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Social Media, Social Change: The Influence of Social Media on Views of Dating and Divorce in Bangalore, India

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Social networking is a phenomenon that is changing communication among people in profound ways within and across communities in nations throughout the world. Social media offers its participants an unprecedented influx of ideas, perspectives, and information. Creating valuable information sources across geographic boundaries, friends across cultural boundaries, and dates across regional boundaries, social media is breaking down traditional information blocks and changing the way we learn about the world. This paper seeks to answer two questions: (1) how is the Internet changing young peoples' views of dating and divorce in India? and (2) can social media play a role in advancing women's rights in India? To explore answers to these questions, the author turned to India's technology hub, Bangalore, interviewing 40 residents between the ages of 17 and 26 and inquiring about their social media use and changing perceptions of dating and divorce. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter provide a public space wherein people find comfort engaging in an open discourse on dating, divorce, flirting, and bar hopping. Topics of discussion once kept private are now brought into the open where women no longer feel bound by social constraints and traditional expectations. By bringing private and taboo issues to our homepages, social media erodes the heavily policed boundaries of identity. Within this transformative climate now ripe for wider social change, women in Bangalore are texting, Tweeting, and status-updating their way toward equality.

social media | dating | divorce |
women's rights | Bangalore | India

Introduction

In February, 2011 five drunken young men from a farming village assaulted a young couple in Ghaziabad, India.¹ They beat the young man and gang-raped the woman.² According to the *New York Times* report, this was just the latest in a series of assaults and gang rapes in the area.³ These sorts of violent assaults have erupted from a clash between conservative village culture and an increasingly modernized city center.⁴ The perpetrators of these crimes are almost always high school dropouts from villages surrounding the city, while the victims are young educated working women.⁵ The conservative village culture is so vehemently opposed to women's independence that some people believe that the very act of women working outside of the home deserves harassment or rape.⁶

¹ Lydia Polgreen, *Rapes of Women Show Clash of Old and New India*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, March 26, 2011.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ See *id.*

In a similar violent outburst, activists from the Sri Ram Sene, a right-wing sensationalist group, attacked young girls in a pub in Mangalore in January of 2011.⁷ Pramod Muthalik, chief of the activist group, called the attack a "victory for all those fighting against pub culture" and "a big success in the fight against indecency."⁸ The explosive violence is evidence of a broader trend that is presently occurring across India: a collision between conservative and modern values. These violent clashes are the result of a massive socioeconomic change that is taking place in India. Urban youth are becoming increasingly independent both financially and socially. In exercising their independence, young people face strong opposition from defenders of traditional values.

The young people of India, aptly named the "Facebook generation," have grown up in a technologically saturated world. The rapidly changing views can, in part, be attributed to the fact that this generation has grown up with an entirely different way to communicate. Grace Mills, author of "The Digital Divide: Left Behind on the Other Side," refers to this emerging dynamic as a symbiotic relationship between our humanity and our technology.⁹ This inextricable link renders the Internet a prime space to examine the tension between emerging social trends and defenders of traditional values.

Social media has the effect of bringing things out into the open that were once hidden or not allowed. Both dating and divorce, for example, were once highly stigmatized in India and remain, in many parts of the country, taboo. This culturally protected entry and exit into marriage is a terrain with rapidly changing boundaries. As individuals create on-line personas and openly monitor a public page of self-expression, the once-clear demarcations of the public and private sphere are eroding. In a country that has intensely policed social boundaries of normative behavior, there is a strong correlation between social media use and shifting social norms in India.

The nature of social media is to make that which is private become public. As a result, social media possesses the potential to change thoughts and behaviors that were once kept in the dark. When people connect from the privacy of their own homes, yet remain partially veiled by the social identities they have created, they are more open to raise concerns that have been considered inappropriate or taboo. This tendency toward unveiling the hidden creates a capacity for change in the discourse that surrounds behaviors, alters the perception of acceptable behaviors, and even shifts the behaviors themselves. Given the level of personal information that people have begun to share over social networks

⁷ *Mangalore Pub Row: Sri Ram Sene Men Get Bail*, IBN Live, Jan. 30, 2009, available at: <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/mangalore-pub-row-sri-ram-sene-men-get-bail/84145-3.html> (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Grace M. Mills, *The Digital Divide: Left Behind on the Other Side*, 30 U. LA VERNE L. REV. 381, 383.

and online dating sites, the Internet has become a rich domain for human interaction and, consequently, fertile ground for study.

This paper seeks to answer two questions: First, how is the Internet changing young peoples' views of dating and divorce in India? Second, can social media play a role in advancing women's rights in India? To explore answers to these questions, I turned to India's technology hub, Bangalore. I interviewed 40 residents between the ages of 17 and 26 and inquired about their social media use and changing perceptions of dating and divorce. Part one provides background information on Bangalore. Part two is an overview of Internet use, specifically existing social networks, online dating, and matrimonial websites. Part three consists of method and findings of the interviews conducted. Part four considers the implications of this research.

Bangalore, India

Nowhere else in India can the effects of new technology be seen as vividly as in the 'Electronics Capital of India,' Bangalore (re-named Bengaluru in 2006).¹⁰ Bangalore, the state capital of Karnataka has eight million inhabitants, making it the third largest city in India after Delhi and Mumbai.¹¹

Industrialization began in Bangalore during the early 20th century and continued to spread with the establishment of technical and academic institutions.¹² India's first Prime Minister, J. Nehru sought to make the city India's intellectual capital and a "City of the Future."¹³ During the 1950s and '60s a number of government initiatives sought to attract large public-sector heavy industries. In the '60s and '70s, state-run businesses grew throughout the area.¹⁴ With the '80s came the growth and spread of multinational corporations, and in the 1990s, Bangalore became a hub for high-tech industries including information and communication technology.¹⁵ In the 2000s, Bangalore added biotech and automotive to its repertoire of expanding fields.¹⁶

Bangalore is now a globally integrated region that is expanding exponentially.¹⁷ The city's software and service industries grow at around 30% each year – an astounding figure compared to global rates.¹⁸ With three universities, 14 colleges, and renowned research institutions, Bangalore has

become one of Asia's leading locations for education.¹⁹ In addition to being a leader in academics, Bangalore also houses the largest number of pubs in India.²⁰

The chief minister of Karnataka declared his intention to modernize Bangalore and make it more globally competitive.²¹ A Billion Rupees "mega-city project" promised to modernize Bangalore through urban renewal and urban design.²² Globalization efforts, new developments, and upgrading elite areas in Bangalore have pushed the lower-middle class further out into the periphery.²³ With a fragmented and polarized urban landscape, Bangalore is characterized by a dualism between the privileged and the deprived.²⁴ This increasing socioeconomic fragmentation has been the cause of many violent clashes with anti-globalization campaigns including a campaign against Monsanto, a U.S.-based agricultural corporate giant. Additionally, this tension has led to violent outbursts of the Sri Ram Sene against women embracing modern values.

With an emerging urban-middle class, globally integrated economy, and an increasingly fragmented social landscape, Bangalore is a prime site to study clashes between old and new values. As the tech capital of India, Bangalore is a globally integrated city that has been deeply influenced by newfound connections through the Internet.

Overview of Internet Use

A. Teen Use of Social Media

Among all other nations, India has the most adolescents in the world: 250 million.²⁵ Half of the Indian population is under 25.²⁶ According to a survey by Synavate, a global research firm, Indians spend 10 hours everyday on some form of media, 2 hours on social networking sites, and 1.6 hours on the phone. In a 2008 *India Today* survey, 74% of adolescents approved of underage sex and one in five Indian teens reports that they have had sex.²⁷ The generation gap has never been wider.

The young generation of India has grown up with technology as a dominant force in their lives. Technology can be used as a private space for secrets kept among a few or as a public space to connect and share information with many.²⁸ Some young people use technology to distance themselves from parents' watchful eyes while others look to their

¹⁰ Christoph Dittrich, *Bangalore: Globalisation and Fragmentation in India's Hightech-Capital*, ASIEN 103 (April 2007), 1.

¹¹ *Bangalore Facts*, KARNATAKA.COM available at: <http://www.karnataka.com/tourism/bangalore/facts.html> (last visited August 19, 2012).

¹² Dittrich, *supra* note 31, at 46.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at 48.

²⁰ *Bangalorebest Pubs*, BANGALOREBEST, available at: <http://www.bangalorebest.com/pubs/bpubs.asp> (last visited August 19, 2012).

²¹ Dittrich, *supra* note 31, at 46.

²² *Id.* at 46.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* at 52.

²⁵ Aron Purie, *From the editor-in-chief*, INDIA TODAY, (Mar. 7, 2011).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

Facebook pages to help their parents better understand who they are.²⁹

This is a transformative generation; a generation that is much farther removed from the values and behaviors of their parents than ever before. As Delhi-based counselor Gitanjali Kapoor noted, “constant exposure of different types of media is enhancing their inquisitiveness, encouraging them to question and stretch their boundaries.”³⁰ Social media enables widespread exposure to practices and behaviors in other countries and across India. It expands the scope of reference, exposing users to new ideas and information.

Many people, though, are opposed to the influences of an inter-connected and globalized social sphere. Adults in India are concerned about dramatically changing attitudes toward sex and dating. Ninety percent of teens approve of premarital sex.³¹ Many young people, consequently, use social networks for a range of dating-related behaviors such as connecting with people they meet at socials, flirting using the Facebook chat function, and if all goes well, posting intimate photos and broadcasting their relationship to the world by using the “in a relationship” status button.³²

Older generations are reacting to these changing social attitudes and behaviors with fear and alarm. A recent *India Today* article explored the variety of purported evils associated with teen online activities. Although the note from the editor in chief of *India Today* in a cover story entitled “Secret Life of India Teens: Casual sex, net addiction, noon parties” emphasized understanding in place of judgment, the article warns of drug abuse, underage drinking, porn addiction, depression, and concludes with casual dating trends sure to get most Indian parents up in arms. The article does emphasize the need for more dialogue with children so that parents can understand their children’s behaviors and the changing landscape of what it means to be a teen today. To assess shifting social attitudes and behaviors related to social media, it is important to first survey the specific types of social media people are using in India.

B. Types of Social Media

Prominent social networking sites include Facebook, Orkut, Myspace, Rediff Ishare, Apna Circle, and Bigadds.

Facebook:

Facebook began in February 2004 and, as of this writing, has 1 billion users.³³ Over 14 million of these users are in

India.³⁴ Facebook allows users to connect with other users and “friends” who can share photos, ideas, status updates and other files, and send emails and instant messages. Facebook stands as the largest site on the Internet for uploading photographs as 14 million photographs are uploaded daily.³⁵

Twitter:

Twitter is a type of social networking that revolves around micro-blogging.³⁶ Users can send and receive messages up to 140 characters called tweets.³⁷ Twitter receives 65 million posts per day.³⁸ Frequently used by celebrities in India, Twitter connects users and allows them to target narrow spectrum audiences because people must select whom they follow or not.³⁹

Rediff Ishare:

Ishare is an Indian social networking site that was launched in 2007 by Rediff.com, an Indian-based news, information, and shopping portal.⁴⁰ Rediff focuses on videos photo and music sharing.

Orkut:

Orkut (www.orkut.com) is a social networking site developed by Google that is popular in South America and India. This site offers connection forums where communities of users can collectively post topics and discuss issues. Worldwide, Orkut has over 100 million users.⁴¹ However, in 2010, Facebook overtook Orkut as the most visited social networking site in India.

Myspace:

Myspace.com was launched in 1999 and was one of the first social networking sites. As of 2010, Myspace had 18 million users, but the site has been experiencing a downward

²⁹ See Interviews on Parent Interaction

³⁰ Damayanti Datta, *Secret Life of Indian Teens*, INDIA TODAY, (Mar. 7, 2011), 18.

³¹ *Id.* at 22.

³² See *Id.*

³³ Will Oremus, “Facebook Hits 1 Billion Users,” Oct 4, 2012, available at:

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/10/04/facebook_hits_one_billion_monthly_active_users_worldwide_makes_promotional_](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/10/04/facebook_hits_one_billion_monthly_active_users_worldwide_makes_promotional_video_.html)

[video_.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/10/04/facebook_hits_one_billion_monthly_active_users_worldwide_makes_promotional_video_.html) (last visited August 19, 2012).

³⁴ Adheeth Ibrahim, *Facebook India Statistics for October 2010*, ADHEETH.COM, Oct. 11, 2010, available at: <http://www.adheeth.com/Facebook-india-statistics-for-october-2010/> (last visited August 19, 2012).

³⁵ Sajai Singh, *Anti-Social Networking: Learning the Art of Making Enemies in Web 2.0*, 6 J. INTERNET L. 3, 3 (2008).

³⁶ *Twitter*, WIKIPEDIA, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>, (last visited August 19, 2012).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Parwatay, *supra* note 55, at 34.

³⁹ Sunarana Suresh, *Guess Who’s the Most Popular*, DNA Sunday, 1 (April 3, 2011).

⁴⁰ Singh, *supra* note 57, 4.

⁴¹ *Orkut*, WIKIPEDIA, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkut>, (last visited August 19, 2012).

trend.⁴² Myspace is often used by artists to promote music and stay in touch with interested fans.⁴³

Apna Circle:

Apna Circle (www.apnacircle.com) was launched in 2007 as the Indian Facebook. Apna Circle offers similar features as Facebook, including personal profile, friends, photo uploads, and includes additional features like a job search engine.⁴⁴

Bigadda:

Bigadda (Bigadda.com) is an Indian social networking site with 1.24 million users. Ninety-five percent of these users reside in India, and the site is directed at young people with 60% of users below 25.⁴⁵

Social networks allow people from across the globe to connect with each other and communicate personal information, ideas, and values. Social networking is a global phenomenon that is changing the way people communicate within and across communities, countries, and around the world. Dating, matrimonial, and social networks in India are a critical arena for negotiating the boundaries of the traditional and the modern.

C. Online Dating

In India, arranged marriages are the prevailing method to unite a bride and groom.⁴⁶ This tradition has strong social roots and serves to reinforce existing social, economic, and historical constructions in India.⁴⁷ Until recently in India, most arranged marriages were put together by families of the bride and groom, and the couple never saw each other until the wedding day.⁴⁸ Now, with the influence of the Internet and online dating sites, the traditional process of marriage is changing.

One popular site in India, ignighter.com initially debuted in Manhattan with failing numbers, but ultimately found success in the Indian dating market.⁴⁹ Ignighter targeted twenty-something singles and hoped to differentiate itself from other Internet dating sites by offering group dates.⁵⁰ While the idea struggled to gain momentum in the United States, the

founders noticed significant levels of user traffic from Asia.⁵¹ India in particular was adding hundreds of users per day, primarily from New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai.⁵² The founders made the decision to transition and become an Indian dating site and now have almost 2 million users and are adding 7000 more per day.⁵³ In founder Adam Sachs' words, "Here we are, a few Jewish guys sitting in Union Square and we might have accidentally revolutionized the dating scene in India."⁵⁴

One likely reason Ignighter has found such an enthusiastic home in India is the group dating forum. While it is considered taboo for unmarried men and women in rural areas to be in public together, in big cities, like Mumbai, attitudes and dating practices are clearly changing. As the *New York Times* puts it, "for some in this generation – those raised on a diet of MTV and social networks – there's a desire to find new dating scripts, or just to hang out with a coed group."⁵⁵ Parents are more comfortable with the group-dating scenario, and group dating offers a transition phase in India's rapidly changing dating culture.

D. Matrimonial Websites

Unlike dating sites, which evince India's evolving dating scene, matrimonial sites reinforce traditional values. Many parents have turned to web-based matrimonial sites in order to handpick brides or grooms for their sons and daughters. This adds ease of privacy when users can sift through the images and profiles of hundreds of prospective mates. Matrimonial sites have become the norm in the arranged-marriage market in urban society according to the *Sunday Times* of India.⁵⁶ Online marriage websites have found a massive market in India.⁵⁷ Online marriage websites in India generate an estimated \$63 million a year and have tens of millions of registered users.⁵⁸ They include, but aren't limited to, shandi.com, indiandating.com, bharamatrimonicals.com, matrimonicalsindia.com. Prajwal Hedge of the *Sunday Times* described the perpetuation of values through matrimonial sites: "We have a young market with an old attitude."⁵⁹

Protected by the ability to ask questions over the Internet instead of face-to-face, even men who have grown up in big cities reportedly ask questions that are outdated and rude, including "are you a virgin?" and "can you cook?"⁶⁰ The speed with which individuals can sort through potential mates over matrimonial sites may encourage people to cut to the

⁴² myspaces-dwindling-traffic-looks-even-worse-from-the-inside/19380431/

⁴³ Singh, *supra* note 57, 4.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Bridgette Colaco, *Internet Dating In India: What Women Want*, paper present at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, 1 (May 25, 2009).

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Hannah Seligson, *Jilted in the U.S., a Site Finds Love in India*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, Feb. 19, 2011, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/business/20ignite.html?_r=2&hp=&pagewanted=all, (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.* at 2.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 2.

⁵⁶ Prajwal Hedge, SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA April 3, 2011 at 7.

⁵⁷ Colaco, *supra* note 69, at 1.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 3.

⁵⁹ Hedge, *supra* note 79, at 7.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

chase and ask questions that would otherwise not be appropriate.

Given the difficulty of living in a city on a single salary, it is no surprise that many young eligible men want to marry working women.⁶¹ However, 20-30% of men prefer stay-at-home wives, reports Rathna Sundaram, who runs a marriage bureau.⁶² Furthermore, it is even harder to match women who work odd hours in media or call centers for example.⁶³ Kajal Desai, a 25-year-old newspaper journalist described this problem in an interview with the *Times of India*: “many guys refused to even meet or have a conversation with me because of my job. I work shifts that end past midnight, and that’s an issue with them.”⁶⁴ Whether it is pressure from parents involved in maintaining profiles or matrimonial sites attracting those interested in traditional ways of thinking, evidence from matrimonial sites suggests that they tend to reinforce existing social norms even while other forms of social media tend to erode them.

Interviews

A. Method

This study seeks to understand the relationship between Internet use and changing views of dating and divorce amongst youth in Bangalore, India. Between March 19 and April 3 2011, I interviewed 40 Bangalore residents between the ages of 17 and 26. Fifteen interviews were conducted with students at the National Law School in Bangalore. Fifteen interviews were conducted at Lifestyle Mall in Bangalore, and an additional 10 interviews were conducted with Bangalore residents at other locales. Each interview lasted approximately 20-40 minutes. All participants were given an orientation before the interview that included a description of the nature, scope, and purpose of the study and issues of confidentiality. Participants were informed that all of their answers would be reported anonymously. The questions used in each interview were prepared in advance based on the interview questionnaire (Appendix A).

The National Law School (NLS) is a prestigious legal institution, and all of the student interviewees were highly proficient in English and came from diverse communities across India. All 15 interviewees at NLS were from middle to high socioeconomic status and everyone had access to the Internet. The other 25 interviewees were Bangalore residents. The majority of these interviewees were also from middle to high socioeconomic status.

B. Findings

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

1. Participant Qualifiers:

Bangalore, and the National Law School in particular, are exceptional spaces with very liberal ideas compared to the rest of India. Many students in the law school are from mixed marriages with parents from different parts of the country. A surprising number of interviewees were extremely careful to qualify their answers:

We are a very small faction of the country. We cannot speak for the majority. You do see change coming to the rest of the county but it will take many more generations.

People come from all over the country to live in Bangalore. We represent a tiny faction. This whole crowd is contained only in metropolitan cities; you won’t find this level of change on the outskirts.

2. Social Media Use:

A. Background

The nature of social media is such that popularity drives interaction. Obtaining “likes” on a post or numerous replies are signals of one’s Facebook agility. Today almost everyone has a web presence in one form or another. When people first began interacting online, anonymity was paramount. People rarely used their real names to comment on message boards. Message boards were the original social networking tools. These attracted like-minded people who interacted online to communicate ideas, interests, and questions.⁶⁵ The social networking of today, namely Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are forums to share information with not just like-minded individuals, but also with a much broader audience. Instead of attracting a particular set of people driven to a page by a query on the same topic, the social media platforms of today connect people via social relationships that can span geographic and political lines, thereby creating exposure to an increasing range of ideas and beliefs.

Facebook emerged as a private club open only to a select group of college students at elite universities. At first, membership was limited to Harvard students, but access was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, Ivy League Universities, and Stanford.⁶⁶ After this college crowd was intimately familiar with Facebook and frequently visited the site, the operators expanded access in incremental steps until access was open across the globe. As a student at one of the first universities granted access to Facebook, I remember thinking it was an online forum for only me and my

⁶⁵ Parwatay, *supra* note 55, at 34.

⁶⁶ Facebook, WIKIPEDIA, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook->, (last visited August 19, 2012).

close friends.⁶⁷ By creating a sort of posh private club allure, Facebook made users feel that it was a safe place to communicate private information publicly. Users became accustomed to posting private information, and even though the audience slowly expanded, the intimate way Facebook was being used did not change. Today, Facebook continues to offer the illusion of a privacy-orientated space, promoting the idea that users have the power to choose what they want to reveal to or conceal from different sets of friends.⁶⁸

B. Interviews

Five themes emerged in the discussion of social media use. The findings of the interviews will be discussed in accordance with these themes, which were: general use, public/private distinction, relationship status updates, parents on Facebook, and ease of access.

i. General Use:

Three interviewees who worked in the technology industry commented on the temptation to share private information and the general allure of Facebook:

Facebook gives you a little bit of fame and everyone secretly craves that. You put up a picture and get 40 comments, you feel so nice. Youngsters put up 400 to 500 pictures of themselves. You want yourself to look like this, you want girls to know what you look like and what music you're into so you create your own world, your own identity.

The Facebook homepage is nothing about you, it's completely information about others. That's the catch, it changes all the time, that's what makes it unique. When you logged onto Orkut it was just your own profile, always the same unless you changed it. Facebook is designed so all of your friends can see as soon as a change happens. It's instant. From a tech perspective it's a very creative and innovative product.

The same interviewee also commented on the reason why people made the shift to disclose information.

On Orkut, people never used to tell anything private publicly but now people upload everything in Facebook and the whole culture has become more open because of it. People have personal pictures and the next day they are on Facebook. People write the smallest of smallest things so you get to know them. It is the main vehicle

through which people know each other. If you want to flirt with someone, you "FB" them.

Several other interviewees noted the role Facebook plays in the dating game.

People get to know each other on Facebook and start chatting. If you are brave enough to take the next step, you can spy on your date better than face-to-face. It helps people become more expressive and they can share their feelings. Also, it is easier to ask a girl out over Facebook than in person.

ii. Public/Private Distinction:

When discussing changes that have occurred as a result of social media, several interviewees referenced a changing distinction between public and private space. Many participants, particularly at the law school campus, identified a shifting sense of identity as individuals create public personas in the open space of the Internet:

Dating, casual sex, one-night stands. People have started to talk about these things with Internet forums and blogs. It's all out in the open and people aren't shy anymore.

One interviewee in the technology business considered the nature of the private space from which people interact online:

Technology is a channel to be more open to discuss and share whatever you want. From a closed door, you're more open than if you were face-to-face.

Many interviewees suggested reasons for why we interact through social media and what motivates us to share private information.

Now we all have a need to know what is happening in other people's lives. It really comes from boredom. We see a general move from things that were once completely private to now being public. Even very young people list themselves as in a relationship and people find it cool.

iii. Relationship Status Update:

Although several students noted that they would list themselves as in a relationship on Facebook, everyone, with the exception of one person, who identified him or herself as being in a relationship also stated that their parents were not aware of this relationship. One respondent had been in a relationship for five years, and her parents did not know about it. In light of this, she avoided the relationship status update entirely and rarely posted pictures. Participants took varying courses of action to alleviate this problem. Three interviewees changed the privacy settings on their Facebook

⁶⁷ I was a junior at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005, when Facebook was first opened to the university.

⁶⁸ Parwatay, *supra* note 55, at 34.

account so that they could reveal information to some and hide it from others. This was a helpful solution for those who wanted to show commitment to their significant other by listing them as a boyfriend or girlfriend without sharing the information with everyone. One student described using the privacy settings because his parents did not know about his yearlong relationship.

Only my close friends and girlfriend can see that I'm in a relationship. I changed the security settings so my parents can't read that.

Not everyone uses the privacy settings. Sometimes instead they will keep two profiles and one is just for the family.

I am hesitant to give up that information. Some people's parents are pretty free but mine don't know about my relationship. They knew I was up to something and happy for some reason. I didn't say why.

The most popular reason offered for not sharing relationship status was not wanting to share the information with parents. Some participants expressed that they also did not want to show the information to friends:

I don't want the whole world to know my personal life.

I wouldn't use it. I don't feel like announcing it to everyone.

One student, who had been in a relationship for two months, offered a unique reason for not wanting to share relationship information with friends:

It changes too often to mention it. My relationships are not that clear cut; it wouldn't make sense.

When asked about the relationship status update, two law students brought up issues of privacy:

You don't want to reveal too much. If you tell someone your sick and can't hang out, then the next minute post pictures at a party, you'll regret it!

I tell my friends don't tag me in photos with beer bottles because my mom is on Facebook. If she saw me hugging a guy or saw comments with language with the F-word, my mom wouldn't like that.

iv. Parents on Facebook:

My parents aren't on Facebook but if they were, I wouldn't add them. That is what I do when teachers try to add me; I block them. Almost all of the participants had parents who were actively on Facebook. Most interviewees felt that they had to hide information about their personal lives from their parents because their views of dating and marriage were radically different from the previous generation. One student attributed this generational gap to Internet use:

This is a very transitional generation. My grandparents were much closer to their kids than my

parents are. We are much farther removed. The Internet is the cause for it because we get ideas and values from other countries, we can see movies, hear music, hear values from other places and there is more globalization.

Although almost all of the interviewees identified problems associated with parents as friends and discussed disapproval that would result if they saw a peek into their real lives, one student saw this as a positive benefit:

There is a stigma over dating but it's going away because of Facebook. Because we have parents as friends on Facebook, they get an idea of what it's like to be me. They see our friends and it helps parents come to know me and my friends. If I say I have a boyfriend my mom will be shocked, but if she sees my friends also have boyfriends, it will be easier. Through messages and comments it makes them used to it. For example, before they had a problem with me hugging people of the opposite sex but through Facebook they see my friends doing it so they know it's fine because otherwise they would see it and think it's only me. They also understand the importance of networking more now - they get it.

This student saw shocking information as an opportunity to desensitize her parents. In this sense, parents can finally understand the classic and universal appeal to common practice, "but everyone's doing it!" In this student's view, the real thing parents fear with dating is that their child will stand out and be socially stigmatized. If parents can see the actual behaviors of their children's friends, it can alleviate these concerns.

v. Ease of Access:

Although research suggests that the digital divide is expanding,⁶⁹ anecdotal evidence from interviewees points to the increasing ease of Internet access. Interviewees in this study noted that a computer is no longer needed to connect as cell phones provide affordable plans with unlimited Internet access, and computer classes for the elderly are sprouting up in downtown Bangalore.

Two interviewees commented on the shifting relationship between the East and West with technological changes.

It's not just connections with other people but the ease of access to technology. Usually we lag behind the West but with the Internet and technology, the same phone is released in the West and then we get it the very next day. But the changes we see from social networking are not about something we picked up from the West, it's just a new opportunity and we're reacting to it

⁶⁹ See Paul DiMaggio & Eszter Hargittai, *From the 'Digital Divide' to Digital Inequality: Studying Internet Use As Penetration Increase*, Princeton Univ. at 5. (2001).

just like you reacted to it.

Now Facebook is everywhere, it's on your phone it's on 3G it's 99 rupees per month to have unlimited Internet access on your phone, so you don't even need a computer to have it.

Another interviewee commented on the rapid influx of technology in Bangalore. The shifting ease of access is increasing the number of people who can get online as well as the widening variety of ways to do it.

10 years back having a computer at home was a big thing. 5 years back Internet at home was a big deal. Now everyone has computers and Internet at home and if you don't, you have it on your phone. There are even classes near my house for elderly on how to use the Internet.

3. Dating and Entry into Marriage:

A. Background

Matrimonial sites and dating websites alter the social landscape of dating in India in two primary and opposing ways. First, matrimonial sites serve as a "cyber match-maker"⁷⁰ and allow people to explicitly state partner preferences thereby reinforcing and exacerbating traditional preferences and encouraging the tradition of arranged marriage. Second, online dating sites and social networks challenge traditional assumptions by redefining dating trends.

In her book *Intimate Discrimination: The State's role in the Accidents of Sex and Love*, Elizabeth Emens examines intimate discrimination and considers racial norms of homogeneity, pairing with one's own type in the United States. She notes that the design of dating websites helps structure the ways that individuals define themselves and the choices they make about their partners.⁷¹ This is true in the West, but in the East, when Internet dating sites meet conservative values about dating, dating sites serve to reduce discrimination rather than reinforce it. This is principally because dating sites offer an alternative to arranged marriages and allow individuals to search for dates beyond the religious and geographic constraints of arranged marriage.⁷² Additionally, Internet dating sites in India are primarily being used as group dating and casual get-togethers, which makes dating more palatable to parents and encourages participants to interact beyond their immediate social sphere.

Emens' critique, however, does fit with the function of matrimonial sites in India. These sites offer a glimpse at the private preferences of individuals and their families and the questions companies pose to organize potential matches along specific criteria. Identity categorizations in Indian

matrimonial sites include skin color, race, and desire to work. Race and religion are present on all major sites enabling users to filter results according to racial preferences.

B. Interviews

i. Matrimonial Sites

One participant offered one reason why matrimonial sites seem to reinforce traditional values, unlike other forms of social media that seem to be changing them:

Matrimonial websites focus on middle and lower-middle class families who have just learned to use the Internet and they are excited to see a site like this exists. The more exposed you are to the Internet, the less you will find that interesting.

Although most interviewees usually discussed parents putting up sites for the children, one interviewee commented on potential brides and grooms creating profiles for themselves.

You can also allow kids to arrange their own and cut out the middle man. I know a lot of people who put up their own profiles in addition to their parents' profile of them, and they manage it themselves.

Many interviewees commented on the problems associated with matrimonial sites, including issues they pose for highly educated women.

Arranged marriage is very different for the highly educated. If I say I want to continue in academics, that specific intensive career is seen as a threat. Many men don't want a wife more qualified than them.

When searching a matrimonial site, if things don't match up just right, you x them, you end it there and don't ever meet them. If, for example, you don't consider the possibility of moving, if I specify the United States as a possibility, they x me immediately.

This interviewee said that her parents received comments from a matrimonial site saying things like, "It is not necessary for her to work after marriage. My son owns a yacht."

There are many strange search terms and you can type in specifics like I want a Hindu husband in the comments. In many cases, there are religious caste and mother tongue specifications. In the drop down menu you can select whether you want or do not want a wife who works. There are a lot of biases in arranged marriages that get reinforced on these sites.

Another law student also commented on the specifications allowed on the sites:

You get better pricing if there are no caste restrictions. You can fill in age, height, color,

⁷⁰ See Interview

⁷¹ Elizabeth F. Emens, *Intimate Discrimination: The State's Role in the Accidents of Sex and Love*, 122 HARV. L. REV. 1307, 1387 (2009).

⁷² See Seligson, *supra* note 72, at 1.

complexity and pick from four colors including very fair, fair wheatish, and dark. A guy's family would not approve of me because a girl is always supposed to be less educated than the guy.

ii. Dating Trends

Most Indians believe that arranged marriage is the optimal way to marry, but for many young people in Bangalore, love marriages provide an intriguing alternative. Arranged marriages are generally established between family members of the bride and groom and, until recently, it has been difficult for young people to meet members of the opposite sex without the presence of a chaperone.⁷³ Interviewees outside of the law school were more likely to comment on these eroding taboos.

It used to be customary for boys and girls to stay away from each other, now they hold hands and date casually, we are getting used to it.

When asked about casual sex, one interviewee had strong feelings that the concern should not be that it is happening, but rather the focus should be on how to protect people when it does.

Casual sex happens. The United States has become accustomed to it because your parents dated and broke up and had sex. But we are the first ones exposed to this so we have no clue what we are doing. We are half here and half there and then we blame the United States. Rather than finding the cause of casual sex, we should promote condoms and protection.

Additionally, this interviewee discussed the need to move these practices out into the open.

We see ads that encourage this to be an open dialogue. The ads say "don't run away from the TV if an ad talks about protection, let us talk... you should also talk to your son" It is becoming more open because it has to be. But you still have to get a prescription for birth control for example and it's very rare for gynecologists to give one out.

On the topic of love marriage versus arranged marriage, there was a wide range of opinions. Those who preferred love marriage emphasized personal choice:

I prefer love marriage so I can get to know the person. I don't want supposed to love; I want love.

This is my life, when a girl is earning and working she has some say in her life; she can stand up to her parents.

One 18-year-old participant commented on the prevalence of dating and said that she knows people as young as 13 who

are in a relationship and if you have not had a boyfriend by the time you are 16 or 17 it is considered strange. In this newly emerging dating scene, social media is playing a critical role in the meeting and initial interaction phase:

I know lots of people who met and married after they read each other's blogs.

People go on group dates [that] they set up online and parents think it's safer so even if they know they might be something more than friends, they still let them go.

People try to make friends and exchange numbers and fix up a date, and then they use Facebook to set up the dates.

4. Divorce

A. Background

One corollary to relaxed views on dating is relaxed views on marriage leading to increased divorce. For thousands of years in Hindu society, weddings were contracts of servitude cemented by dowries from the bride's parents.⁷⁴ In Bangalore today, long-held taboos surrounding divorce have begun to disintegrate. As evidence, more than half of the court cases in urban Bangalore courts are matrimonial disputes.⁷⁵ *The Bangalore Daily News* identified reasons for the increasing rate of divorce: couples are less tolerant of imperfections, more aware of women's rights, pro-women laws, and experience a more stressful lifestyle.⁷⁶ According to Mahur-dra Singh, a divorcee who was quoted in *Daily News and Analysis Sunday*, "Society...is more permissive. Whether it is the 'Western influence' or a need to assert one's freedom of choice, this is a natural corollary of progress and economic well-being."⁷⁷

In 2010, it was estimated that 55,000 Indian couples were involved in divorce, 3,000 of which were in Bangalore alone.⁷⁸ Some successful recent grounds for divorce have included spending too much time at the office, refusing to sit for a ceremony and causing a "drama," and failure to wear modern clothes.⁷⁹ Until 2010, most divorce cases were granted by courts only when there was mutual consent.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *India: Divorces Become More Common As Romance Gains Importance*, HUFFPOST WORLD, April 23, 2009, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/23/india-divorces-become-mor_n_190607.html (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁷⁵ Vaneeta Pandev & Kanu Sarda, *The Road to Divorce is Clear*, DAILY NEWS AND ANALYSIS SUNDAY, 3, April 3, 2011.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ The United States has one of the world's highest divorce rates with more than 1 million divorces annually. DAILY NEWS AND ANALYSIS SUNDAY, Bangalore, April 3, 2011.

⁷⁸ Pandev, *supra* note 99, at 3.

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *India: Divorces Become More Common As Romance Gains Importance*, HUFFPOST WORLD, April 23, 2009, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/23/india-divorces-become-mor_n_190607.html (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁷³ Colaco, *supra* note 69, at 1.

Legal grounds for divorce include cruelty, adultery, desertion, conversion, mental disorder, leprosy, or any serious communicable disease, and failure to resume cohabitation after a decree of separation.⁸¹ Women can also obtain a divorce based on rape, bestiality or sodomy, second marriage by a husband or if a husband's whereabouts are unknown or he is convicted of a crime.⁸² Recent additions include abusive partners, incompatibility, different aspirations and irretrievable breakdown of marriage.⁸³ Bolstered by new domestic violence laws and an expanding list of legal grounds for divorce, women are seizing the opportunity to fight violence in the home by exercising their option to leave the marriage. According to Kirti Singh of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), while men used to file for divorce more frequently than their non-earning wives, now "financially independent urban women do not hesitate in severing ties with their husbands."⁸⁴

Secondshaandi.com is an online matchmaking service for divorced Indians with 50,000 customers. The company's chief executive commented on the trend: "In a few years, we may not even be talking about divorce and remarriage as a stigma anymore."⁸⁵ Contrary to the executive's expectations, 60% of customers come from outside of large cities demonstrating the widespread nature of divorce. Websites like secondshaandi are taking divorce out in the open. For those trapped in marriages, the increase in divorce offers a new way out. However, a legal divorce process can take up to 20 years.⁸⁶

B. Interviews

Infuriating defenders of traditional values, not only has divorce in Bangalore reached unprecedented levels, but the majority of Bangalore youth I interviewed also describe this trend as a positive change. However, this was the area that attracted the widest diversity of opinion. Some students thought divorce was appropriate whenever people are not happy while others suggested divorce is never appropriate because it undermines the sanctity of marriage. Almost all interviewees said there would still be a social stigma attached to getting a divorce. For those who thought the increasing divorce rate was negative, they also felt that holding a marriage together was primarily the burden of the wife.

Trust in the institution of marriage is going down. 20 or 30 years ago, divorce was non-existent. It's

really increased, and I think it's a bad thing. Earlier life was simpler; it's a generational leap. Now it is difficult to sustain a marriage because men and women both work. It used to be easier for men to assert their rights over women but now women are gaining their independence so you see more divorce.

Divorce is still looked down upon; it's common but not good. She is not regarded as equal after a divorce. It's more than just her virginity, she cannot make a family or marriage work, clearly she can't. She's no longer at her peak.

For those who recognized increasing divorce as a positive change, divorce meant an assertion of individual rights and freedom from societal constraints. Additionally, these interviewees commented that increased divorce has palatable benefits for women.

To a large extent divorce is changing. People seek divorce because the girl's nails aren't trim, the man is obese and does not smell good. But overall, this is a good change. Previously girls suffered in silence, now we have a life ahead and it doesn't end with marriage.

I've seen divorces in my family. In India right now, it is an assertion of identity, which was lacking before. It is not that these problems did not exist before, it is just that it was in the private domain. Now it is in the public, it is out in the open, it is talked about, and people are asserting their rights.

If individual choice governs the decision to enter a marriage whether through arranged or love marriage, it also rules the decision to leave it. One respondent confirmed this by saying,

Many people in my generation are okay with divorce and marriage not lasting forever. It has a lot to do with the way marriages are arranged from the start.

Every single interviewee commented on the fact that this generation has seen more change than any prior generation. Many discussed the role of independence in this transitional generation.

Women can make choices; they have professional mobility, financial independence, and their own social groups. Now it is finally based on you as an individual and your own desires and preferences.

⁸¹ Pandev, *supra* note 99, at 3.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *India: Divorces Become More Common As Romance Gains Importance*, HUFFPOST WORLD, April 23, 2009, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/23/india-divorces-become-mor_n_190607.html (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁸⁶ *Id.*

In our society it is please be a doctor, please be an engineer, do not be a writer or you will not get a job. Our whole country was do this or do that for what society will think of you. But now our generation is different, I do not want to live for society. I live for myself.

A common theme that reemerged amongst participants in many different contexts was the growing sense of autonomy and ability to make personal choices.

All of these rules and restrictions were created to keep people united under one religion. If you're educated, literate, and have a good head on your shoulders, you do not have to follow these traditions blindly.

Implications: Can Social Media Inspire Social Change?

Access to the Internet can play a significant role in advancing women's rights. A more specific question is whether or not social media can contribute to social change. This was the question posed by Malcolm Gladwell in a *New Yorker* article entitled, "Small Change: why the revolution will not be tweeted."⁸⁷ Unlike the civil rights movement, which created enormous social change due to ties among people in different hierarchies, social media, he argues, only provides weak ties amongst acquaintances.⁸⁸ Gladwell contends that hierarchical relationships are necessary to make tangible social change, and social media falls short in this area.⁸⁹ I disagree.

In a country like India with progressive laws on the books yet still stunted by inefficient and ineffectual enforcement,⁹⁰ I believe that for the individuals I interviewed, social media is the single most effective tool to create social change. By itself, the Internet has its limitations. For example, access is concentrated in the urban middle class, thereby denying a significant segment of the population opportunities for self-expression.⁹¹ Additionally, the influence of social media can cut both ways. Increasing divorce rates point to a positive shift in that women may be leaving violent relationships, but as many interviewees noted, "no one can call increased

divorce a good thing." However, with an issue like advancing women's rights, social media does have an unprecedented ability to change perceptions and behaviors. When used in conjunction with legal reform and other offline activism tools, the Internet is an indispensable tool to reach out to the influential middle class and beyond. Gladwell accurately notes that acquaintances that comprise the majority of Facebook friends are powerful because they are the greatest source of new ideas and information.⁹² Social media is grounded on the voluntary sharing of information and helps participants connect and expand their understanding of an issue. To challenge gender roles, it is not hierarchy that is needed, just a microphone.⁹³

A principal tool for male domination and tyrannical regimes across many cultures is isolation. An effective way to oppress the oppressed is to isolate and limit exposure to new ideas.⁹⁴ Social media undermines this power and offers avenues for an unprecedented influx of ideas, perspectives, and information. Social media shines a light on society's dirty little secrets. It broadcasts issues that we have collectively chosen to ignore, and it offers a voice to the voiceless, so long as connections are maintained. By bringing private and taboo issues to our homepages, social media erodes the heavily policed boundaries of identity. Creating information sources across geographic boundaries, friends across cultural boundaries, and dates across regional boundaries, social media is breaking down information blocks and changing the way we learn about the world.

Hegemonic dominance silences the voices of women, restricts them to the home, and offers no way out. Through sites like Facebook and Twitter, a public space has emerged for people to share discontentment and realize they are not alone. Social media undermines systems of oppression because it creates a public platform for discourse. This is a discourse on dating, divorce, flirting, bars; all things that were once kept private are now brought into the open where women are no longer bound by societal constraints. With a transformative climate ripe for change, women in Bangalore are effectively texting, tweeting, and status updating their way toward social equality. Real economic and political changes may not be far behind.

⁸⁷ Malcolm Gladwell, *Small Change: Why the Revolutions Will Not be Tweeted*, *The New Yorker*, Oct. 4, 2010, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell, (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ See e.g. The Dowry Prohibition Act.

⁹¹ See Rito Paul, *Can the Mouse be a Tool of Revolution in India?*, *Daily News and Analysis*, Feb. 12, 2011, available at: http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_can-the-mouse-be-a-tool-of-revolution-in-india_1507015 (last visited August 19, 2012).

⁹² See Gladwell, *supra* note 111.

⁹³ I agree with Gladwell that social media has limited import in regime change revolutions because social media is only a tool and it is critical for individuals to take an active role and step into danger. However, in social change movements, shifting values and beliefs does not have to occur on the front lines. It does not require the same level of active participation and instead can result from a more shift in public discourse and behavior.

⁹⁴ See David Nibert, *Humans and other Animals: Sociology's Moral and Intellectual Challenge*, *INT'L JOURNAL OF SOC. AND SOCIAL POLICY*, 2003, Vol. 23 Iss: 3, 4-25.

Survey for college student dating relationship
Background Information:

How old are you?

What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

What is your year at university?

- a. First year
- b. Second year
- c. Third year

What is your religious background?

- a. Christian
- b. Muslim
- c. Sikh
- d. Hindu
- e. Other

What is your family's annual income?

- a. Under Rs. 10,000
- b. Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 19,000
- c. Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 29,000
- d. Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 39,000
- e. Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 49,000
- f. Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 59,000
- g. Rs. 60,000 to Rs. 69,000
- h. Rs. 70,000 to Rs. 79,000
- i. Rs. 80,000 to Rs. 89,000
- j. Rs. 90,000 or more

Do you live with your partner?

- a. Yes
- b. No

What is your relationship with your partner?

- a. Dating
- b. Engaged
- c. Married

How long have you been in this relationship?

- a. Less than one month
- b. About 1 month
- c. About 2 months
- d. 3-5 months
- e. 6-11 months
- f. About one year
- g. Between 1 and 2 years
- h. Between 2 and 3 years
- i. More than 4 years

What age do you think would be appropriate for marriage?

Is sexual intercourse a part of your relationship?

- a. Yes
- b. No

What kind of social media do you engage with?

How frequently do you check these sites?

When did you begin looking at these sites?

What is your motivation for using social media?

How many of your friends use social media?

Do you look to social media more or less often than your friends?

Are there times that social media answers your questions more effectively than your immediate family or friends, please describe.

Have you ever used an online dating site?

Do you know anyone who has used an online dating site?

How has this changed dating in Bangalore?

What are the benefits of online dating?

Do your parents approve?

How has divorce changed in India?

When did you see people start using online dating sites?

What is group dating?

Marriage and Divorce Perception Questions

1. In a marriage, how do you feel domestic work should be divided?
2. Do you think it is appropriate for a woman to work while she has young children?
3. What age do you think is the ideal age to marry?
4. What in your mind makes a successful marriage?
5. If a marriage falls apart, what are the main causes in general?
6. If people are unhappy in a marriage, is a divorce a good idea?
7. Under what circumstances would you consider getting a divorce?
8. How does a marriage change over time?

1. Who is the most interesting person or organization you have connected to using social media?
2. Do you find you interact online with people who have your similar background?
3. Do you interact with people online who have similar or different views about the world?
4. In what ways has social media reinforced your current beliefs about the world?
5. In what ways has social media changed your views about the world?
6. In what ways has social media reinforced your current beliefs about marriage?
7. In what ways has social media changed your beliefs about marriage?
8. Where do you see the future of social media?