gain by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. (Smith 1976 [1759], 1, ch. ii.1: 50, as cited in Offer 2006: 77)

‘To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy’ is precisely what Madurai residents try to attain from those around them. To be seen is to count, to have substance, visibility and humanity; not to

be seen is to be low, empty or void, invisible and non-human. In Madurai, the proper use of consumer goods helps a person to become visible, but material goods do not mean the same thing in everyone's hands. Some people are more fully able to use these objects than others. In particular, gender and generation (like caste and religion) affect individuals' potential for deployment and sublation of styles and goods (see Vera-Sanso 2007). There are also differences in individuals' motivations for using consumer goods as a strategy for gaining respect. Willingness to take part in conspicuous consumption varies by caste, and the display or use of certain material goods may be deemed more or less appropriate for people of particular castes (see Dickey 2012). Caste can also shape the importance of visible consumption more fundamentally. In more anonymous urban settings, lower-caste people with *vacati* may find it more pressing than higher castes to gain recognition through the material signs of class, which are oftentimes less essentialised than caste attributes.<sup>25</sup>

In doing this research, I have frequently been drawn to what I observed as a drive to be treated with dignity. The question I asked of Murugan, Anjali and Sundaram—'Why shouldn't people know you are suffering?'—was intentionally naïve but sincerely curious. Independent of the experience of material comfort or deprivation, one of the most immediate daily concerns for many people is how they will be treated by the others they encounter. Will they belong? Will they be seen as someone who counts, someone worthy of recognition, someone who has done and will do what it takes to be a full social being? The desires revealed in the many answers to my often unspoken question substantiate Michael Jackson's assertion that regardless of the circumstances of daily life, it is the '*experience* of being in control' that matters more consciously than objectively being in control of wealth, power, or 'the fate of one's fellow human beings' (1998: 22). Jackson calls dignity a gloss for the 'existential imperative' (ibid.: 206–07), the 'truth . . . that people need to have some say in the world into which they are thrown, that they must in some measure choose their own lives and feel that they have a right to be here' (ibid.: 195). Anton Blok puts this in the negative: people, he writes, 'require some measure of recognition and repute, lest they die a social death' (2001: 9). That social death is the invisibility that

<sup>25</sup> But see Frøystad, who argues that class judgements in Kanpur are highly informed by unarticulated assumptions about the correlation of caste and class, and that 'the distinction between markers based on economic means and genetic heritage was not as clear-cut as it may seem' (2006: 170).

denies dignity. Dignity, as I have argued, is an aspect of social relations rarely discussed in studies of class, but the value of dignity frequently underlies the discussion of consumption in everyday life.

Gaining a modicum of dignity also entangles people within the very hierarchical system whose effects they are trying to mitigate. This is not simply because performing according to the rules of the game can reproduce the hegemony of class, but more precisely because it sets the performers up to be evaluated by—and to evaluate—others through the diffuse social gaze. Dignity of this type is not an egalitarian ‘human dignity’, but a dignity dependent on the respectful gaze and address of judgemental others. In seeing and in presenting themselves in ways that invite being seen, these residents produce themselves as both subject and object in a field of power relations (Foucault 1978, 1980). Those quoted in this article, all of whom strive to be recognised regardless of how ‘high’ they are in the class system, act as subjects when they themselves identify those by whom they want to be granted respect. They thereby continuously re-position themselves as objects of others’ gaze and judgement. On the other hand, aware that they are offering themselves up to scrutiny, this behaviour is also a means of ‘managing the gaze’ (Staples 2003: 301). But there is a mutuality to this vision (in some ways akin to *darṣan*): it is reciprocated. Such an exchange not only exercises power but also indicates belonging.<sup>26</sup>

The compelling need to claim dignity and a place in the social body, which in these accounts appear to be highly dependent on the regard of others, is what most consciously motivates the care with which people acquire material goods and the knowledge of their proper use. At the same time, these actions tie people to nodes of power in a capitalist system marked by highly diffuse modes of control. The imprecise but all-encompassing sense of a disciplining audience is reflected in Madurai residents’ non-specific use of pronouns when they describe who observes and who is observed. The self-conscious critique of the performance of class, in which

<sup>26</sup> I am conscious of the visual metaphors in this paragraph and elsewhere in this article that link sight with knowledge (‘in the eyes of’, ‘viewed as’, ‘seen as’). Alan Dundes has highlighted the ‘primacy of vision in American culture’ (1972: 8), arguing that English gives preeminence to vision over other senses as a metaphor for knowing and understanding. In some ways, this connection also appears in the Tamil verb *teri*, to be known/be visible. On the other hand, ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’ have different significance in Tamil society, as with the mutuality of *darṣan*.

participants are at once actor and audience, object and subject, suggests a level of awareness of the engagement in a play of power. At the same time, the apparently contradictory drive for dignity, which is dependent on this very interaction played out in this way, remains key to the well-being of many people.

### *Acknowledgements*

I wish to thank Susan Bell, Melanie Dean, Diane Mines, Constantine Nakassis and Llerena Searle for helpful discussions of ideas and literature as I formulated the arguments in this article. Ritty Lukose also provided a productive critique of key points in her comments on the 2009 American Anthropological Association panel for which this article was originally written. Funding for the research was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Institute of Indian Studies and Bowdoin College.

### REFERENCES

- Banerjee, Mukulika and Daniel Miller. 2003. *The Sari*. Oxford: Berg.
- Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Béteille, André. 1991. 'The Reproduction of Inequality: Occupation, Caste and Family.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.) 25 (1): 3–28.
- Blok, Anton. 2001. *Honour and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 1986. 'The Forms of Capital.' In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, 241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Brennan, Geoffrey and Philip Pettit. 2004. *The Economy of Esteem: An Essay on Civil and Political Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castleman, Tony. 2011. 'Human Recognition and its Role in Economic Development: A Descriptive Review.' Institute for International Economic Policy Working Paper Series, The George Washington University.
- Da Costa, Dia. 2008. "'Spoiled Sons" and "Sincere Daughters": Schooling, Security, and Empowerment in Rural West Bengal, India.' *Signs* 33 (2): 283–308.
- Dean, Melanie. 2011. 'From Darśan to Tīruṣṭi: "Evil Eye" and the Politics of Visibility in Contemporary South India.' PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- Desai, Sonalde. 2007. 'The Middle Class.' In *The Oxford Companion to Economics in India*, edited by Kaushik Basu, 345–47. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Desai, Sonalde and Amaresh Dubey. 2011. 'Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 46 (11): 40–49.
- Desai, Sonalde and Veena Kulkarni. 2008. 'Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action.' *Demography* 45 (2): 245–70.
- Deshpande, Satish. 2003. *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

*Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, 2 (2013): 217–243



- Dickey, Sara. 2005. 'Still "One Man in a Thousand"?' In *Living Pictures: Perspectives on the Film Poster in India*, edited by David Blamey and Robert E. D'Souza, 69–78. London: Open Editions.
- . 2010. 'Anjali's Alliance: Class Mobility in Urban India.' In *Everyday Life in South Asia*, second edition, edited by Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb, 192–205. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2012. 'The Pleasures and Anxieties of Being in the Middle: Emerging Middle Class Identities in Urban South India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 46 (3): 559–99.
- Donner, Jonathan, Nimmi Rangaswamy, Molly Wright Steenson and Carolyn Wei. 2008. "'Express Yourself'" and "'Stay Together'": The Middle Class Indian Family.' In *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, edited by James E. Katz, 325–37. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Doron, Assa. 2012. 'Mobile Persons: Cell Phones, Gender and the Self in North India.' *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 13 (5): 414–33.
- Dundes, Alan. 1972. 'Seeing Is Believing.' *Natural History* 81 (5): 8–12, 86–87.
- Eck, Diana L. 1981. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Chambersburg: Anima Books.
- Fernandes, Leela. 2006. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon.
- . 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon.
- Frøystad, Kathinka. 2006. 'Anonymous Encounters: Class Categorisation and Social Distancing in Public Places.' In *The Meaning of the Local: Politics of Place in Urban India*, edited by Geert de Neve and Henrike Donner, 159–81. London: Routledge.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, revised edition. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Gorringer, Hugo. 2006. "'Banal Violence'?: The Everyday Underpinnings of Collective Violence.' *Identities* 13 (2): 237–60.
- . 2010. 'Shifting the "Grindstone of Caste"?: Decreasing Dependency among Dalit Labourers in Tamil Nadu.' In *The Comparative Political Economy of Development: Africa and South Asia*, edited by Barbara Harriss-White and Judith Heyer, 248–66. London: Routledge.
- Greenough, Paul. 1995. 'Nation, Economy and Tradition Displayed: The Crafts Museum, New Delhi.' In *Consuming Modernity*, edited by Carol Breckenridge, 216–48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Haynes, Douglas E. and Abigail McGowan. 2010. 'Introduction.' In *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, edited by Douglas E. Haynes, Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy and Haruka Yanagisawa, 1–25. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Haynes, Douglas E., Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy and Haruka Yanagisawa, eds. 2010. *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hermann, Steffen K. 2011. 'Social Exclusion: Practices of Misrecognition.' In *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*, edited by Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhaeuser and Elaine Webster, 133–49. New York: Springer.

- Jackson, Michael. 1998. *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jeffrey, Robin and Assa Doron. 2011. 'Celling India: Exploring a Society's Embrace of the Mobile Phone.' *South Asian History and Culture* 2 (3): 397–416.
- . 2012. 'Mobile-izing: Democracy, Organization and India's First "Mass Mobile Phone Elections".' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (1): 63–80.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2008. *Social Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Kapadia, Karin. 1995. *Siva and her Sisters: Gender, Caste, and Class in Rural South India*. Boulder: Westview.
- Kauffman, Paulus, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser and Elaine Webster, eds. 2011. *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*. New York: Springer.
- Kretzmer, David and Eckart Klein, eds. 2002. *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Lakha, Salim. 1999. 'The State, Globalisation and Indian Middle-Class Identity.' In *Culture and Privilege in Capitalist Asia*, edited by Michael Pinches, 252–76. New York: Routledge.
- Liechty, Mark. 2003. *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McGowan, Abigail. 2009. *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Meyer, Michael J. 2002. 'Dignity as a (Modern) Virtue.' In *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, edited by David Kretzmer and Eckart Klein, 195–208. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Miller, Daniel. 1987. *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 2010. *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mines, Diane P. 2005. *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mosse, David. 1994. 'Idioms of Subordination and Styles of Protest among Christian and Hindu Harijan Castes in Tamil Nadu.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.) 28 (1): 67–106.
- Offer, Avner. 2006. *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain since 1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Osella, Filippo and Caroline Osella. 1996. 'Articulation of Physical and Social Bodies in Kerala.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.) 30 (1): 37–68.
- Pinney, Christopher. 2002. 'The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants "Get Hold" of Images.' In *Media Worlds*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin, 355–69. Berkeley: University of California.
- Price, Pamela. 1996. 'Revolution and Rank in Tamil Nationalism.' *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (2): 359–83.
- Ram, Kalpana. 2009. 'Modernity as a "Rain of Words": Tracing the Flows of "Rain" between Dalit Women and Intellectuals in Tamil Nadu.' *Asian Studies Review* 33 (4): 501–16.
- Sayer, Andrew. 2005. 'Class, Moral Worth and Recognition.' *Sociology* 39 (5): 947–63.

- Schaber, Peter. 2011. 'Absolute Poverty: Human Dignity, Self-Respect, and Dependency.' In *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization*, edited by Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser and Elaine Webster, 151–58. New York: Springer.
- Skuse, Andrew. 2005. 'Enlivened Objects: The Social Life, Death and Rebirth of Radio as Commodity in Afghanistan.' *Journal of Material Culture* 10 (2): 123–37.
- Smith, Adam. 1976 (1759). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Sridharan, E. 2004. 'The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India's Middle Class: Its Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalization.' *India Review* 3 (4): 405–28.
- Srinivas, Tulasi. 2002. 'Flush with Success: Bathing, Defecation, Worship, and Social Change in South India.' *Space and Culture* 5 (4): 368–86.
- Srinivasan, Mytheli. 2003. 'Emotion, Identity, and the Female Subject: Tamil Women's Magazines in Colonial India, 1890–1940.' *Journal of Women's History* 14 (4): 59–82.
- Staples, James. 2003. 'Disguise, Revelation and Copyright: Disassembling the South Indian Leper.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 9 (2): 295–315.
- . 2005. 'Becoming a Man: Personhood and Masculinity in a South Indian Leprosy Colony.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.) 39 (2): 279–305.
- Tolen, Rachel. 2000. 'Transfers of Knowledge and Privileged Spheres of Practice: Servants and Employers in a Madras Railway Colony.' In *Home and Hegemony*, edited by Kathleen M. Adams and Sara Dickey, 63–86. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Venkatachalapathy, A.R. 2006. *In Those Days There Was No Coffee*. New Delhi: Yoda Press.
- Vera-Sanso, Penny. 2007. 'Increasing Consumption, Decreasing Support: A Multi-Generational Study of Family Relations among South Indian Chakkliyors.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.) 41 (2): 225–48.

