

Gender, Class, and Nation in the Foothills of the Himalayas:

**Student Aspirations and the
Construction of the New Middle Class**

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India's "New Middle Class" (NMC) has gained a great deal of attention in the media and scholarly literature as of late. This transnational, upwardly mobile group is important in establishing a hegemonic structure and culture that legitimizes what it means to be a new Indian woman and man. Moreover, neoliberal ideologies of rationality, meritocracy, individuality, and progress embedded in these constructs portray the New Middle class as altogether penetrable, thus holding open unlimited possibilities for those of other classes (Bhatt 2010; Fernandez and Heller 2006). Meanwhile, researchers report that the chances of obtaining high-level transnational urban professional jobs are slim for most educated young people in India, particularly those in non-metropolitan areas (Bhatt 2010; Dyson 2006; Fuller, 2007; Jeffrey 2009, 2010). Although higher education has become prized for both women and men, and institutions of higher education are popping up in record numbers throughout the country, even a college degree does not ensure access to global professional positions. Regardless, the NMC sets the standards for the hegemonic aspirations of others.

For young people in India, aspiring to the NMC means not only aspiring to achieve a higher education and/or high-level job, but also valuing and embodying appropriate behaviors, attitudes, practices, desires, and tastes. Scholars note that, particularly since the opening of the Indian market and its integration into the global economy, those who aspire to NMC status inculcate the ideologies and practices of self-control, self-reliance, self-improvement, independence, and meritocracy. Largely influenced by the media, the new normative Indian is also a "consumerized" one (Lukose 2005, 2009). Wearing modern clothing, owning

modern goods, and speaking English well are markers of the idealized, transnational professional (Bhatt 2010).

Research in this area has concentrated mostly on educated young people from privileged backgrounds, typically in major metropolitan areas (Fuller 2007; Patel 2006; Radhakrishnan 2009), or the lower classes (Bhatt 2010; Rogers 2008). My project will investigate whether and how dominant middle class identities, ideologies, and practices are articulated through the aspirations and attitudes of young, educated, non-metropolitan, non-cosmopolitan young people in northern India.

Important for this analysis is the intersection of gender and class. Radhakrishnan (2009:199) argues that the “success of privileged professional women who ‘maintain’ their culture epitomizes and legitimizes the broader interests of the dominant class by reinforcing their moral and cultural authority.” (see also Chaudhuri 2001; Vijayakumar 2013). The respectable femininity embodied by women who work in transnational professional class positions reflects the need for recognition from the West and adaptation to ideologies and practices associated with neoliberalism, such as paid work, consumption, and media access, and, at the same time, prioritizes family, modesty, purity - in remaining “essentially” Indian (Parameswaran 2004; Radhakrishnan 2009). Other research shows that the new Indian woman is one who strives to succeed in her career, has good health, engages in leisure activities, and cares about beauty – but only to a point. She knows where to draw the line. (Chaudhuri 2001; Thapan 2004; Lukose 2005, 2009). She exhibits self-restraint and

modesty especially with regard to activities such as smoking, drinking, and sexual relations (Radhakrishnan 2009; Vijayadumar 2013).

While the new ideal Indian woman is constructed as one who embodies purity, honor, and prioritizes family and is also highly educated, ambitious, and successful, the new ideal Indian man is one who is aggressive in obtaining a quality education, highly successful in his career, wears nice clothes, and is able to purchase material goods (Chaudhuri 2001; Khan 2008). At the same time, the ideal man is one who engages in self-control (George 2006) and is protective of the honor of his family (Yim and Mahalingam 2006). The “respectability” embodied by the global professional class relates not only to constructions of gender and class, but also to the vision of India as a modern, Hindu nation. These dominant constructs influence, and are legitimized through, the aspirations and attitudes of young, educated people in India.

This paper extends the literature by investigating the aspirations and attitudes of college students in non-metropolitan areas of northern India. To what extent, and how, do they articulate and embody the beliefs and practices of the New Middle Class through their aspirations and attitudes? Moreover, to what extent, and how, do female and male students express different attitudes and aspirations, and how do these reflect dominant constructs of the ideal Indian woman and man? This is important because these ideal constructs, largely based in the realities of elite, transnational middle class lives, are held up to be the “legitimate” ones that reflect a vision of India as a modern nation and are articulated as an “aspirational subjectivity that is open to all.” (Bhatt 2010:147).

One important implication of my findings is that, by reinforcing dominant middle class ideologies, non-urban students in the Himalayan region play an important part in legitimizing middle-class interests, and hence what it means to be a modern Indian – even though they may never achieve middle-class status.

DATA AND METHODS

This study draws from 197 questionnaires and 38 in-depth interviews administered to students who attend several well-regarded private and public universities in the Garhwali area of the northern Indian Himalayas. In 2010 I surveyed 196 college students at H.N.B Garhwal University, a central (government) university in Srinagar, a small town at the foothills of the Himalayas, north of Delhi. My quantitative results yielded some interesting findings, which prompted me to return in the spring of 2014 to conduct exploratory, in-depth interviews with college students at five reputable institutions, both public and private, in Dehradun and Srinagar in the state of Uttarakhand. The findings reported here draw mainly from these interviews.

Dehradun is a fast-growing mid-sized city located in the foothills of the Himalayas approximately 236 kilometres north of Delhi. In Dehradun, I interviewed students at Doon University, a large central (government-funded) institution that offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees; Himgiri Zee University, a private liberal arts and sciences university; Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) College, also offering a range of liberal arts programs; and Graphic Era University, a technical college specializing in engineering and management. Srinagar is a mid-sized town of approximately 80,000 people, also situated in the

foothills of the Himalayas approximately 120 kilometres east of Dehradun. In Srinagar, I interviewed students at H.N.B. Garhwal University, a large central university offering a wide range of programs on the graduate and undergraduate levels. Further details regarding the characteristics of the respondents are in the Appendix.

Questions were asked with regard to students' aspirations and expectations in the following areas: paid work, marriage, childbearing/rearing, and family relations. The interview schedule also contained questions regarding attitudes and practices related to alcohol and tobacco use, and dating. Although all interviews were conducted in English, I enlisted the help of Hindi-speaking research assistants in all locations in order to clarify and explain concepts and questions. Assumptions about "third-world" women's oppression, Mohanty argues, can lead to a priori assumptions about the meaning of practices and attitudes. Western feminist scholarship thus risks perpetuating oppression by applying dominant concepts and interpretations, and, in doing so, marginalizing the "other" (Mohanty 1984, 2003). Also, because thoughts, attitudes, and practices are given meaning and value within particularly social-historical and cultural contexts, and because there is a tendency on the part of Western scholars to privilege Western values and meanings, the involvement of Indian research assistants who speak fluent Hindi was important in the data collection process.

The interviews lasted anywhere from a half hour to an hour. They were not taped; instead, we took copious notes throughout the interviews. The

interviewees were asked at times to repeat their answers so as to ensure verbatim responses. Informed content was obtained from all of the interviewees.

An inductive, interpretive method of analysis that emphasizes socially-constructed meaning and value relativism was used for this project. This analytic method is based on an epistemological approach that takes into consideration context, how and why the respondent makes sense of their reality and defines their situation, and how the researcher's biography, experiences, and identity affects his or her own definition of reality and the situation. (Brinkman and Kvale 2008; Hesse-Biber 2013) The interviews were analyzed to identify patterns and construct conceptual categories. A conceptual coding scheme was then developed. Therefore, although the theoretical and empirical literature both informed and helped make sense of the data, new concepts and ways of understanding were allowed to emerge from the data.

FINDINGS

Educational and Career Aspirations

“Girls are More Sincere”

Both male and female students in the hill region have high aspirations, both educationally and career-wise. They see education as intrinsically important, a status marker, and as key to getting ahead in both the marriage and job market. As one female Doon University student said:

My father always said that being overeducated is never a problem. You can never have too much knowledge.

With very few exceptions, the students also reported that their parents place a high value on education for both men and women. Although 87 percent of the students reported that their mothers are “housewives,” they overwhelmingly said that both their mothers and father encouraged them to achieve higher educations. For students from the Garhwali region, however, economic need and family responsibilities may interfere with devotion to studies:

In [the] Garhwal region, because boys also do some part time work. I have noticed that education [here] doesn't attract students. Students think, “what will I get by attending.. why [should I]”? (Male, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Although all of the students I interviewed think that higher education is important, most of the students expressed the view that female students are more “sincere” or “serious” regarding their educations. Asked whether they thought girls attended class more than boys (a finding that emerged from my earlier quantitative study), 66 percent answered affirmatively, 13 percent said they did not think this was the case, and 13 percent said they thought both males and females were equally as dedicated.

When I asked one female Doon University student what she meant by “sincere,” she said: “Being truthful to any endeavor.” Other terms used to describe girls' general disposition toward school are “devoted,” “dedicated,” and “interested.” The reasons given for why female students are more sincere, dedicated, or interested in their educations, and hence more involved (as indicated by class attendance), than males can be divided into two interrelated categories: 1) spaces and freedom; 2) political-economic.

Spaces and Freedom

A common theme among the students was that boys have always have more freedom to roam in public, and even expected to do so; thus boys are more likely to “skip” class to “have fun” outside of school. I asked a female student at Doon University whether she thought girls attended class more often. She said “Yes. I attend my classes because I want to learn.” A male student, sitting nearby, chimed in “Boring.” I looked at him and smiled, and he continued, “boys like fun.. they find it outside the class.” Similarly, one interviewee responded:

Yes, girls are always ready to attend class; boys wander around. Boys are interested in tormenting girls. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Another female student at H.N.B. Garhwal University, a graduate student who teaches classes, said:

Yes. I also teach. Girls come more than boys. Boys do fun [things] or go home. Boys always like to enjoy the outer world, but girls like to stay to themselves and their work.

Girls are more aware about the future. Girls are more interested. Boys are taking a “leave it, it will be” [attitude]. Since the last two months, not a single boy [in my classes]. [They] wander in the city.

Girls, on the other hand, feel a kind of “freedom” when in school, because they are no longer confined to the home or immediate surroundings. And this can lead to increased freedom after college:

Yes, [this is] true. In Indian society, women are more sincere. Women are leaving the boundary; after college level, feel free. Girls feel they should work harder. Guys can study hard and also play hard. (Male, Himgiri Zee University)

Males, in contrast, who have had privileged general access to public and private spaces historically, do not value school as a special or separate place where

they have the freedom go where they want, engage in a variety of activities, and socialize with both females and males. They can do those things virtually anywhere:

Men become a little more casual in attending classes compared to women, I think this is because men are more free/independent to do anything in our country rather than women. (Male, Graphic Era University)

Political-Economic Explanations

With regard to political and/or economic explanations for women's greater dedication to schooling, interviewees share the view that women have more to lose by not being sincere about their educations. Men, who are naturally expected to join the workforce, can afford to "waste" time, "wander around." This is not the case for women, who are expected to marry and have children if they do not pursue higher education. As one student told me:

Women are more serious about pursuing their career as they know if they will not score, [they] will then they would be forced to take up the option of marriage and then their hard work till now would be wasted. (Female, Doon University)

Delaying marriage and childbearing is seen as empowering women with an opportunity to pursue their career interests, suggesting that they see these life course events as constraining. Males, who are not similarly constrained, can afford to "waste" time, "wander around."

In addition to delaying marriage and childbearing, the value of education for political power within the family is clear among the female students I interviewed. Educated women are seen as having the "right" to negotiate career choices:

Nobody will say no because if a wife or daughter-in-law is educated she has the right to work.

Both male and female students report that education advantages both women and men with regard to marital prospects. For women, however, high levels of education may present a *problem* in the marriage market. As female M.B.A. student at Doon University said, "If women have more education, it is difficult to find a man who is more educated. It is a problem with the guy's family." The problem of a perceived relative lack of "marriageable" men is echoed by others:

Women are more desirable if they are highly educated. A more educated woman and less educated man would be a problem. But if they are the same education, it's o.k. (Male, Himgiri Zee University)

[There is an] advantage after getting a Ph.D. She is valuable and respected. My partner will be happy that I am educated. It would be a problem, though, if he is less educated. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Yes, more desirable. At 35 a girl wanted to marry. When [she was] 27, after she got a job. [There were] no guys. After some job she wanted to be a lecturer. She got into a rural area. She married her driver. (Male, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

This problem, however, is seen as one that is diminishing in India, even among students in the Garhwali region:

In India, not important. Being educated is best. [But] If a boy has a Ph.D. and the girl is not highly educated, it not a problem. If it is the reverse, it depends on the girl. It depends on the literacy of the boys. Things have been changing. People have become supportive of girls. (Male, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

When asked how they felt about married women working outside the home, a full 68 percent responded positively, without hesitation or qualification.

Both male and female students interviewed expressed a high degree of ambitiousness. Female students, in particular, named prestigious careers such as astronaut, neurologist, lawyer, vice chancellor, embassy official, economics professor and starting an NGO as their “dream” jobs after graduation.

Dreams and Tensions

Both male and female students express a desire to extend their relatively “carefree” youth for as long as possible. (Stats – average age at marriage and childbirth...) They also both say they want to be “settled” prior to marriage and childbearing. For males, this is mostly related to being financially stable and able to “provide for” a family. Some male students also expressed the desire to “enjoy/experience life” before bearing the weight of marriage and family.

I want to live my life before getting married. I want to roam all over the world because after marriage there are many responsibilities to be fulfilled. (Male, Graphic Era University)

After I am in a job and all alone [meaning independent from parents) I will be ready. When I am all alone and has only his expenses. I have to be able to take care of my wife and family. (Male, Himgiri Zee)

For female students, being “settled,” in contrast, tends to be related to being in a stable and strong position in order to avoid dependence on a partner or to avoid “difficulties” in their married lives:

I first want to prepare myself in all aspects that is required before marriage, most importantly acquiring a job so that I don’t have any kind of difficulties in my married life. (Female, Graphic Era University)

Other female students similarly stressed the importance of preparing themselves, mentally and economically, for their entry into marriage:

Because I basically don't have any intention of getting married. But even if I do, I would be well-settled, less dependent on my partner, or maybe till then I can be mentally prepared to spend my life with a complete stranger. (Female, Graphic Era University)

“Adjustment Should Be There”

The majority of female students interviewed plan to live with their husbands' natal families following marriage, and said that they would move with their husbands (and their husbands' families) for a job offer. It is not surprising, then, that for the female students “adjustment” was a recurring theme when talking about the transition to adulthood, marriage, and childbearing. Particularly in the case of arranged marriages, women are expected to leave their natal homes to live with people they do not know well, sometimes moving far away from their families and friends. As one pointed out, resisting this arrangement could result in something far worse for women; that is, remaining unmarried:

I like joint family. Most of the people in India. It is a tendency. Because girls have to pay price for divorce. In joint families, there are social values. If [a] wife forces [her] husband to live in a separate place, social values lose importance and problems begin. Girls should show same amount of respect for brother, sister, mother-in-law, father-in-law as for own family. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Most of the females who anticipate living in joint families after marriage do not see this as a disadvantage with regard to their social or career opportunities. In fact, even when considering the adjustment issue, most look forward to their new family arrangements. As one student said:

In India we are taught to leave the family – adjust a lot. People think there will be problems, but I will have a lot of people to help me. When I come home, they will ask me how was your day. People think it will be more difficult. My sister lives in a joint family. She doesn't have to worry about her kids. (Female, Doon University)

Female students expect that their new joint family will provide company, support, and possible free daycare. They even anticipate that this new environment will be one of joy and happiness, or at least harmony:

I like to join a joint family. If the husband and wife are living together [alone], they are just killing time. [With the joint family] there would be harmony. And [it is] tradition. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

When you are working, everybody greets you warmly. Just be happy. I have been in a joint family and then was separated [from the joint family]. Now I'm in a nuclear family. I would love to be in a big family. (Female, Doon University)

Moreover, women regard their higher levels of education as providing them with the political capital to negotiate with their mothers-in-law, making their anticipated adjustment a potentially more positive and pleasant experience. When asked whether she expected her mother-in-law to have influence over her work in and out of the home, one student female H.N.B. Garhwal student said, "If the wife is educated, she will know what is good or [what is] not." Another reported:

Definitely [influence of mother-in-law], but in a positive way. Somewhere there are differences between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. If we are positive, we can mold the thought of a person who is being negative toward us. Adjustment should be there. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Influence in good way can be appreciated, but if she [mother-in-law] deny any choices I make I wouldn't care at all for it's my life that I chose to live. (Female, Graphic Era University)

A male student, similarly, said:

Nobody will say no because, if a wife or daughter-in-law is educated, she has the right to work. (Male, Himgiri Zee University)

Several of the female said that they would talk to their in-laws even before marriage regarding career aspirations and suggested that they would not marry if there was conflict of interest.

Although women speak of the positive aspects of a joint family, and their anticipated use of educational capital to empower them in the home, both males and females overwhelmingly believe that women are innately suited to provide care for children and the family. As one female student at Doon University, who describes herself as an "independent" woman, said "Having a baby changes you from a lady to a mother." Attitudes toward the inherent nature of women's mothering skills and abilities are summed up by statements such as this one made by a male student at Himgiri Zee: "Kids needs a mother more than a father." When they attempt to explain why children need mothers more than fathers, they tend to use circular reasoning:

...because women have more responsibilities than men, and children are more dependent on their mother. (Female, Himgiri Zee)

As the "obvious" primary caretakers of home and family, women therefore expect, and are expected to, take time off or leave the workforce altogether when they have children. When asked whether she would take continue working after marriage and childbearing, a female student at Doon University said:

Obviously I will leave because children need attention and have many needs. You see cases where the mom is working and children are in the care of others – they miss their mothers. Maybe I will return [to the workplace] after 5 or 6 years.

In contrast, men are expected to work continuously. When asked whether companies should give women with children more flexibility than others in the workplace, % of students answered affirmatively. The reason, they said, is because:

...it's the mother that takes up the responsibility of the child as well. Men need no such flexibility. (Female, DAV)

Another female student responded:

Yes, because girls are weaker than men and they have to do all the work i.e. to look after family and job while men mostly have to look after their jobs. (Female, Himgiri Zee University)

Most of the students interviewed said that there should be increased flexibility and provisions for women at work because of their special limitations and constraints. Not only do women have more responsibilities in the home, according to the respondents, but they are also limited spatially and temporally by virtue of these responsibilities as well as their perceived vulnerability relative to men. Both male and female students expressed the view that working hours for women should be reduced and limited to daylight hours:

Yes, women should get more flexibility than others. Their office timings should be reduced to 10-4. Men can work till 6 or 7 in the evening also. (Male, Graphic Era University)

Yes, because of the physical weakness. Men are more powerful. Men can spend more hours at work. Male, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Implicit in these comments is the belief, common among the respondents, that women are in need of protection (against male violence):

Yes. [There are] problems with women at night. The security of women is at stake. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

One student went as far to suggest that "...in India with all the rape cases, they [women] should get private offices."

Middle Class Morals

The perceived need to preserve women's purity and safety is even more apparent in the students' responses to questions concerning drinking alcohol, smoking, and dating behaviors. Most students disapprove of drinking and smoking for women and men. In fact, one male H.N.B. Garhwal student said that he thinks drinking and smoking are the "next step to hell." There is a moral dimension to engaging in and promoting these behaviors. They are generally viewed not only as unhealthy, but as *bad behaviors* done by *bad or deviant people*.

Although some students reported that they think it acceptable for men to drink in some places, such as restaurants and at home, women who engage in this behavior are clearly seen as morally lacking. Moreover, these behaviors are linked to sexual immorality in particular. As a female H.N.B. Garhwal student conveyed:

When girls drink, there is no need. [People] obviously think girls use wine because of sexual desires in the hills. It is normal for boys.

If a girl drinks or smokes, she is not only seen as engaging in bad behavior, but she is an indecent person:

In India, this is a very big issue. For a boy, it is o.k. If girl is drinking and smoking, is it not good she is *that kind* [my emphasis] of girl. (Female, Doon University)

Another female Doon student said:

In India in most places it is not right, especially for girls. Girls should be pretty *decent* [my emphasis], so smoking and drinking is a bad thing.

Even students who argue that women should be allowed to “go out to a pub after work” [question wording] express concern about the vulnerability of women in that context:

Yes, it is alright to go out after work to a pub. Might not for women because of many rape cases happening nowadays. (Male, Graphic Era University)

While women are viewed as potential victims, men are viewed as potential predators. According to one male student, smoking and drinking are freedoms to which only men are entitled as part of maintaining their identity and status as men. If they are deprived of these, they may exert their masculinity by controlling, and even becoming violent toward, women:

Indians are conventional – they follow traditions. They don't like [these things]. By forcing them not to do these things in public, these men get frustrated – results in rape. (Male, Himgiri Zee)

The male students I interviewed, however, do not see themselves expressing their masculinity through aggression toward women. To the contrary, they repeatedly spoke of the importance of treating women with respect and care. When asked about dating and relationships, both male and female students talked about the importance of “decent” interactions and meeting in “decent” places:

I've been with a guy for two years – dating. We meet only on Sundays. We go to a fixed theater and watch a movie. It's nice that way – comfortable. We used to talk on the phone a lot, day and night. There is a difference between day and night, although we didn't notice. Now we just text. We don't talk.

Q: What would you say is acceptable interaction between men/women of your age in public? (Example: holding hands, sitting on a bike close to each other?)

Decent. Going to a theater, rather than PDA. This is Dehradun, not Mumbai. We have these ethics and morality. (Female, Doon University)

Dates were described by most of the interviewees as opportunities to talk, get to know one another. Public displays of affections were viewed as unacceptable, even “vulgar.” At the same time, it is seen as inappropriate to be “totally alone” with a date:

Yes. Talking to each other to understand each other. [It is] not [appropriate] to [go to] each other's homes. And not to a restaurant. (Female, H.N.B. Garhwal University)

Talking to each other; having a good time; sharing feelings and emotions, future plans. I have had a boyfriend for seven years. We are of different castes. He is waiting until I get a good job so he can convince his mother. (Female, H.N.B Garhwal University)

I am dating someone. We don't actually go on dates. We hang out, talk on the phone all the time, take silly photos. I teach him later (because he doesn't go to class). Once we went out to eat. (Female, Doon University)

I will date a person whom I do not know only when I know the person very well and would like to go out for a movie in date and not at my place if no one else was there - never. (Female, Graphic Era)

Students in Srinagar seem more conservative than those in Dehradun in their definitions of appropriate interactions and contexts for dating. As one female student at H.N.B. Garhwal University said:

No kissing, no hugging, no holding hands. Just talking. Because [anything else] is not normal. Because, according to traditional [views], the perception is they like each other and will marry, [so] why are they doing [these things] on their own, with no consent of parents.

The interviews also revealed their shared belief that men should enact respectability and be seen (by parents, community, and selves) as “good” and “respectable” people with regard to their interactions with women in the dating context:

I would like to take her for dinner. No I will not invite her if no one else is there at my place. I don't want her to feel uncomfortable, as before marriage our society makes issues out of nothing. (Male, Graphic Era)

We spend quality time with each other. Watching a movie. I pick her up right in front of her mother. As long as she feels I am a good and respectable person... How you represent yourself matters. (Male, Himgiri Zee)

Tentative Conclusions

Significant changes have occurred in the past few decades in India with regard to economic and cultural globalization. These changes have no doubt affected the aspirations of students in the hill region of northern India. The question for this research focuses on to what extent, and how, do these aspirations reflect new middle class (NMC) ideologies and practices. Moreover, what does this suggest about the strength of these ideologies and their effects on people of all castes and classes in India, particularly on educated, non-urban, non-elite, educated young people.

The findings of this study indicate that both male and female students in the hill regions of northern India have high aspirations both educationally and career wise. They believe in the benefits of achieving higher education for its

own sake and for the status and capital it provides on the marriage and career markets. They also aspire to occupy careers in business, science, and education. According to respondents, female students are not only more “sincere” when it comes to education, but they also aspire to more prestigious career than men. Included in their “dream jobs” are titles such as astronaut, neurologist, lawyer, vice chancellor, embassy official, and professor. For some female students, these are only dreams that may or may not translate to realities. Others had high expectations that they would someday occupy their dream job or career. One female student, for example, expressed the very real expectation of running an NGO related to women’s welfare and in fact had already started one in Lucknow. Another’s dream to become a lawyer is one she fully expects to realize, primarily because she is strongly supported by her husband and extended family.

Although female and male students both have high educational and career aspirations, they differ with regard to expectations in the private realm. Female and male students overwhelmingly expect to live with the husbands’ natal family after marriage, believe that women should be the primary caregivers of children, and that women are upholders of moral values in the home and in the society at large. They believe that women should be given special consideration in the workplace and should be protected and respected both in the home and at work. The male students largely reported the importance of being seen as respectful and caring in their relations with females.

The findings thus suggest that these non-elite, non-urban, educated students' aspirations and expectations generally align with NMC ideologies and practices. They to strive to become independent and self-supporting, highly educated and achieve decent careers. They want to make their own decisions and yet are also closely connected to, and influenced by, their families. The ideal of respectable femininity is central to constructions of the new middle class in India. The ideal Indian woman is one who has a high-level education and career and, at the same time, finds her identity as a woman rooted in her responsibilities to home and family. The ideal India man, while also achieving a high-level education and career, is one who respect and cares for women. These students' aspirations and expectations thus largely reflect and reinforce what it is to be a true Indian man and woman.

The importance of these findings lie in the fact that the aspirations and expectations of these college students seem to largely reflect, and thus reinforce the legitimacy of, dominant constructs of class, gender and nation. What is it to be a new Indian woman and man? What is it to be a modern Indian nation? These dominant definitions are rooted in the lives and experiences of the global, professional elite. However, without an elite background and education, is it highly unlikely that the students I interviewed will ever occupy these positions. As Jeffrey has pointed out, many young people from lower-middle class backgrounds in Northern India are able to attain higher educations but lack the "high level social contacts and upper-middle-class skills to succeed within fiercely competitive markets for government jobs and positions in the new economy." He

observes that, among the young people in his study, “this disjuncture between image and reality generated a widespread sense of being in limbo,” waiting for their dream career, or in many cases even a decent job, to come along. (Jeffrey 2010). Thus, these students are essentially reinforcing the ideologies and practices that hold up a system that will mostly likely let them down. Moreover, by adopting and embodying ideologies of meritocracy, achievement, and independence, they are likely to blame themselves if they fail to reach their dreams.

Although largely impressionistic, there seems to be a regional difference with regard to the responses. The students in Srinagar, both male and female, seem to hold more rigid beliefs about marriage, women’s relationships within the family, and definitions of moralistic behaviors and attitudes for women and men. They seem to express more rigid and stricter attitudes about the moral boundaries for women and men, with much higher expectations for women than in the larger and more industrialized and “modernized” city of Dehradun. If this is the case, it may be that these students, who largely hail from the Garhwali region, are more likely to resist or even be in conflict with dominant ideologies and practices, and thus less may be less likely to set themselves up for failure. More systematic research needs to be done in this area.

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APPENDIX

Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Institution	
Doon University	16% (6)
Himgiri Zee University	21% (8)
Graphic Era University	13% (5)
DAV	18% (7)
DIV	5% (2)
H.N.B. Garwhal	26% (10)
Gender	
Female	61% (23)
Male	39% (15)
Age (median)	23
Class (self-identified)	
Lower	3% (1)
Middle	66% (25)
Upper	21% (8)
None	10% (4)
Caste	
Lower (ST, SC, BC, OBC)	50% (19)
Middle	16% (6)
Upper	21% (8)
None	13% (5)