

Crossing Caste Boundaries in the Modern Indian Marriage Market

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Abstract

In India all caste groups are thought to share an equally strong preference for endogamy. Through a field experiment in the arranged-marriage market involving 1070 women participants, conducted across multiple matrimonial websites, we compare the revealed preferences for

boundary-crossing of Upper-Castes (“UCs”) and Scheduled-Castes (“SCs”), two groups situated at the opposite ends of a ranked social order. We find that 70.7% of SCs, but only 53.9% of UCs express an interest in crossing caste boundaries for marriage. We also find that, among UCs, socioeconomic (“SE”) status is inversely related to boundary-crossing preference, while among SCs the opposite is true. Our findings suggest that arranged-marriage markets in urban India operate on the principle of exchange. Participants who can benefit from boundary-crossing, and have high caste or SE status to exchange, are more likely than other participants to express an interest in doing so. These findings imply that if UCs and SCs go on to exchange caste and SE status through marriage, we may, over time, observe a weakening of caste boundaries.

Introduction

In ethnically and racially divided societies, social distinctions survive when social boundaries continue to be reinforced from one generation to another. Most scholars agree that an ethnic, racial, or caste identity category is defined by descent-based attributes. This definition places endogamy, or the practice of marrying within one's own group, at the heart of the reproduction of these attributes. Indeed, conventional wisdom on caste in India suggests that a strong preference for endogamy, with associated policing, is common to all caste groups, thus guaranteeing the reproduction of caste from one generation to the next.

In multiethnic and multiracial societies, ethnic and racial identities can be in a ranked or unranked relationship (Horowitz 1986),ⁱ and in ranked system, disparity of rank is often reinforced by disparity of economic status, i.e. there is substantial overlap between the members of higher income groups and those from the higher social rank, combined with a similar overlap between members of the lower ranked social group and those of lower income groups. We view Hindu society as a ranked social order with Upper Castes (“UCs”) at the top, Backward Castes (hereinafter “BCs”) in the middle and the Scheduled Castes (“SCs”) or *Dalits* at the bottom.ⁱⁱ

Despite the difference between their ranks, relations between upper and lower caste groups in India have come a long way from what they once were. For instance, owing to the compulsions of democratic politics, these opposite ends of the caste hierarchy regularly join

together in political alliances and members of lower caste groups have been successful in pushing for affirmative action legislation through parliament with the support of upper caste members. However, this does not necessarily signal the demise of the caste hierarchy. Furthermore, relations in the public sphere are not necessarily indicative of caste relations in the private sphere. Caste often still governs relations in the private sphere (Froystad 2005). Caste columns on the matrimonial pages in newspapers and on matrimonial websites are a strong reminder of the relevance of caste in the private sphere. The policing of marriage, especially of women, by family and community members and sometimes by caste councils, is indicative of caste system's continued hold on Indian society. In its most extreme form, this policing, via honor killings, can be deadly. A study supported by the National Council of Women of 560 recent cases of honor killings in India found that 83 percent of cases in which people were either killed or threatened were related to inter-caste marriage, many of which involved a woman marrying a man belonging to a caste ranked lower than her own.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, even in light of this empirical evidence, there are reasons to believe that social change, though limited to small segments of the Indian population, is occurring.

For much of Indian history caste and SE status have reinforced each other. Yet, in recent years, caste and socioeconomic status have begun to decouple; our data set made up of middle and upper-middle income SC respondents testifies to this change. In the last 60 years, caste discrimination has been outlawed and affirmative action policies have been put into place in government jobs, in educational institutions and in both the state and national legislatures (Galanter 1984). This has opened avenues for the upward mobility of lower castes (Pande 2003; Prakash 2009; Hnatkowska, Lahiri, and Paul 2013). In addition, political representation of backward and scheduled castes has improved steadily (Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009). Meanwhile, over the last quarter-century, the Indian economy has grown at an average of 6% per annum, creating numerous opportunities for upward economic mobility (Hnatkowska and Lahiri 2012, Hnatkowska et al 2013). These changes have allowed backward and scheduled castes to enter the Indian middle-income brackets.^{iv} The marriage market reflects these changes. In recent years, BC and SC columns have appeared in the matrimonial pages of Indian newspapers and a growing number of individuals from these groups are using matrimonial websites.^v These trends point to new opportunities for social interactions between members of different castes, including opportunities for boundary-crossing in the marriage market. For our purpose, a boundary-crossing preference is expressed when an individual A responds to a matrimonial interest from another individual B, who belongs to a different caste group than A.

Longitudinal evidence from the N-S data set,^{vi} which includes approximately 12,000 observations, also highlights this change. The data in the N-S data set were collected by reviewing a sample of no more than 100 advertisements in each of four different Indian dailies (*The Hindustan Times*, based in Delhi; *The Times of India*, based in Mumbai; *The Statesman*, based in Calcutta; and *The Hindu*, based in Chennai) on 30 Sundays (the day known for its large matrimonial section), randomly selected by decade.^{vii} Data reported in Figure I suggest that, between 1980 and 2010, while self-identification by caste in newspaper matrimonial ads remained strong, requests for partners from particular caste groups have shown a secular decline, pointing to a more relaxed attitude towards endogamy.^{viii}

Our research into boundary-crossing preferences in marriage is motivated by two factors. First, conventional wisdom among scholars of the caste system suggests that all groups prefer endogamy equally. We wanted to probe whether this long-held view was true for the gradually diversifying urban, Indian middle class. Rather than examining marriage outcomes, we focus on boundary-crossing preferences. We focus on preferences in order to probe the relationship between group rank and attitudes towards marriage across caste boundaries. Second, and relatedly, as caste and SE status have begun to decouple in India, a debate has appeared over the direction of social change. Are caste divisions going to persist, even as previously unequal groups begin to become equal economically and socially, but remain distinct by subscribing to endogamy? Or is the significance of caste divisions going to decline with an increase in the acceptance of and actual instances of inter-caste marriage? Our study engages this debate by identifying the mechanisms that may either reinforce or undermine the significance of caste. We do so by examining the behavior of participants in the marriage market. We focus on women in particular because, unlike their male counterparts, women's future caste status depends entirely upon the caste of the partners they marry. Moreover, given the Indian context, in which immediate family is often heavily involved in—if not in charge of—the search for an appropriate partner, it is more appropriate to say that we focus on the boundary-crossing preferences of prospective brides *and* their families.

After comparing the revealed preferences of SCs and UCs for boundary crossing in the marriage market, we find that urban, middle class marriage markets in India work on the principle of exchange. Both caste and SE status are endowments that facilitate this exchange.

Only those who stand to benefit from the exchange of these two endowments are more likely than their similarly situated counterparts to prefer boundary-crossing. Those who either do not stand to benefit from an exchange of caste and SE status-based endowments, or lack the endowments necessary to participate in an exchange, are less likely to prefer boundary-crossing.

More specifically, since SC women can gain caste status by marrying up, while UC women can lose caste status by marrying down, it is not surprising that we find that SCs express an interest in boundary-crossing more frequently than UCs. Meanwhile, among UCs, SE status is inversely related to the preference for boundary crossing; UCs from lower SE status backgrounds demonstrate higher rates of preferences for boundary crossing than their higher SE status, UC counterparts. In contrast, among SCs, the relationship reverses and there is a positive relationship between SE status and preference rates for boundary crossing: SCs from higher SE status backgrounds are more likely to prefer boundary crossing than SCs from lower SE status backgrounds.

The remainder of the paper is divided into six sections. We begin by discussing the literature on caste and boundary crossing. We then outline the key hypotheses for our study. In the next section, we describe our experimental design for studying boundary-crossing preferences in the marriage market, our data, and its coding. Subsequently we present our data analysis and discuss our findings. Finally, we explore some of the implications of our findings for the significance of caste boundaries. We conclude by identifying some areas for future research.

Caste and Boundary-Crossing

A ranked caste system exists across all regions of India and is based on traditional occupation. Within each caste category, or *varna*, are numerous sub-castes or *jatis*. Among Hindus (over 80 percent of India's population), castes are divided into upper, intermediate, and lower categories. Priests (*Brahmins*), warriors (*Kshatriyas*), and traders (*Vaishyas*) constitute the UCs. Meanwhile, intermediate castes (*Shudras*) were traditionally connected to service work and farming. They make up the BCs. Finally, the lowest castes or SCs (*Dalits*) were once involved in ritually polluting occupations like scavenging, cleaning toilets, and tanning animal hides. They

faced, and often continue to face, extreme social discrimination and were considered untouchable.

Caste in today's India is not what it once was. It is no longer a distinct occupational group, fastidious prevention of inter-dining is often impossible, and people from many castes and even different caste-hierarchies come into contact with one another on a regular basis. Yet, caste remains relevant when it comes to marriage and, of the many social practices in India that implicate the caste system, marriage is arguably the most central. As Louis Dumont (1980) explains, endogamy is essential to the caste system and to caste identity because of the caste systems' regulation of hierarchy through ritual pollution and purity. Moreover, while the rules relating to purity and pollution cover many different social contexts, there is arguably no more fundamental way in which pollution can occur than in the context of marriage (Davis 1941).

Contrary to expectations held for the generations after independence, rising levels of economic development and education in India did not result in the disappearance of caste-based loyalties in social life. The scholarship that explains the continued resilience of caste boundaries has put forward three principle arguments. One view argues that the continued relevance of caste identity is rooted in the practices of refashioning, whereby lower ranked groups have adopted new names, customs, and practices for the purpose of moving up the rank ladder (Srinivas 1962).^{ix} Another view contends that by classifying themselves as separate ethnic groups, caste groups have redefined divisions among themselves (Jaffrelot 2003). Where the state has recognized these differences in their census enumeration (Dirks 2001), or in affirmative action policies to compensate for past discrimination or persistent economic and social backwardness, it has assisted in this process. Still others situate the persistence, and even enhancement, of caste divisions in the *culturalization* of caste. Instead of representing descent-based disparity, this perspective argues, the institution of caste is being viewed as a site of multicultural coexistence. Different castes are all equal but remain separate because of distinct cultural identities (Natrajan 2012). All three views point to the continued significance of caste and the survival, if not strengthening, of caste boundaries in modern Indian society. This, in turn, suggests an equal preference for endogamy across and within caste groups. However, there is actually very limited empirical work that has systematically probed the preference for endogamy across and within caste categories.

The research that *has* been done on caste and intermarriage in India suggests that even well-educated, urban-dwelling Indians still largely adhere to traditional caste norms when it comes to marriage. Using data gathered from matrimonial advertisements and interviews with middle-income marriage market participants in West Bengal, Banerjee et al (2009) study the effect of caste and a number of other variables on marriage outcomes. They find a strong choice for within-caste marriage across all castes, but find that the “cost” that individuals pay—by not maximizing their preferences on other attributes—is relatively low. Since the authors focus on marriage outcomes and not preferences, particularly those related to boundary-crossing, they capture the effects of preferences alongside a number of other attributes that inform the eventual selection of the marriage partner. So, for instance, a woman interested in inter-caste marriage, on meeting men outside of her own caste, may not find the educational background, height, or personality of the individuals she meets agreeable. The outcome in such a case looks like a preference against boundary-crossing when in fact this individual may have been quite prepared to engage in such behavior. By focusing on outcomes rather than preferences, Banerjee et al (2009) are then not able to capture accurately the underlying pattern of preferences for caste-related boundary-crossing in the marriage market.

In contrast, Dugar, Bhattacharya, and Reiley (2011) study preferences instead of eventual outcomes in the arranged marriage market in West Bengal. They conduct a series of experiments by placing fictitious matrimonial advertisements for grooms in a leading Bengali language newspaper and observe how brides in the marriage market respond to variations in the reported income-level of these grooms. They find a strong in-group preference among the three groups they examined, which included two upper-caste sub-castes and one scheduled caste sub-caste. Dugar et al (2011) then go on to estimate the amount of income an out-group groom must report before a bride will respond to his advertisement.^x But both Banerjee et al (2009) and Dugar et al (2011) examine West Bengal and, thus, neither allows for regional comparison, leaving open the question of whether West Bengal is anomalous. This is important because caste, at least traditionally, is quite local in nature and scholars have noted regional variation in caste practices, as well as in caste politics (Bayly 1998; Gupta 1997, 2000, 2005; Rao 1990; Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Srinivas 1995).

Nevertheless, Dugar et al's (2011) finding that marriage market participants become amenable to boundary crossing as the incomes of their potential partner's rises suggests that caste boundaries in the marriage market may be crossed as caste and SE status decouple. While establishing the existence of interest in boundary crossing, their work leaves questions related to patterns of boundary-crossing preferences—which groups are preferred over others—and inclinations towards boundary crossing—which groups are more likely to prefer this approach—unanswered.

What explains boundary crossing?

While inter-caste marriages are assumed to be uncommon in India, they do occur. The National Family Health Survey reports 13% of its respondents to be in an inter-caste marriage.^{xi} Meanwhile, survey evidence also points to acceptance for intercaste marriage. For instance, in the 2004 Indian National Election Study conducted by the Center for Study of Developing Societies New Delhi, when respondents were presented with the assertion that inter-caste marriage should be banned, 40% of Hindu respondents opposed it. Yet, the literature on caste and marriage has not systematically explored the interest in or preferences for boundary-crossing through marriage. As a result we turn to the literature on interracial and interethnic marriage that has both proposed and tested theories on boundary-crossing behavior. The sociological theory on homogamy suggests that individuals seek to marry other individuals that are as similar to themselves as possible on the indicators that matter to them (Heer 1974; Johnson 1980; Kalmijn 1991, 1993, 1998; Kennedy 1952; Lieberman and Waters 1988; Mare 1991; Porterfield 1978; Qian 1997; Root 2001; Spickard 1989), while another sociological theory, caste-status exchange, suggests that some individuals will forsake homogamy if they can enter into a beneficial exchange through marriage. This might involve, for instance, higher-caste individuals who lack wealth seeking to marry lower-caste individuals who are better off financially. Though this theory does not appear to have been tested empirically in India, it has been verified with respect to race, in analogous boundary-crossing contexts, in the United States and a number of other countries. (Davis 1941; Fu 2001; Kalmijn 1993; Merton 1941; Qian 1997; Schoen and Wooldredge 1989). Such findings raise the question of whether caste-status exchange operates in the very marriage markets that Davis (1941) and Merton (1941), the theory's progenitors, thought they were describing when they proposed it over 70 years ago. We attempt to answer

this question by specifically looking for evidence that either homogamy or caste-status exchange explain the crossing of caste boundaries in marriage markets in India.

Next we outline our hypotheses regarding boundary-crossing preferences in the urban Indian, middle class marriage market.

Hypotheses

As noted above, there are two different theories which attempt to understand boundary-crossing preferences, namely homogamy and caste-status exchange. Under homogamy, individuals seek out partners who are as similar to themselves as possible on all applicable criteria. If an individual is well-educated, moneyed, and from a high social rank, she will look for a partner who is the same. In India, for many individuals, homogamy would involve finding a partner from the same caste. Importantly, homogamy predicts the absence of boundary-crossing preferences. Instead, homogamy suggests that in those hierarchical societies in which social and economic status are fused, endogamy allows for the replication of both caste and SE status across generations. In such societies we would expect marriage markets to be multiple and particular to each ranked group.

Hypothesis 1: Both SC and UC women will restrict their partner preference to members of their own caste category.

In the marriage market, given their higher social rank, UC women will be less likely to express a preference for boundary crossing as compared to SC women. By marrying out, they stand to lose their higher caste status. For SCs, boundary crossing in marriage will result in higher caste status, so they are more likely to express a preference for boundary crossing as compared to UCs.

Hypothesis 2: SC women will be more likely to prefer boundary crossing than UC women.

Under caste-status exchange, individuals from higher caste groups may exchange their caste status for something they are missing, like economic status or power, through marriage. Caste-status exchange predicts boundary-crossing when both parties have something to offer and can benefit from an exchange. Therefore, we would not expect to see exchange when lower ranked groups have nothing to offer those of higher rank. Thus, if there is any merit to caste-status exchange theory, we should only see exchange once caste and SE status have been decoupled, at least to some extent. Put differently, once lower ranked social groups have acquired enough economic status to be able to meaningfully participate in an exchange, we should see the formation of a boundary-crossing market in which individuals of lower rank can use their newfound wealth in order to acquire social status through marriage. Caste-status exchange theory suggests that, in a ranked system, when caste and SE status no longer coincide, marriage will facilitate a status exchange based on rank and SE status endowments.

Hypothesis 3A: UC women from higher SE status backgrounds will be less likely to express a preference for boundary crossing than those from lower SE status backgrounds since they have little to gain, in terms of status, from boundary crossing; however, UC women from lower SE status backgrounds can still trade their higher caste for higher SE status and will be more likely to express a preference for boundary-crossing.

Hypothesis 3B: Similarly, SC women from lower SE status backgrounds will be less likely to express a preference for boundary crossing than SC women from higher SE status backgrounds since they have little to exchange in the way of status endowments.

Data and Methodology

In order to test the proposition that all castes behave endogamously we conducted an original experiment by way of three of India's largest matrimonial websites,^{xii} Shaadi.com, Bharat matrimony.com, and Jeevansathi.com.^{xiii} The resulting data cover a wide variety of different UC and SC *jatis*, or sub-castes, across three of India's largest states—Uttar Pradesh in the North, Maharashtra in the West and Tamil Nadu in the South—each of which are quite distinct.^{xiv}

While scholars often draw conclusions on preferences for boundary-crossing in the marriage market based on the actual outcomes of marriages, in this paper, instead of focusing on the actual outcome of inter-caste marriage, we focus on interest in boundary crossing as captured by a positive response to an out-of-caste profile. We do so because we believe that interest in boundary-crossing better reflects changing attitudes towards caste. Indeed, even if individuals are interested in boundary-crossing, they may forego an inter-caste marriage because of a mismatch on a variety of non-caste criteria including personality, beauty preferences, family-related disagreements, etc. In such situations, effects related to these other factors may be conflated with caste-effects. Therefore, by focusing on the expression of interest in boundary-crossing, we are better able to isolate caste-based effects and understand the factors that drive boundary-crossing behavior.

We specifically chose to focus on the behavior of urban, middle-income participants in the Indian marriage market because, in theory, unlike their rural counterparts, these individuals and their immediate families, who are often heavily involved in any search for marriage partners, should be exposed to less community-level policing. In urban areas people are less dependent on caste networks in their day-to-day lives and are, therefore, less influenced by their preferences and customs. The threat of excommunication from the community does not hold as much sway. The relative anonymity of urban life, combined with the fact that couples are not as embedded in the multi-generational power structure of the village, allows inter-caste couples to avoid the worst forms of discrimination, at least to some degree. Survey data from the Indian National Election Study of 2004, on acceptance of inter-caste marriage supports these assertions, with 53% of urban dwellers and only 35.7% of rural dwellers rejecting a ban on inter-caste marriage. Furthermore, in urban areas the social interactions of members of different caste categories are not governed by the same social norms or customs as those in place in rural areas. Amongst individuals of the same SE status, there is a higher probability in urban areas of individuals from different caste backgrounds interacting as social equals than in rural areas. Finally, through newspaper matrimonial columns and matrimonial websites, urban dwellers are exposed to a larger number of choices in the marriage market relative to those who live in rural India, where reliance on similar media for mate selection is still very low.

In this paper, we compare UC and SC behavior because we are specifically interested in probing how and why caste rank influences preference for boundary-crossing in the marriage market. The two groups on which we collect data are situated at opposite ends of the caste spectrum and, as a result, there is a clear and stark difference in rank between the *jatis* falling within these broad categories. Working with UCs and SCs only allows us to observe differences in behavior across a clear rank difference. Indeed, while we do observe UC and SC responses to BC groom profiles, we have not included BC women participants in our study because some of the *jatis* falling in this category have begun to share characteristics with UCs, while others are closer to SCs in terms of their socio-economic disadvantage.

As already noted, in this paper we focus on the boundary-crossing preferences of women because, under the sets of norms specific to inter-caste marriage, a woman takes the caste of her husband after marriage. This convention makes boundary-crossing more consequential for women than men.

Our research mimics well-tested experimental designs used for measuring discrimination in labor markets (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003; Thorat and Attewell 2007). This design suits the objectives of the study because, in many respects, the arranged marriage market mimics the labor market. Using a correspondence-based design, we study discriminatory behavior of UCs and SCs towards potential partners belonging to categories other than their own. Relying on cooperating marriage bureaus, we identified a set of prospective grooms for whom caste is no bar in marriage partner selection. The potential grooms in this set, who were identified for each round of the experiment in each of the three states, are nearly identical in terms of our control variables: educational background, appearance, age, skin color, family status, income and job profile. The only material difference between each of these prospective grooms is caste, as they come from UC, BC, and SC categories.^{xv} As these three prospective grooms match on all other non-caste parameters—belonging to very similar upper-middle income/high-status backgrounds, averaging between 5’9’ and 5’10’ feet tall, ranging from 27-28 years-old, possessing an MBA degree from a reputable Indian business school, making an annual income between 9.5 and 10 lakhs per year (approximately USD \$17,500-18,500), and being fair in skin color^{xvi}—our design allows us to conclude with a high degree of confidence that, since our set of grooms was

attractive on a wide variety of parameters, among those individuals who respond to the three expressions of interest, variation in response is related to the caste of the groom.^{xvii}

Having identified a set of prospective grooms, we registered these individuals with the three matrimonial websites detailed above. We then assembled a list of prospective brides registered with each of the three websites and drew up a random sample from these lists for UCs and SCs. After doing so, we contacted these prospective brides on behalf of three prospective grooms, one from each caste category.^{xviii} Each of these prospective brides received one profile from a groom from her own caste category and two profiles from grooms from other caste categories.^{xix} Over all, we contacted 1557 UC and SC prospective brides and received responses from 1070 of them—a 68.7% response rate. We then recorded the caste of each of these potential brides,^{xx} as well as other information typically deemed important in the process of matchmaking, including height, skin color, age, education, and SE status.^{xxi}

We coded the data as follows: first, for our dependent variable, boundary-crossing preference, which we define as a positive response to an advertisement for an individual whose caste is different from the individual giving the positive response,^{xxii} we employ a dummy variable—with a 0 representing no boundary-crossing preference (no response to different-caste profiles) and a 1 indicating the opposite (positive response to one or more different-caste profiles). We then coded UC or SC, categories which are both fixed by law in India and widely recognized, as 1 and 0 respectively. We coded education by assigning a 1 to those individuals who stated that they only had a high school-level degree, a 2 to those who had achieved a bachelor's-level education, a 3 to those who held a masters or similar, and a 4 to those who had completed a PhD or a professional degree.^{xxiii} For skin color, we used the basic categories that marriage market participants employ themselves: fair, wheatish, and dark, which we ranked as 3, 2, and 1, respectively. For SE status, since the data we collected only pertained to middle income marriage-market participants, we broke the data down into lower-middle income, middle income and upper-middle income,^{xxiv} which we coded as 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Finally, for height and age, which fall naturally on an ordinal scale, we did not assign ranked categories and simply employed the data in the form it was collected. With the data coded in this way, we were able to analyze relationships between caste, educational background, skin color, height, age, SE status and boundary-crossing preferences.

In order to gather more information on our experimental findings, we also conducted forty one-on-one interviews with subjects belonging to different regional and caste backgrounds. These were conducted both on the phone and in person. Since these interviews were of a deeply personal nature, we had to rely on snowballing technique to construct our sample.^{xxv} One of our subjects, their family members, or one of our acquaintances had to vouch for us before people would agree to speak to us. In these interviews we asked our subjects to define an ideal partner, the process of searching for one, the significance of caste in their personal life and in the search for a partner (in their own case and that of their friends and family), reasons for a preference for or against boundary-crossing, how boundary-crossing preferences varied between the cities where they lived and the rural areas where they still had family, and between women and men. We also asked them about their thoughts on boundary crossing by the time their children would be ready for marriage.

Data Analysis

Given our experimental design and randomization, t-tests are the most expeditious way to determine whether a given treatment (or variable) has a significant effect upon boundary-crossing preference. Thus, we tested Hypotheses 1 and 2, exploring the average effect of the treatment—in this case *caste*—on the treated by sub-setting the data into UC and SC groups and running a t-test on the boundary-crossing preferences of respondents in these subsets. This t-test indicates that the 553 UCs and 517 SCs in our sample behave quite distinctly when it comes to boundary-crossing: $t = -5.381$, $p < 0.001$. This significant negative relationship between caste and boundary-crossing preference suggests that the higher one's caste, the less likely one is to express an interest in boundary-crossing. Thus, analysis at this level of aggregation answers our most fundamental question—are all castes equally interested in boundary-crossing?—with a fairly resounding no. In order to test Hypotheses 3A and 3B, we also conducted t-tests comparing further subsets of our UC and SC groups, this time sub-setting by SE status. Within each caste subset, we created one subset for upper-middle income respondents and one for middle and lower-middle income respondents. For UCs, a t-test comparing the boundary-crossing preferences of upper-middle income respondents to those of middle and lower-middle income respondents reveals that that these groups are distinct, $t = -4.668$, $p < 0.001$, and that a

significant negative relationship exists amongst our UC respondents between SE status and boundary-crossing preference. Along the same lines, when we compared the boundary-crossing preferences of upper-middle income SCs to those of middle and lower-middle income SCs we found that these groups are also distinct, $t = 1.982$, $p < 0.05$, and that the relationship between SE status and boundary-crossing preference for SCs is the opposite of that for UCs—significant and positive. When taken together, our analysis indicates that SE status has a significant impact on boundary-crossing preference, but that this impact varies by caste group.

In order to further explore boundary-crossing preferences in the marriage market, we ran a logistic regression across the entire data set, regressing all independent and control variables on boundary-crossing preference. As shown in Table I, we found that, amongst the 1070 female respondents included in our sample, caste, education, age and SE status are all significant determinants of boundary-crossing preference; meanwhile, height and skin color are not significant in this regard.^{xxvi} The coefficients for caste, education and SE status are all negative and significant to at least $p < .05$. Thus, the higher one's caste, education or SE status, the *less* likely one is to engage in boundary-crossing. At the same time, the coefficient for age is positive and significant to $p < 0.001$, indicating that the greater one's age, the *more* likely one is to express an interest in boundary-crossing.

In order to confirm the above-highlighted variations in behavior within caste categories, we also ran logistic regressions on UC and SC subsets of our data examining the impact of all of our control variables (education, height, skin color, age and SE status), save for caste, on boundary-crossing preference. This further analysis of the data confirms that within caste-based categories, boundary-crossing preferences do not always follow the trends we found in our analysis of the aggregate data. In particular, as shown in Table I, SE status remains a significant determinant of boundary-crossing preference for both UC and SC individuals, but as first-shown through our t-tests above, SE status has a different relationship with boundary-crossing preference for each of these groups. For our 553 UC respondents, SE status is negatively correlated with boundary-crossing preference to a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating that UC individuals with higher SE status are *less* likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than their middle and lower-middle class counterparts. Yet, for our 517 SC respondents the opposite relationship exists. For these SCs, there is a positive relationship between SE status and

boundary-crossing preference to $p < .05$, indicating that individuals with higher SE status are *more* likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing. Meanwhile, for all other control variables, education, height, skin color and age, the sign of the associated coefficients remains the same, even if their significance varies slightly.

In order to further explore the varying relationship between caste and SE status, we created a multiplicative interaction term for caste and income-group and ran an additional logistic regression across the entire data set. Before doing so, we coded upper-middle income respondents as 1 and both middle and lower-middle income respondents as 0, and SC respondents as 1 and UC respondents as 0, the opposite of the coding we used for our caste variable in the above regressions. We were then able to explore the boundary-crossing preferences of SCs conditional on their upper-middle income (“UMI”) status. The results of this model are in Table II. The model indicates that amongst our respondents a significant positive relationship exists between our interaction term and boundary-crossing preference. In other words, if one is an SC and from an UMI background, then one is significantly more likely than those SCs who are not UMI to express an interest in boundary-crossing. A quick perusal of the rest of Table II reveals that, though their values have changed to some degree, the signs of all coefficients remain the same as those found in Table I. The significance of certain variables has also changed, but this is not particularly surprising given that this logistic regression involves an interaction term.^{xxvii}

Next, since the terms used to create an interaction term are not readily susceptible to straightforward interpretation, we calculated predicted probabilities for the four logical combinations of these terms: SC/UMI, SC/Non-UMI, Non-SC/UMI and Non-SC/Non-UMI. We based these predicted probabilities upon median characteristics for all control variables that are not a part of the interaction term (education, height, skin color and age). The resulting plot is in Table III. It illustrates the relationship between caste and class, as well as the relationship between caste category (SC vs. UC) and boundary-crossing preference. The predicted probability that a non-UMI UC will express an interest in boundary-crossing is quite high, 60%, while the same probability for a UMI UC is just 33%. For SCs the opposite relationship exists, but the disparity is less pronounced. Our model predicts that a non-UMI SC will express an interest in boundary-crossing 65% of the time, while a UMI SC will do so 79% of the time.^{xxviii}

Finally, both of the predicted probabilities for SCs are greater than those for UCs, confirming the negative relationship between caste-category and boundary-crossing preference we first highlighted above.

Findings and Discussion

There are two major findings that flow from our analysis: (1) rank in a hierarchical social system is negatively correlated with boundary-crossing preference; and (2) SE status is correlated with differences in within-group boundary-crossing preferences.

Our first finding, as briefly detailed above, is that in a ranked system, one's position in the hierarchy influences one's boundary-crossing preference in the marriage market. Descriptively, while 61.9% of those brides who responded to any one of our advertisements expressed an interest in boundary-crossing, this number varies by caste. As shown in Figures II and III, 53.9% of UC respondents and 70.7% of SC respondents displayed a boundary-crossing preference. By way of comparison, the numbers are 99.3% and 93.8%, respectively, when UCs and SCs responded to advertisements from members of their own caste category. These descriptive statistics are supported by our t-tests and logistic regression analysis. Indeed, as our data demonstrates, each of these tests indicates, to a high level of significance, that the higher one's caste, the less likely one is to express an interest in boundary-crossing. Simply put, no matter the metric, caste is highly determinative of boundary-crossing preference.

During our one-on-one interviews, SC subjects reported two motivations for boundary crossing. Some pointed to the weak social policing associated with marrying up. As one of our upper-middle income SC interview subjects put it, "Of course if I marry into a higher caste, then people in the family and outside will not pass comments." Others suggested that they were indifferent to caste, especially if someone from another caste approached them with an interest. We discovered middle and lower-middle class SC women were, however, sensitive to the social distance, or the rank gap, especially if it was coupled with an SE status gap. Consider the response of a 24 year-old interview subject pursuing a Master's degree. She belonged to a lower middle-income SC family. When asked about the possibility of considering a UC partner from a wealthier family, she was skeptical. She felt there was little chance of such a match succeeding.

“Why would such a family want a relationship with my family?” She pointed out that there were caste *and* status differences to contend with. “I am a woman, I am the one who is expected to adjust. How will I adjust with so much difference between us?”^{xxix} But even when such a gap was absent, SC women were indifferent between BC and UC men. They felt that their higher SE status made them a suitable match for all castes. By contrast, among the UC subjects, the SC line was often the one that could not be crossed, unless the groom was very well educated and had good career prospects. Even then parental discomfort was a perpetual concern. Some of our subjects felt that parents would come around when they saw that their daughter was “secure” and “well-settled.”^{xxx}

Our data and findings broadly support caste-status exchange theory. Many of the brides in our sample were willing to explore marriage opportunities with individuals from different caste backgrounds. Upper-middle income SC respondents and middle to lower-middle income UC respondents were more likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than middle- and lower-middle income SC respondents and upper middle-income UC respondents.^{xxxi} We find that those who possess rank or SE status-based endowments and stand to benefit from exchange are more likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than those who lack similar endowments for exchange or than those who do not stand to benefit from exchange.

Our data indicate a clear difference in behavior within caste groups as well as between caste groups. In particular, middle and lower-middle income UC respondents are significantly more likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than their upper-middle income counterparts. Given their caste and SE status endowments, upper-middle income UCs can be confident that they can find partners in their own caste category, without “having to resort to” responding to expressions of interest from other caste groups. Meanwhile, middle and lower-middle income UCs have caste status, but lack SE status and, therefore, are willing to look further afield. Indeed, amongst UC respondents, a one step drop in status, for instance from upper-middle income to middle income, is associated with a 1.075 increase in boundary-crossing preference.

Notably, the relationship between SE status and boundary-crossing preference is inverted in the case of SC respondents, with upper middle-income SC respondents being significantly more likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than their middle and lower-middle

income counterparts. Amongst SC respondents, a one-step drop in status is associated with a 0.626 decrease in boundary-crossing preference. Given their SE status endowments, upper middle-income SC women have a chance at trading SE status for caste in a marriage with a UC man. Meanwhile, middle and lower middle-income SC women, who have neither SE status nor caste status to offer in an exchange, restrict their responses to potential UC men—at least relative to upper-middle income SCs. In other words, while SE status does not operate uniformly across all caste groups with respect to boundary-crossing preference, SE status does predict behavior within particular caste groups—so much so that SCs who *have* education, but who have not yet achieved upper-middle income status, refrain from expressing an interest in boundary-crossing. We find that SCs who have achieved graduate-level education, one marker of upward mobility, but have not yet achieved upper-middle income status, are particularly unlikely to express an interest in boundary-crossing. It may be that these individuals recognize the constraints of the exchange system and only respond to potential suitors who they believe they have a reasonable chance of marrying.

Having found empirical support for caste-status exchange at work in Indian marriage markets, we must consider alternative explanations for these findings. One such explanation is that there are problems with our data. For instance, one might argue that our data suffers from selection bias—that the SCs who use matrimonial websites are particularly prone to boundary crossing and/or that the UCs on utilizing these sites are prone in the opposite direction. We find no *a priori* reason to believe this is the case. Another such explanation is that data collected from matrimonial websites is plagued by sampling bias—that the sample of SCs found on such sites is unusual in some way. And it is. SCs who are online are different from the larger SC population in that they are often more educated and wealthy than other SCs. But, ultimately, this is not a reason to dismiss our findings. Our research was focused on the SCs who were a part of the growing Indian middle class. The SCs who use online matrimonial websites are representative of this segment. Qualitative evidence collected from interviews with recent marriage market participants supports this choice. Subjects consistently indicate that their less-educated and wealthy relatives, particularly those residing in villages, do behave more traditionally in both the ways they search for partners and the partners they choose. At the same time, these same respondents indicate that many of their city-dwelling, educated and financially-comfortable friends and relatives choose to use online matrimonial sites to find partners.

Another potential problem afflicting the SC sample could be that supply of UCs on matrimonial websites is greater than that of SCs. Faced with a limited choice of potential partners from among SCs, individuals from the group could then be predisposed to looking for partners outside the group. Having considered the problems of over- and under-supply in advance, we made a conscious choice to oversample from those communities that maintain a substantial presence on matrimonial websites. For SCs, this meant that our sample includes Jatavs, Mahars, and Adi Dravidas.^{xxxii} Oversampling allows us to be confident that the SCs in our sample have many other same-caste suitors to choose from and are not responding to expressions of interest from members of other castes simply because they cannot find someone from their own caste.^{xxxiii}

A final alternative explanation for our findings is that modernization is at work, causing liberalization of social practices. While we do argue that modernization lays part of the foundation for the caste-status exchange we see going on in our data, our data do not seem to follow a classic modernization pattern. Since modernization theory predicts the mass liberalization of social attitudes, if modernization was truly behind caste-status exchange we would see boundary-crossing on a large scale, with those who have received the benefits of modernization to have liberalized their attitudes in greater numbers. Our data indicate the opposite. Well-educated, upper middle-income individuals from upper caste backgrounds are less likely to express an interest in boundary-crossing than their middle-income, less well-educated counterparts. In fact, if modernization was at work, we would simply see a strong positive correlation between education and wealth and boundary-crossing preference across SCs and UCs. As we do not find these patterns in our data—except when we examine subsets—we feel confident that we are dealing with caste-status exchange, not modernization.

Implications

The above findings point to the fact that in the urban, Indian, middle-class marriage market, a significant proportion of participants and their families is willing to consider crossing caste boundaries if it allows them to upgrade their caste or SE status. Our qualitative research indicates that interest in inter-caste unions might be even greater if prospective brides could make decisions independent of their families. This finding is important because inter-caste

marriage has significant social implications. Its occurrence and acceptance signals a weakening of caste divisions. Marriage can comingle family and social networks of spouses (Romano 2003). Since caste is reproduced through marriage, an inter-caste marriage may result in weaker adherence to norms related to maintaining caste separation in the next generation.^{xxxiv} Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in India, marriage of women is policed more strictly by families and communities and marrying into a lower caste is strongly discouraged. The willingness to cross ranked caste boundaries by women then signifies a weakening of these boundaries. Since caste in India has historically been a source of social exclusion and serious discrimination (Mendelsohn & Vicziany 1998; Viswanathan 2005; Deshpande 2011), boundary-crossing among the UCs, especially toward the SCs, is a sign of social inclusion of a severely marginalized group.

Our findings on preferences in the private sphere compliment recent work on changing caste relations in the public sphere in the wake of both rising literacy and income indicators among SCs in India. Krishna (2007)—through research conducted in two Indian states, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—discovers a new generation of local SC leaders. These local political entrepreneurs, who Krishna calls “Naya Netas” (new leaders) have developed a following not only among members of their own community, but, importantly, also among members of communities ranked higher than the SCs. Krishna (2007) finds that out-group members turn to these SC Naya Netas, even over their own caste leaders, in order to gain access to the state and its resources. Along similar lines, in a study conducted in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Kapur et al (2010) find that with a rise in rural SCs’ standard of living, members of this caste category are reporting better treatment at the hands of groups that have traditionally dominated them.

But discrimination still remains and our data do not suggest otherwise. Our study shows that although 28% of the UC participants in the experiment express an interest in boundary crossing to SCs, controlling for all the other important variables, among the different groom profiles in the experiment, SC profiles were the least desired matches in the marriage market (outside their own caste category) because of the stigma assigned to their identity. We do not have longitudinal data on variation in preferences for boundary crossing in the marriage market. As such, we are unable to draw definite conclusions on the direction or magnitude of social change that is occurring with respect to preferences for boundary crossing. Instead, our findings

point to the presence of an exchange mechanism that is able to facilitate social change through the crossing of caste boundaries in marriage.

Conclusion

Our correspondence-based field experiment conducted across multiple Indian matrimonial websites finds that a substantial number of participants reveal a preference for crossing caste boundaries in the arranged marriage market. The lower-ranked SCs express a stronger preference for crossing caste boundaries than the higher-ranked UCs. We also find that in the arranged marriage market those participants who stand to benefit from caste-status exchange are more likely to prefer boundary-crossing. Those who cannot benefit from an exchange and those who lack the SE status-based and caste-based endowments for an exchange, are less likely to participate in one. Our findings, we hope, make a strong case for future research that will systematically explore inter-caste relations in sites of caste reproduction, including patterns of habitation, associational life, marriage, education, especially as caste and SE status continue to decouple in India and as notions of stigma and prestige associated with caste weaken.

TABLES

Table I: Logistic Regression of Control Variables on Boundary-Crossing Preference for Full Data Set and UC and SC Subsets.

	ALL DATA	UC	SC
(Intercept)	-7.995 *** (2.128)	-9.250 ** (3.279)	-8.510 ** (3.001)
Caste	-0.550 *** (0.139)	NA NA	NA NA
Education	-0.232 ** (0.082)	-0.243 * (0.118)	-0.314 * (0.123)
Height	0.014 (0.030)	-0.048 (0.047)	0.061 (0.042)
Skin Color	-0.184 (0.125)	-0.233 (0.192)	-0.143 (0.173)
Age	0.385 *** (0.039)	0.627 *** (0.066)	0.207 *** (0.052)
SE Status	-0.435 ** (0.161)	-1.075 *** (0.221)	0.626 * (0.298)
N Respondents	1070	553	517
AIC	1289	628	621

Standard Errors in parentheses.

Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

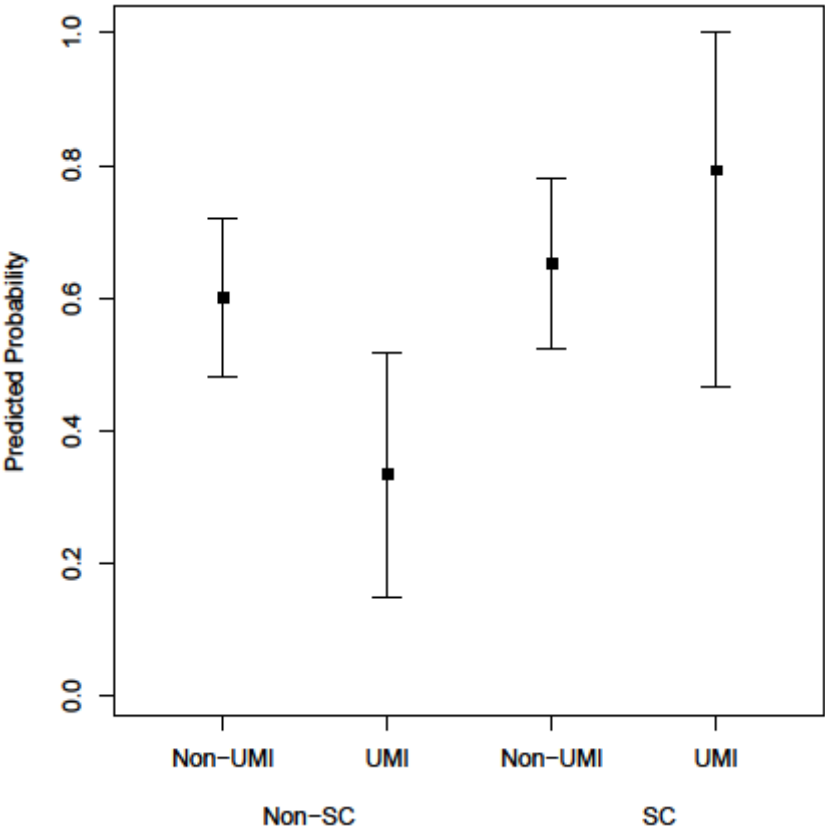
Table II: Interaction Model for Caste and SE Status on Boundary-Crossing Preference by Caste Group

(Intercept)	-9.542 ***
	(2.197)
Caste (SC)	0.226
	(0.155)
Education	-0.278 ***
	(0.083)
Height	0.016
	(0.031)
Skin Color	-0.172
	(0.126)
Age	0.396 ***
	(0.040)
SE Status	-1.098 ***
	(0.212)
SC*SE Status	1.806 ***
	(0.402)
N Respondents	1070
AIC	1265

Standard Errors in parentheses.

Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Table III: Predicted Probability Point Estimates and Confidence Intervals Across All Logical Combinations of Interaction Term Components for a Respondent with Median Characteristics on all Control Variables.



FIGURES

Figure I: Percentage of Total Newspaper-Based Matrimonial Advertisement Observations Involving “Caste Identification” and “Caste Request” By Decade

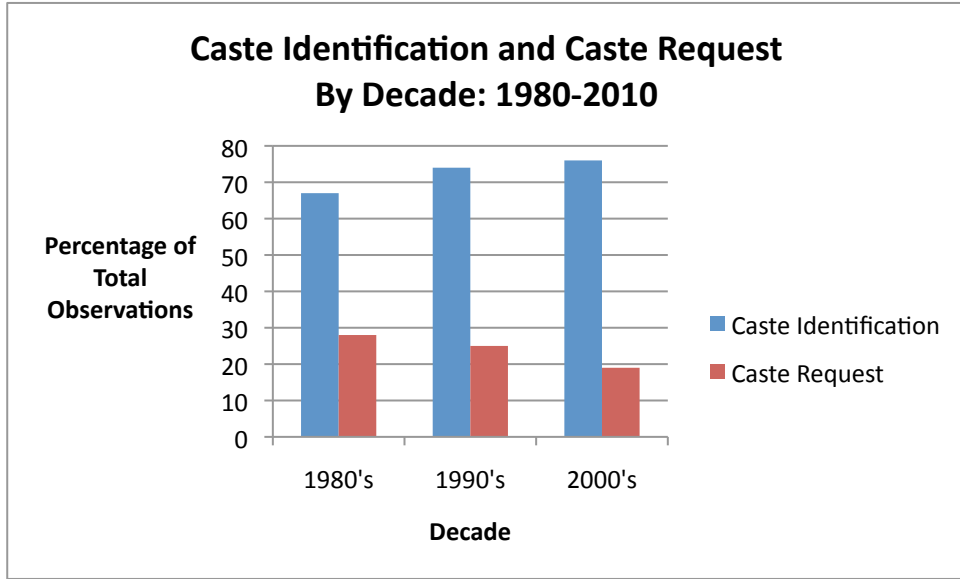


Figure II: Percentage of UC Who Express an Interest in Boundary-Crossing.

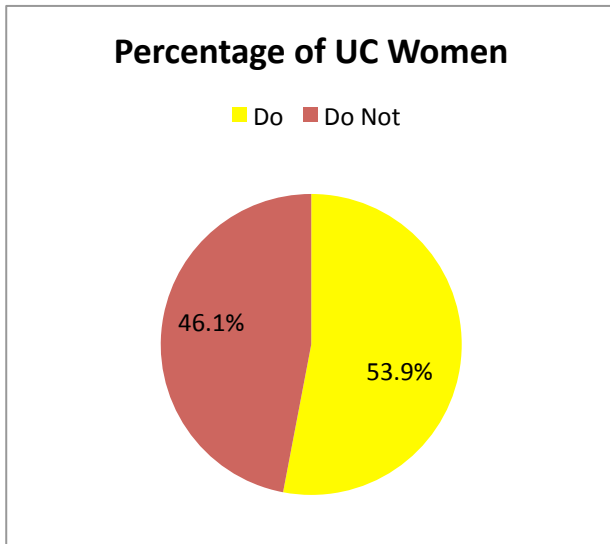
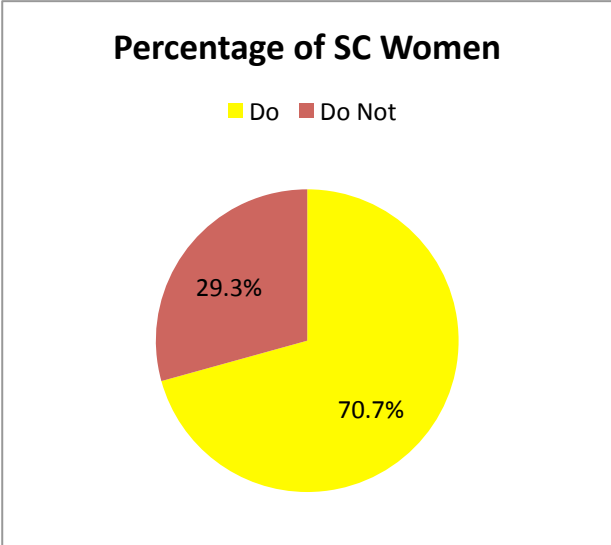


Figure III: Percentage of SC Women Who Express an Interest in Boundary-Crossing.



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ⁱ A ranked relationship is defined by relations of difference as well as disparity between groups, while an unranked relationship is defined by a relationship of difference alone.

ⁱⁱ "Scheduled Castes" or "Dalits" belong to those Hindu castes or *jatis* that were previously considered to be "untouchable." The historical professions of individuals from these groups are associated with work that is considered to be ritually polluting and, as a result, they have faced, and in many places continue to face, severe social discrimination. In 1935, the colonial government collapsed the various untouchable sub-castes into a single category which they called the "scheduled castes." This bureaucratic nomenclature survives to date. Subsequently, the Scheduled Castes began to call themselves "Dalits"—a Marathi term which means "ground down" or "broken to pieces."

ⁱⁱⁱ In over 80 percent cases the woman's family was implicated in the crime.

^{iv} For the purpose of this study, we use a definition of urban middle class as is used in popular discourse in India, and one which is different from the classification based strictly on income percentiles. Our study participants for the most part hold a college degree, reside in urban areas, have access to the internet, and report an annual family income of at least Rupees 200,000 or 4,000 Dollars. Below this annual income level, an individual was exempt from paying income tax in India in 2011-12. For a wide ranging discussion on the modern Indian middle class see Baviskar and Ray (2011).

^v Matrimonial advertisements in newspapers and membership on matrimonial websites are expensive and are typically beyond the reach of low income Indian families.

^{vi} Name changed to maintain the anonymity of the authors.

^{vii} The data in the N-S data set was coded as follows. Any mention of the ad-placer's caste was considered "caste identification." Meanwhile, any specific request for a partner of a particular caste was considered to be a "caste request."

^{viii} In general, marriage market entrants must reveal information about their caste because hiding it potentially lowers their credibility. As a result, we would expect caste identification to remain high. In contrast, the declining number of specific caste requests suggests that people are more willing to choose their partner from a larger set of castes.

^{ix} Srinivas called this process of mimicking the upper caste practices by upwardly mobile lower castes as "Sanskritization".

^x Their findings also suggest that as income levels among lower ranked groups rise, and they enter the middle class in larger numbers, we are more likely to observe interest in boundary crossing in the middle class.

^{xi} In the US, 6% marriages are reported to be interracial or interethnic (Qian & Lichter 2007). We think that inter-caste marriages in India are likely to be under-reported especially given the stigma associated with them.

^{xii} Membership on such websites costs up to hundred dollars for a six-month package and compares favorably with newspaper ads, many of which cost as much as 75 dollars for three weekend appearances.

^{xiii} See the essay by Titzmann (2011) on the growing role of matrimonial websites.

^{xiv} The three are some of the largest states in India. They have a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. In Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the caste system came to be challenged earlier through social movements of the lower castes followed by assertion in the electoral arena. In Uttar Pradesh, such a challenged first appeared in electoral politics through the emergence of lower caste-based political parties.

^{xv} Instead of using false résumés, a common practice in labor market studies, the study generated data by working with actual prospective brides and grooms. Overall, 9 potential grooms were identified, 3 in each of the three states. No pictures of the grooms were made available to the participants when contacting them with an expression of interest. This allowed us to make sure that 9 profiles used in the study were almost identical across all the parameters revealed in their profiles.

^{xvi} While these grooms are above average on most attributes, they are by no means among the best grooms present in the market. For example, on groom's income, a highly valued attribute, incomes in the same age-bracket went as high as 3.5 million rupees per year.

^{xvii} This range was even smaller with a set of groom profiles for a particular state. For example, for all three profiles in the Northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the men were 27 years old, had an annual income between 9.5 and 9.75 Lakhs, were 5.9 inches tall, and belonged to a family of a senior civil servant.

^{xviii} Our female respondents were contacted by our grooms through a message of interest—one that most women would consider to indicate a willingness to further explore a possible relationship. This message was standardized and, among other attributes, prominently displayed the caste of the individual expressing interest.

^{xix} Typically, each individual who registers with a matrimonial website receives many expressions of interest. As a result, our profiles were just three of many other expressions of interest. In order to avoid any bias arising out of the order in which ads were received, we randomized different components of the process of expressing interest. Sometimes our SC groom was the first to express interest, while our UC groom was the first to express interest at other times. In addition, our grooms sent their expressions of interest at different times in the week and different times of the day. And, finally, no individual received expressions of interest from all three of our grooms at the same time.

^{xx} An inclusive list of all sub-castes or *jatis* in our sample is as follows. UCs: Brahmin, Agarwal, Kshatriya, Kayastha, Rajput, Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu, Mudaliar, Pillai. SCs: Mahar, Chambar, Matang, Jatav, Jullaha, Nai, Khatik, Kori, Balmiki, Nishad, Dhobi, Ravidass, Devendra Kula Vellalar, Arunthathiyar, Adi Dravida.

^{xxi} We also collected data on profession of the women, but decided not to code and analyze this data. We did so in part because our qualitative research indicated that education and socioeconomic status—but not profession—were important parameters by which grooms consider prospective brides; unsurprisingly, these were the same bases upon which brides try to impress prospective grooms. We also reasoned that profession is, in many ways, redundant to educational background and socioeconomic status.

^{xxii} While this type of behavior does not indicate that an individual will go on to marry someone of a different caste and we collected no data on this outcome, in India, where caste boundaries have been reported to be strong, willingness to entertain marriage prospects from individuals in different castes represents a significant and consequential outcome.

^{xxiii} We coded education in this way under the basic and warranted assumption that in the Indian marriage market education is typically valued in this basic rank ordering.

^{xxiv} The lower-middle income category was defined as an annual family income of less than 2 lakhs, the middle income category ranged 2-5 lakhs, and the upper-middle income category was defined as above 5 lakhs. Each of these coding brackets was self-reported by participants and then verified using participants reported income/assets. Participants have strong incentives to report their socio-economic status honestly to potential grooms, as misreporting is likely to be discovered eventually and punished harshly. As a result, we only recoded approximately 10% of participants' self-reported socioeconomic status. In almost all of these recoding cases, participants had underreported their income/assets.

^{xxv} We interviewed 18 UC subjects and 23 SC subjects.

^{xxvi} We also created a combined education/socioeconomic status variable and analyzed this data, but did not include it here because we found that it did not increase our pseudo R-squared and did not shed any additional light on the relationship between caste and boundary-crossing preference that was not already captured by each of these variables analyzed separately.

^{xxvii} Importantly, the constitutive terms of the interaction term SE Status*SC cannot be interpreted as if they were in a “normal” regression. In an interaction model, the coefficients on constitutive terms show the effect of that variable when the other constitutive term is zero. In our case, this means that the coefficient on the term SC shows the effect of being an SC when one is NOT from an upper-middle income background. Similarly, SE Status shows the effect of being from an upper-middle income background when one is NOT an SC.

^{xxviii} Interestingly, this is not the only income-related story concealed within the aggregate data. The observant reader will have noted a significant negative coefficient on our education variable for the logistic regressions we ran on the aggregate data, the SC data and the interaction model data. In order to probe this relationship further, we sub-setted our SC sample by SE status, first grouping SC individuals from lower-middle income and middle income backgrounds together and then grouping individuals from upper-middle income backgrounds together. Logistic regressions run on these subsets reveal that the coefficient for education regressed on boundary-crossing preference is -0.279 ($p < .05$) for lower-middle and middle income SCs, while the coefficient for upper-middle income SCs is negative, but not significant. This indicates that there is something special about the relationship between education,

SE status and boundary-crossing preference for lower-middle and middle-class SCs. We leave exploration of this relationship for a subsequent paper.

^{xxxix} She felt that because she was educated and planned to work, she should be treated as an equal in the household. By marrying into a family which was higher in both social rank and SE status, she feared, she would be marginalized.

^{xxx} Irrespective of caste, parental comfort was often a major concern among our subjects, almost all of whom felt that by the time their children grow up, the significance of caste will have diminished considerably. Interestingly, our UC respondents expressed more confidence about such an outcome as compared to our SC respondents.

^{xxxi} Today, in large metros among upper-SES UCs, the practice of attending *swyamvars* is gaining popularity. Men and women sign up to attend a gathering of prospective grooms and brides from the same caste along with family members. These events are usually held in elite hotels and barriers to entry—a fee of \$100 or over and high income requirements—mean that only upper SES families can afford to attend. This behavior points to a strong desire among the members of this group to find partners among their own SES and caste category. We were unable to find similar events for middle and lower middle SES UCs and for SCs belonging to any SES category.

^{xxxii} These are the largest and most well off SC castes in their respective states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

^{xxxiii} All three *jatis* were over 50% of their respective state sample.

^{xxxiv} See Labov and Jacobs (1993) for the articulation of this argument in the context of race.