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Schemas of Marital Change: From Arranged Marriages to Eloping for Love

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Abstract

In recent decades, arranged marriages have become less common in many parts of Asia. This paper explores people's schemas surrounding just such a marital change in one Indian village using semi-structured interviews ($N=30$) and ethnographic fieldwork. Respondents categorize marriages into two main types: arranged marriages and elopements, also called love marriages. Arranged marriages were common in the past, while elopements are now dominant. Both types of marriages have characteristics that are perceived positively and the ideal marriage is a hybrid of the two. Respondents ascribe the rise of love marriages to educational expansion, technological change, and foreign influence. Many also see it as an inevitable part of a larger process of socio-economic change. These schemas are strongly shaped by global influences, but also reflect multiple layers of local beliefs and cultures.

Keywords

Family change; India; marriage; schemas

In recent decades, family behaviors have undergone many changes. One such change is a decline of arranged marriages and complementary rise in “love marriages” or, more accurately, self-choice marriages in Asia. Arranged marriages, in which parents chose their children's spouses, were widespread in many Asian countries in the past. In recent decades, however, young people have increasingly taken a larger role in choosing their own spouses in Nepal (Fricke et al. 1998, Ghimire et al. 2006, Niraula 1994), Indonesia (Malhotra 1991), China (Pimentel 2000), Taiwan (Thornton and Lin 1994), Japan (Applbaum 1995), Korea, and Malaysia (Rindfuss and Morgan 1983).

Understanding how and why such changes take place, as well as their consequences, is an important area of sociological research. Recent research on family change points to the role of ideational elements in family change (Johnson-Hanks 2011, Thornton 2005). Ideational elements – also known as schemas (Johnson-Hanks 2011) or models of and for reality (Fricke 1997a, Thornton et al. 2001) – shape behavior and its meaning. Johnson-Hanks and colleagues (2011:2) define schemas as “the largely underdetermined, and often taken-for-granted, ways of perceiving and acting through which we make sense of the world and motivate our actions.” Schemas include categorizations, subjective evaluations, social

scripts, and mental representations that are both cultural and cognitive in nature. Thus, understanding family change requires understanding the schemas that people hold and the ways in which schemas shape behavior.

Village studies are well suited to exploring such schemas (Fricke 1997b). While they are limited to a small geographic area, village studies provide “highly textured accounts of how things hang together” (Fricke 1997b: 830). Such accounts are important in and of themselves because they allow us to explore schemas within a meaningful context. They also provide a foundation for better understanding the determinants and consequences of family behaviors by inductively identifying schemas and other factors that are relevant to a particular context.

This paper draws on a village study to explore schemas surrounding marital change held by ordinary people living in one Indian context, namely the Darjeeling Hills. Like many places in Asia, the Darjeeling Hills are experiencing a decline of arranged marriages. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, this paper addresses three main research questions about the schemas surrounding marital change: How do people categorize and subjectively evaluate different types of marriage? Why do they think marriage behaviors are changing? And, how do these schemas fit with sociological theories of family change?

This paper contributes to research on family change by providing a textured account of how ordinary people’s schemas about marriage are simultaneously shaped in powerful ways by global and local influences. The schemas held in the Darjeeling Hills reflect widespread, global beliefs, but they also reflect multiple layers of local beliefs and cultures. Some of the layers of the Indian cultural context reinforce global beliefs, while others run counter to it. Thus, the marital schemas people hold are a hybrid of multiple, sometimes contradictory, influences.

MARITAL CHOICE IN INDIA

In India, marriage practices vary by region, religion, ethnicity, and over time. However, for much of the country, arranged marriages in which parents and other family members choose their children’s spouses are customary. Couples are not expected, nor encouraged, to form relationships before they are married, although such attachments are expected to develop afterwards. Arranged marriages support the caste system by ensuring that spouses are of the same caste and the kinship system by prioritizing the older generation and broader kinship ties over that of the marital couple (Gore 1965, Mody 2008).

Arranged marriages are still widely practiced in India. Of the ever married women aged 25–49 that were interviewed in the Indian Human Development Survey in 2005, less than 5% had the primary role in choosing their husband and only 22% knew their husband for more than one month before they married (Desai and Andrist 2010). Nearly two-thirds of the women were consulted in the decision to marry however. It should be noted, however, that only women were asked about marital choice and, thus, the survey underestimates the total amount of self-choice since men exercise more choice (Caldwell et al. 1983).

While arranged marriages remain common, young people increasingly participate in spouse selection. Nationally, younger cohorts of women are more likely than older cohorts to have

been consulted by their parents in the decision to marry (Banerji et al. 2008). Ethnographic work also describes the rising trend of parents consulting their children more and giving sons veto power (Caldwell et al. 1983, Caldwell et al. 1988, Corwin 1977, Meinzen 1980). Further, elopements do take place (Chowdhry 2007, Grover 2009, Mody 2008, Rocca et al. 2009). Most research emphasizes the disapproval and sometimes violent reactions of families and communities towards elopements (ibid), but not all studies find this pattern (Corwin 1977, Donner 2002).

THEORIES OF MARITAL CHANGE

Early theories of family change were part of the tradition of modernization theory (Adams 2010, Inglehart and Baker 2000, Thornton 2005). Industrialization, urbanization, and educational expansion were believed to create pressures for self-choice marriages based on affection, which were seen as well-suited for urban living and industrial occupations (Burgess and Locke 1960, Goode 1963, Nimkoff 1965). Early Indian studies followed this tradition (Corwin 1977, Ross 1961). For example, Corwin's (1977) explanation of an increasing acceptance of inter-caste love marriages in a small town in West Bengal focused on urbanization and industrialization. She suggested that young people who lived in urban areas and took up occupations outside of agriculture were increasingly economically independent of their parents and, thus, better able to choose their own spouses or "sway parental consent." Interestingly, Goode (1963) believed that India was moving toward self-choice marriage, but that the amount of industrialization was insufficient to account for the change. Thus, he suggested that ideological factors were of greater importance in India.

In a departure from the modernization tradition, Thornton (2001, 2005) points to the key contribution of ideational factors in creating family change. He suggests that developmental idealism, which can be described as the belief in modernization theory itself, creates family change. The belief that a shift from the "traditional" family to the "modern" family accompanies development was well established among scholars in Northwest Europe by the 1700s. The "modern" family was defined according to family behaviors practiced in Northwest Europe from the 1700s to early 1900s, which early scholars believed to represent the pinnacle of the developmental scale. Conversely, family behaviors practiced outside Northwest Europe, in places believed to be further down the development scale, were defined as "traditional." Today, under the package of ideas that comprise developmental idealism, both modern and traditional continue to be defined in this way. Developmental idealism further includes the core beliefs that both modern society and modern families are good and attainable, the modern family is a cause and effect of modern society, individuals are free and equal, and relationships should be based on consent. Thus, developmental idealism can be viewed as one of the many cultural models that form a broader world culture and are manifest in educational curricula, human rights treaties, and other global phenomena (Krucken and Drori 2009, Meyer 2009).

Under developmental idealism, self-choice marriages are classified as part of the modern family, while arranged marriages are traditional. In Northwest Europe, young people chose their own spouses, often on the basis of affection, thus, such marriages were classified as modern (Thornton 2005, 2009). Conversely, arranged marriages were practiced outside of

Northwest Europe so they were categorized as traditional. Arranged marriages are further incompatible with developmental idealism because they can violate the value of consent. In India, the custom of caste endogamy also violates the core belief of all individuals being equal.

Thornton (2005) suggests that developmental idealism spread through schools, colonialism, travel, mass media, missionaries, international development aid, and other mechanisms. People were motivated to adopt developmental idealism because it demonstrated that they too were “modern” and, in their eyes, hastened the process of development. Thus, as they adopted developmental idealism, people changed their family behaviors to match those of the modern family. Consistent with this proposition, Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) draw on several ethnographies to conclude that the idea of love as a legitimate basis for marriage, as well as a way to assert a modern identity, seems to be “globally shared.” Other ethnographies also document a growing belief in self-choice and love as the basis of marriage, as well as the place of this belief in conceptions of modernity (Ahearn 2001, Cole and Thomas 2009, Hirsch 2003, Rebhun 1999). Thus, ironically, while scholars have largely abandoned modernization theory, its acceptance outside the scholarly world may be driving the very changes early scholars predicted. Thornton (2005) cautions, however, that the adoption of developmental idealism varies. Depending on the local context, some aspects may be quickly adopted, while others may be rejected, resisted, or modified to incorporate indigenous beliefs.

Srinivas (1952, 1967, 2002 [1962], 1956) provides a theory of how such a process of modified adoption occurred in India. He suggests that what he terms Westernization was shaped by the history of British colonialism, ethnic diversity, and Sanskritization – the process through which lower castes move up the social hierarchy by emulating the practices of higher castes. Srinivas simplifies India’s diversity into two categories of high and low castes. While he does not explicitly define them, high castes include Brahmins, the highest caste, and, possibly Kshatriyas, the second highest caste (*varna*). The low caste category is a broad categorization of all other groups. At the beginning of the colonial period, the culture of high castes, including family behaviors, was markedly different from that of the British (Srinivas 1956). High caste family practices included arranged marriages, marrying girls before puberty, widows burning on their husbands’ funeral pyres, and the low valuation of daughters. By contrast, the culture of lower castes was more consistent with British family life and culture, including more self-choice and flexibility in marriage and divorce, as well as greater gender equality. On a more mundane level, many lower castes customarily ate meat and drank alcohol like the British, while high castes did not.

During the colonial period, British culture was increasingly adopted by high castes, yet, at the same time, colonialism spread high caste culture among lower castes (Srinivas 1956, 1967, 2002 [1962]). The British promoted literacy by founding schools, introduced technology, such as railroads and radios, and applied British scholarship and governance to Indian history and government (Allen 2002, Dirks 2001, Srinivas 1956). These technologies and social changes spread not only British culture, but also high caste culture. For example, cheap editions of classic Hindu texts became widespread and ever larger segments of the population could read them. India’s classical Hindu history was uncovered by British

scholarship and Hindu epics, like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, were televised and watched across India. As high caste culture spread throughout India, lower castes became more aware of and able to emulate it. More recently, Hindi cinema has become another powerful mechanism spreading high caste, and often North Indian, practices (Caldwell et al. 1983). For example, the portrayal of abandoned North Indian rituals in films, not only revived the rituals in North India, but spread them to other parts of India where they had not previously been practiced (Dwyer 2004).

Thus, Srinivas (1956) suggests that colonialism led to a new hierarchy within India in which Sanskritization was still practiced, but modified. The British sat at the top of the hierarchy and were increasingly emulated by high castes. The high castes, on the other hand, were demoted from the top of the hierarchy, but their Brahmanical practices were still emulated by lower castes placed further down the hierarchy. This can be described as upper castes' increasingly adopting developmental idealism and "modern" family behaviors. By contrast, lower castes increasingly abandoned their indigenous practices that were, ironically, relatively consistent with "modern" British practices in exchange for high caste practices that were not. Thus, Srinivas concludes that Sanskritization – the adoption of high caste culture – is a precursor to Westernization. Like Thornton (2005), however, Srinivas (1956) cautions that the process may vary according to context. He speculated that in areas where the dominant castes were not Brahmanical, the process of Sanskritization would be slower or inculcate non-Brahmanical practices.

Overall, Srinivas' theory suggests that developmental idealism was indeed spread in India through many of the mechanisms that Thornton (2005) identifies. However, at the same time, "traditional" family practices found among high castes that run counter to developmental idealism, were spreading simultaneously through the same mechanisms. Thus, Srinivas' theory suggests that in India the adoption of developmental idealism is paradoxically intertwined with the adoption of high caste culture that runs counter to it.

THE DARJEELING HILLS CONTEXT

Srinivas' (1956) speculation that the local context within India is influential is particularly relevant to the Darjeeling Hills. The Darjeeling Hills have an unusual history and ethnic profile in India, although the country's great diversity makes any Indian locality unique. The Darjeeling Hills are located in the Eastern Himalayan foothills, bordered by Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the rest of West Bengal. Prior to the 1800s, the population was comprised of three Tibeto-Burman groups, Lepchas, Limbus, and Bhutias. In the 1800s, however, the British gained control of the area by claiming land from Sikkim and Bhutan. The British demand for labor pulled in migrants from neighboring Nepal. The migrants were largely members of other Tibeto-Burman groups, including Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Magar, and Sherpa. They also included Dalit castes, such as Kami, Sarki, and Damai, as well as Brahmins and Kshatriyas, called Chhetri-Bahun in the hills. These many individual castes (*jatis*) which reside in the Darjeeling Hills can be grouped into three broad categories. The Chhetri-Bahun comprise high castes, Tibeto-Burman groups occupy a middle position in the caste hierarchy, and Dalits occupy the lowest position (Subba 1989).

While caste (*jati*) identity remains important in the Darjeeling Hills, there has been a homogenization of culture across castes (Shneiderman and Turin 2006, Subba 1989). Over the years, these groups have increasingly taken on a collective ethnic identity of Nepali, or Gorkha, and speak the Nepali language. This ethnic identity has supported a long standing movement for the separate state of Gorkhaland. This process of homogenization has not been dominated by Chhetri-Bahunns however. While they occupy the highest position in the caste hierarchy, Chhetri-Bahunns are not economically, nor politically, dominant in the Darjeeling Hills (Shneiderman and Turin 2006, Subba 1989). Tibeto-Burman groups comprise the largest population, lead local political parties, and are often the biggest landowners.

In keeping with Srinivas' theory, the cultures of Tibeto-Burman groups bear similarities to Western culture. Most importantly for this study, Tibeto-Burman groups customarily practiced types of marriage in which young people were primarily responsible for choosing their own spouses (Majupuria and Majupuria 1978). However, ethnographies based on fieldwork from the 1960s in Nepal find that most marriages were arranged among Tibeto-Burman groups at that time (Jones and Jones 1976, Macfarlane 1976, McDougal 1979). For example, Macfarlane concluded that while the Gurung "maintained an ethic of romance and love among boys and girls" it was done "alongside a fairly formal arranging of marriages by parents" (Macfarlane 1976: 224). Similarly, an ethnography from the 1920s found that most marriages were arranged among Lepchas living in Sikkim (Gorer 1967 [1938]). These ethnographies further highlight the importance of Sanskritization, through which Tibeto-Burman groups were adopting the culture and religion of high caste Hindus, including their marriage practices. In fact, Ahearn (2001) speculates that the entire practice of arranged marriage among one Tibeto-Burman group, the Magars, may be due entirely to Sanskritization.

It is difficult to determine if these ethnographies from Nepal and Sikkim are good estimates of the historical practices of Tibeto-Burman groups in the Darjeeling Hills. On one hand, the Darjeeling Hills may have had more arranged marriages than these ethnographies suggest. Given anthropologists' interest in unique cultures, ethnographers often selected remote fieldsites in which the ethnic group of interest was isolated. By contrast, the Darjeeling Hills are not remote and Tibeto-Burman groups living there were not isolated from other groups. On the other hand, the Darjeeling Hills may have had fewer arranged marriages than these ethnographies suggest. As noted above, high castes were not dominant in the Darjeeling Hills as they were in many places in Nepal (Subba 1989). Further, while Nepal was never directly colonized, there was a strong colonial presence in the Darjeeling hills, including British missionaries who built churches and schools. Thus, as Srinivas suggests, the adoption of high caste family behaviors may have been comparatively slow or weak in the Darjeeling Hills.

The limited evidence that is available suggests that arranged marriages were dominant in the Darjeeling Hills in the middle of the 1900s as they were in Nepal and Sikkim. The only relevant survey data from the Darjeeling Hills was collected in five villages in 1980–81 (Subba 1989). Subba found that the percent of married people with inter-caste marriages ranged from 32% in the village closest to the city of Darjeeling to just under 10% in the

most remote village. Inter-caste marriages violate the custom of endogamy and, thus, should all be self-choice marriages. However, not all self-choice marriages are also inter-caste. Thus, this roughly suggests that as many as 70–90% of marriages contracted from around 1950–1980 were arranged. The results of this study and my previous fieldwork (Author) also suggest that arranged marriages were dominant in past decades.

METHOD

The empirical analysis draws on 30 semi-structured interviews on people's views of marriage and other family behaviors. These interviews were collected in May 2010 in one village, referred to as Pariwarbasti. The results are also informed by ethnographic fieldwork carried out by the author in Pariwarbasti from September 2007 through May 2008 (Author).

Site

Pariwarbasti is located in the Darjeeling Hills a few miles from the town of Kalimpong. The primary economic activity is agriculture, with rice, corn, and gladiolas comprising the main crops. Many residents work as daily laborers in agriculture, construction, and other activities. Many men also work in other parts of India, either migrating to cities in search of jobs or working as soldiers in the Indian army. The village has government schools that go through class ten. Some children also attend schools in Kalimpong, where there is one college and several private, English-medium schools, including elite Anglo-Indian schools founded by the British. The majority of residents are Hindu and Buddhist, but there are also many Christians. Christian missionaries have been active in the district since the late 1800s.

The village is well connected to the rest of India. In 2010, almost all households had electricity and most had televisions. Families that didn't have their own television often watched television at neighbors' homes. They watched Hindi serials, Bollywood movies, and song and dance competitions, such as Indian Idol. Nearly every household had at least one mobile phone and many had more than one. There were no computers in the village, but some people occasionally used computers at internet cafes in Kalimpong.

Data Collection

In order to capture the range of schemas in the village, a sample of 30 respondents was stratified by gender and life course position (2X3). Life course positions included older married people with a married child, married people with a child under age ten, and unmarried people. Given the changes in family behaviors over time, stratifying the sample by life course also ensured representation of the potentially divergent views of younger and older villagers. Within each of the stratified groups, I also included a mix of castes and education levels to further ensure that the full range of schemas was captured. I interviewed at least one Chhetri-Bahun, one Tibeto-Burman, and one Dalit in each of the six stratified groups. Similarly, for education, I attempted to include at least one person with zero to four years of schooling, one with five to nine years, and one with ten or more years in each group. However, due to the high levels of education among youth and the association between marital status and education, I was unable to interview an unmarried person with less than nine years of education. Further, since the village has relatively few Chhetri-

Bahun and even fewer Dalits, most of the respondents are members of Tibeto-Burman groups. The basic characteristics of the respondents appear in Table 1.

Selecting respondents comprised a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. First, I interviewed respondents who I previously interviewed in 2007–08 who fit the criteria ($n=12$). I re-interviewed them because I already had a good rapport and detailed information on their family histories and backgrounds. Second, for the remaining respondents ($n=18$), I interviewed people that I knew from previously living there who fit the criteria and also asked people if they knew someone that fit the criteria.

All interviews were collected by the author alone in Nepali with no one else present. The interviews began by going through a list of family behaviors, including marriage, childbearing, and household structure, and asking what each behavior is like in the village today and then what it was like in the past, 20–25 years ago. If they said the behavior was different between the two periods, I then asked why it changed and how the change is affecting village life. I also asked them what they think marriage will be like in the future and how they personally and other people in the village feel about different marriage behaviors they described.

Respondents' responses about what it was like in the village 20–25 years ago are best interpreted as their view of what it was like at an imprecise time in the recent past. In the first few interviews, I attempted a third question anchored on the time around India's independence, roughly 50–60 years ago. However, with a couple of exceptions, respondents were not able to distinguish between the two time anchors in the past. It is also possible that the tedium of discussing three time periods led to poor responses. Further, respondents occasionally used their own time anchors by contrasting practices in the village today with their own experiences when they were young or with their parents' and grandparents' experiences.

Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed into Nepali and translated into English by native Nepali speakers, I coded the transcripts along four main domains. First, I coded the interviews descriptively according to type of family behavior. Codes included, for example, arranged marriage, inter-caste marriage, and pre-marital relationship. Second, the interviews were coded according to subjective evaluations, including good, bad, and neutral. These included the respondents' own evaluations, as well as the respondents' views of what other villagers thought. Third, causes of changes in family behaviors were descriptively coded as they emerged, including technology, foreign influence, and Bollywood films. Fourth, the consequences of changes in marriage and other family behaviors were descriptively coded as they emerged, including morality, social cohesion, and health. Throughout the coding process I also inductively coded other themes that emerged in the interviews and were outside the four pre-determined domains. For example, these codes included family harmony, education, and alcohol use. Once the interviews were coded, I ran queries that examined how these codes overlapped with each other. For example, to understand views of the causes of marital change, I looked at text where codes for elopement and causes of

change overlapped. I also examined how codes were distributed by life course, gender, education, and caste of the respondents.

RESULTS

Categorical Schemas: Models of Marriage

Marriage Today: Elopement and Love Marriage—All thirty respondents said that the common way to marry these days is by eloping. As one 32 year old woman put it plainly, “these days mostly they run away and get married themselves.” As this quote suggests, these marriages are often referred to in Nepali as “*keti bagyo*,” which literally means the girl ran away. More generally, different conjugations of the verbs *bagnu* or *bagaunu* (to run away or cause to run away) are used to refer to eloping – literally running away to get married.

In an elopement, a girl leaves her home without informing her parents. Sometimes, she goes directly to the boy’s home where she stays with him and his family. After a few days, a member of the boy’s family will go to the girl’s family, inform them of her whereabouts, and gain consent for the marriage. It is also common for both the girl and boy to run away without the knowledge of either set of parents. These couples go to a home of the boy’s relatives or friends who live outside the village. Usually, the couple leaves the village if the boy is afraid his parents may not accept the girl or if the girls’ family lives nearby and could easily interfere if she went to his home. After living together for a few days the couple will return to the boy’s home. Parents usually approve of the marriage since the couple has stayed together overnight. Although, in some cases, parents refuse to approve and cut off contact with their child or encourage their child to abandon their spouse. After the elopement, couples continue to reside in the husband’s family home, and are viewed as a married couple. Formal wedding ceremonies take place later, usually within a few weeks or months of the elopement.

The basis of these elopements is viewed as love, affection, or attraction between the couple. Villagers also use the English phrase “love marriage” to describe them. For example, one 22 year old man said, “Boys and girls are following love marriages. They find their partners and fall in love for some time and get married later.” People also use English words to refer to these relationships, including “girlfriend,” “boyfriend,” and “lover.” Couples meet each other in person, usually in secret from family members, and speak to each other on mobile phones. Mobile phones are also a means of meeting in the first place. Young men will dial numbers at random until they reach a young woman that will talk to them and, if all goes well, they may later meet in person.

Many marriages are between people of different castes and religions. As one 32 year old woman stated, “These days castes do not match at all. Marriages take place between upper and lower castes or different castes of the same status.” While inter-caste and inter-religion marriages are common, this status is also discarded to some extent. Women usually take on the caste and religion of their husband and his family. For example, some women’s first names were changed to match the religion or caste of their marital homes.

Marriage in the Past: Arranged Marriages—All thirty respondents also said that elopements have increased over time. They said that in the past elopements were less common, rare, or nonexistent. Instead, people had arranged marriages in the past. To refer to this type of marriage people used the English term “arranged marriage” or the word *mangni*, which literally refers to an engagement. The statement of a 48 year old woman is typical: “There used to be arranged marriages, but now we don’t have that custom. Arranged marriages have declined.” However, some respondents also noted that some love marriages and elopements did take place in the past. For example, a 70 year old man who said “they didn’t elope” in the past, also said that he “eloped with the girl [he] liked” when he was 25 years old.

Respondents view arranged marriages as differing from love marriages or elopements in three key ways. First, in an arranged marriage it is the parents, not the child, who chooses the spouse, although the child must consent to the parent’s choice. There were some differences on this point by gender however. Some suggested that a son would work with his parents to choose a spouse in an arranged marriage, while a daughter would not. Second, an arranged marriage takes place in a culturally appropriate way. The boy’s family approaches the girl’s family, the couple must be of the same caste and religion (or among Christians just the same religion), an engagement ceremony (*mangni*) precedes the wedding, and caste-specific gifts are exchanged between the families. Third, in an arranged marriage the couple is not expected, nor encouraged to love each other before marriage. The couple usually meets only briefly before the wedding and are expected to develop affection after marriage. These defining characteristics are summarized in Table 2.

Evaluative Schemas: Models for Marriage

Below, I describe how respondent’s felt about arranged marriages and elopements or love marriages and how they thought others in Pariwarbasti felt about them. I also describe the reasons they gave for their evaluations. These evaluative schemas are summarized in Table 3. In keeping with their views of the two types of marriage being in opposition, what they thought was good about one type of marriage was usually a reflection of what they thought was bad about the other. Thus, below, I describe good aspects of love marriages and then good aspects of arranged marriages. Overall, some people declared that they liked one marriage type more than the other, but most felt each had both good and bad aspects.

Collectively, there were three main aspects of love marriages and elopements that people liked or said was good. First, is the element of choice – ten respondents spoke approvingly of young people choosing their own spouses. For example, a 26 year old married woman said, “I recommend that everyone marry according to their own wish.” Many of these respondents were older people who emphasized that parents should accept their children’s choices. For example, a 62 year old woman said, “Well, they elope with the one they like, not the one chosen by their parents. Parents need to understand the wishes of the candidates getting married. They must let them marry the ones they love.”

Second, people thought love marriages are good because they believed self-choice leads to more successful marriages. Twelve respondents said that love marriages are good because

the couple loves and understands each other (since they chose each other) and, thus, will have a good marriage. For example, the 26 year old woman quoted above continued:

“If we choose and marry according to our own desire that is good for us. If our parents search the girls for marriage, [the married couple] may not understand the feelings of each other. Doing love marriage is to understand the feelings of each other. In a love marriage both of them have understood each other. They know the habits of each other, but in an arranged marriage we may not know and understand the feelings of each other. Many mistakes can happen. They may scold each other. We get hurt by it. So, love marriage is far better than arranged marriage.”

In keeping with this logic, one unmarried man even suggested that divorce does not happen in love marriages.

Third, eighteen respondents spoke approvingly of the inter-caste and inter-religion nature of many love marriages. Some of these statements emphasized tolerating and accepting such marriages, rather than promoting them. For example, one 32 year old married woman said:

“A boy and girl belong to different castes and religion may like each other and get married, but their parents don’t accept them at home. But, villagers think that if the couple gets along very well and makes a living it is all right. Whatever their caste or religion, the newly married couple should get along well and make their own living. Villagers don’t mind such marriages.”

Thus, some of these evaluations were more neutral, rather than positive, in nature. It is not that inter-caste and inter-religion marriages are good per se, but that they are not bad.

Ten of these respondents, however, gave more positive evaluations of such marriages. They emphasized the equality of all people, spoke disparagingly of the caste system, and suggested that these marriages should not only be tolerated, but valued. For example, one unmarried man said:

“Even though they are from different castes and religions they are human beings. There are only two types of people in the world. They are male and female. After loving each other they marry, even if they are of different castes. It’s good. I don’t like the way people criticize such marriages.”

These respondents who took a more approving stance on inter-caste and inter-religion marriages had a distinctive profile. All ten of them had at least nine years of schooling and eight of them were in the young, unmarried life stage.

The statements that gave positive evaluations of arranged marriages fell into four main types. First, some said that arranged marriages are more prestigious or honorable than love marriages. For example, a 21 year old married woman said, “Arranged marriage is better than love marriage. There is honor (*ijjat*) in an arranged marriage for both boys and girls.” Only four respondents, all of whom were women, made explicit statements of this kind. However, they were tapping into a more widespread feeling. Some elopements are sparked by pregnancies. Thus, elopements are associated with pre-marital sex, which is widely disliked. It is largely women and their families that bear the potentially adverse

consequences of pre-marital pregnancies. Most felt that if pregnant girls married their partners it was acceptable, but if they did not marry they were disgraced. As one unmarried woman said, "If the girl marries the same boy she had sexual relations with it is all right. They are lovers and they can be pregnant. Nobody will be concerned about this. If the boy doesn't accept her though, the problem lies there. They will be hated by people then." Some suggested, however, that even if the girl marries she earns a bad reputation.

Second, eight respondents said that a good aspect of arranged marriages is that they happen when the couple are ready to marry and the marriage is given proper consideration. This sentiment was usually voiced in the negative sense. In other words, people said that a bad aspect of love marriages is that some people elope hastily when they are young and not ready. For example, one 26 year old married woman said, "The youth marry early these days. When they go to school they start love affairs at the age of thirteen or fourteen with classmates that they meet every day. Then they elope to get married. They are too immature. They don't know anything then." In turn, some suggested that these hasty elopements lead to misunderstandings between spouses as they get older, problems with childbearing and rearing, and divorce.

Third, twelve respondents indicated that they liked arranged marriages because they benefit inter-generational relationships. This belief was expressed in different ways. Four people said that parents like arranged marriages so, if children have an arranged marriage, it will make their parents happy. For example, one 58 year old woman said:

"I think arranged marriage is better than elopement. Since the arranged marriage is fixed by the parents they are happy with it. But in cases of elopement, the parents are concerned. They aren't sure what the boy is like. They are afraid he may beat her or make her do too much work."

Similarly, three people suggested that married women will get along better with their parents-in-law if they play a role in choosing her. One young married woman said, "In love marriages there are only feelings between the husband and wife. The father-in-law and mother-in-law may not like the daughter-in-law. Therefore, arranged marriages are better." Five respondents also noted approvingly that arranged marriages reinforce the bond between married women and their parents. This bond is important because if marriages break down women usually turn to their parents for support. These respondents noted that love marriages are problematic because women surrender their parents' future support if they marry according to their own choice, rather than their parents'.

Finally, the fourth type of positive evaluations of arranged marriages were positive reflections on caste and religious endogamy. Six people said that they personally do not like inter-caste and inter-religion marriages, particularly between Dalits and non-Dalits. For example, a 55 year old woman said:

"They didn't think about inter-caste marriage in the past. If anyone married a low caste girl he wouldn't be called a man at all. He would be ousted. ... We need to warn [young people] not to love Dalits. Since we belong to the old generation, I like arranged marriages."

As this statement suggests, there is a gradation in this sentiment. Inter-caste marriages among non-Dalit castes are largely acceptable, but not as good as same caste marriages. These six respondents, as well as one other respondent, further noted that arranged marriages are good because they preserve the traditions and cultures of individual castes and religions. For example, a 55 year old Tamang woman said, “Our fathers didn’t accept inter-religious relations. They used to respect their own language. Nowadays, they have forgotten their religion and languages. They are influenced by other’s languages. The situation is getting worse.” These respondents also had a distinctive profile with five of the seven coming from the oldest generation.

Similarly, thirteen of the respondents did not say that they personally disapproved of inter-caste marriages, but noted that they are problematic because others don’t like them and a couple could be expelled by their families or mistreated. Again, these statements focused on marriages between Dalits and non-Dalits. A statement by a 32 year old woman is typical:

“Upper caste parents do not allow their sons and daughter to marry lower caste boys and girls. Kami, Damai, and Sarki [Dalit] children are not allowed to marry our children. If a son of a high caste family runs away with a girl from a low caste family his parents do not allow the couple to come back to their home.”

Similar sentiments were also found among Dalit respondents. An unmarried Dalit woman said that she preferred to marry a boy from her own caste so she would not be treated badly by her in-laws. A few respondents also reflected on how other people’s disapproval could negatively impact not only the couple, but their family members. For example, a 38 year old, Limbu man explained:

“Well, there is a social boundary, if my son marries a daughter from a low caste, like Sarki, Kami, or Damai [Dalit castes], than society will exclude me and there will be a problem for me. I have no objection to it, but it will create a problem in society. Then I will be forced to separate my son from my home.”

Further reflecting people’s beliefs that both types of marriages have positive aspects, the ideal marriage is a hybrid. This hybrid marriage, which I refer to as an arranged love marriage, combines the best of both types (Table 2). Young people choose each other on the basis of love, but then they approach their parents for approval and go through the formalities of an arranged marriage. Most of the unmarried respondents said they wanted to have an arranged love marriage. For example, when I asked one unmarried woman how she wanted to get married she said, “I like arranged marriages. What I think is first have a love affair and then tell parents at the time of marriage. We can convince them on both sides. Then the parents can arrange it as an arranged marriage.” However, the requirement that arranged marriages be between people of the same caste is a barrier to realizing this ideal in practice. With many castes living in the area, many people end up finding someone of a different caste and, thus, cannot go through the process of an arranged marriage.

Causal Schemas: Models of Marital Change

When asked why marriage had changed, respondents’ pointed to three main factors: educational expansion, technological change, and foreign influence. They were not equally

spoken of however. Many people mentioned education and technology, while foreign influence was only mentioned by a handful of respondents. These three broad factors were also intertwined together. Several respondents grouped these factors together into a broader process of socio-economic change. Below, I describe respondents' beliefs about each of these factors in turn. The pathways are also summarized in Figure 1.

Eighteen respondents said that educational expansion contributed to marital change. People in the village were very aware of rapid changes in education over time. They commonly referred to older generations as uneducated and younger generations as educated. Occasionally, they made statements suggesting that this rise in education simply caused the increase in love marriages. More commonly, however, respondents pointed to mechanisms through which education leads to love marriages.

First, several respondents noted that education changes marriage by changing the thinking of young people. Education changed young people's thinking by making them clever and better able to make their own decisions about marriage. For example, a 38 year old man said, "Now people have become wise since most of them are educated now. Education has made them clever. Due to this modern age even two year old children recognize money. The children of this age are that clever." Others noted that education changed young people's thinking by making them believe in equality of all castes. For example, a 51 year old man said, "The young children are educated now. They don't care about caste. They say all castes are equal."

Second, respondents believed that educational expansion changed marriage by upsetting the generational hierarchy. Education is an important marker of status and prestige. Thus, with educational expansion, the younger generations have more education and, thus, greater status than their parents in this dimension. In turn, this greater status among young people makes them less respectful of parents and more likely to marry according to their own wishes. For example, a 70 year old man noted, "Parents were very strict then [in the past]. Children used to obey parents, but they don't these days. They aren't scared because they are educated and parents are uneducated. We don't know anything, but they are clever. They are ten times ahead of us."

Third, respondents suggested that education changed marriage by giving children more time away from their parents while attending school or living in hostels. At school, young people are able to meet peers and develop romantic relationships without the supervision of families and neighbors. Further, some children who attend secondary and tertiary schools live in hostels because their school is far away. These children spend most of their time away from families and neighbors. As one 59 year old man explained, "For some we send them outside for their education and then they walk in their own style, they run away to marry. They abandon the memory of their home."

Thirteen respondents pointed to technological change. They focused on the spread of two items in particular: mobile phones and televisions. As noted above, mobile phones and televisions are widespread in the village and even poor households have mobile phones and watch their neighbors' televisions. People are very aware of these technological changes and

often remarked on them in casual conversation. Some people loosely associated technological change with marital change and young people's increasing independence making statements that the appearance of mobiles or televisions had simply caused the changes in marriage.

Respondents also described specific ways that mobiles and television changed marriage behaviors. Many people suggested that the spread of mobile phones facilitated love marriages by giving young people a means to carry on relationships without the knowledge of family members and neighbors. For example, a 31 year old married man said, "They can talk with a person on their mobile and decide to meet at a place. They talk about love affairs and soon it becomes ready for marriage. The mobile has made it easy for today's children to meet and develop their affair quickly."

While mobile phones facilitated love marriages by providing a new means of communication, television facilitated love marriages by inculcating new values and ways of thinking. For example, a 27 year old man pointed to young people emulating models of love found in Bollywood movies:

"The main source is television. People see the films on the television and know the importance of love marriage. Their concept changed. Villagers also began doing like that. I think this all changed because of the television. Now we know about Bollywood, but we didn't know about it in the past."

Others pointed out that television also provides models of disobedience and defiance of parents.

The third factor that respondents identified is foreign influence. Five people suggested that young people today are adopting the practices of other countries. These respondents noted that people today have greater exposure to foreign practices through travel and education. As a 24 year old man explained:

"[Marriage] has changed according to the time. In the past, people were not educated. They didn't know the outer world. They were following only the old way, not knowing what change is. But now, due to education and people travelling abroad, they know the world very well and the people in their fashions. Thus, today's youth are affected by the cultures of developed countries and are trying to follow that. Nepali youth also want to be advanced like people from developed countries."

These five respondents who explicitly pointed to foreign influence were distinctive. Four of them were unmarried youth with a college education, while the fifth was a 59 year old man with ten years of education that had served several years in the Indian army.

Many people also voiced a belief that changes in marriage are part of a broader process of socio-economic change that is natural or inevitable. People of all characteristics made statements of this type, but the words varied by education. Those with little or no education said that today's time was simply different than the past or described specific ways that it had changed. For example, a 32 year old woman with four years of education said:

“These days the time has changed. The climate has changed. Children today have a different brain. They are very clever. They pick up everything. And there is this computer. Earlier people were plain and simple. Whatever their parents decided about their marriage they accepted and married whomever their parents chose.”

Highly educated respondents – those with ten or more years of schooling – used the English words modern, advanced, forward, and developed to describe this process of change. One woman who was educated by Catholic nuns also used the English word civilized. For example, a 27 year old man with ten years of education said:

“In the past, people were mostly uneducated. They had a traditional concept, but now everything has become modern. Every kind of facility is there now. Television wasn’t there in the past. They didn’t have knowledge. They used to focus only on their old culture. They were busy in farming. But now people have learned many things. They watch television. They read newspapers. People went abroad after being educated and everything has been advanced.”

DISCUSSION

These schemas bear the imprint of global culture found in developmental idealism. First, the categorical schemas themselves are consistent with developmental idealism. Respondents view marriages as falling into two oppositional types: arranged and love marriages. Further, the two types are categorized in a way that is consistent with developmental idealism. Arranged marriages are seen as a traditional or old behavior, while love marriages are seen as the modern counterpart.

Second, many of their subjective evaluations are consistent with the values of individualism, freedom, and equality that underlie developmental idealism. Many respondents believe that choosing one’s own spouse, often on the basis of love, is a good thing in and of itself. Thus, they endorse the core beliefs of developmental idealism that relationships should be based on individual consent and individuals should be free to choose their own partners. Further, the young, educated respondents’ statements about people from all castes being equal and the value of inter-caste and inter-religion marriages suggests that young, highly educated villagers endorse the value of individual equality found in developmental idealism.

Third, many respondents view marital change as an effect of modern society. Highly educated respondents used English words, like modern and advanced, to describe broader socio-economic change and identify the transition to love marriages as simply another aspect of that process. The respondents with little or no education did not use those words, but they too described how broader change is taking place and identified the marital transition as part of it. The handful of youth who said that love marriages are part of being advanced or modern further suggests that, for some, love marriages is a way to be modern. However, it is important to note that the belief that love marriages are an effect of modern society may stem not only from the inculcation of developmental idealism, but also from their own observations of how marriage and other aspects of village life changed together over time.

The results further suggest that people are aware that a new collection of ideas is being inculcated among young people and, in turn, contributing to the changes in marriage. Only a handful of respondents noted that foreign influence is contributing to the change in marriage. However, many spoke of schooling, television, and Bollywood movies transmitting new ideas about love, marriage, and inter-generational relations. Several also explicitly referred to changes in thinking and the abandonment of old ideas and concepts.

At the same time, however, respondents' schemas of marital change also point to other factors working in tandem with, but outside of developmental idealism. Schooling changed young people's thinking, but it also upset the generational hierarchy. In turn, young people have greater power to act on their ideas and defy the older generation. This power of education to upset generational hierarchies and contribute to family change is also found elsewhere (Caldwell et al. 1982, Ghimire et al. 2006). The spread of mobile phones is another factor that facilitated young people's ability to act on their new ideas. Mobiles allow young people to meet and maintain contact with each other in secret. However, none of the respondents spoke of greater economic independence giving young people greater power over their parents as suggested by Corwin (1977) and Ross (1961). It seems likely that this dynamic operated in Pariwarbasti, but none of the respondents mentioned it. The focus in the interview questions on life specifically in the village, apart from nearby urban areas, may have contributed to this result.

Respondents' schemas also show a strong influence of the Indian context. Many Indian and specifically high caste beliefs about marriage are upheld in Pariwarbasti. Arranged marriages are seen as more honorable and prestigious than love marriages. Several respondents are troubled by how love marriages harm the quality of inter-generational relationships, which are of great importance. Some are also troubled by the damage to caste-based practices and customs as inter-caste marriages flourish and caste identities blur. Further, the ideal marriage is not that of a love marriage or an arranged marriage, but a hybrid of the two. Thus, the ideal marriage is not that of the Western marriage found in developmental idealism, but a combination of Indian and Western practices. This is consistent with Srinivas' theory that high caste culture spread along with Western culture. Further, these same beliefs and fears, as well as the ideal of the hybrid arranged love marriage, are found in studies from other parts of India (Chowdhry 2007, Mody 2008, Rocca et al. 2009, Raval et al. 2010), as well as in Bollywood movies (Dwyer 2004). Thus, the schemas found in Pariwarbasti fit well within the broader Indian context at one level.

However, Pariwarbasti is not a typical Indian case. As noted above, arranged marriages are still dominant in India as a whole (Desai and Andrist 2010), while in Pariwarbasti elopements are now dominant. Further, while some elopements, particularly between Dalits and non-Dalits remain problematic, most are quickly accepted by family members and the community. By contrast, studies from Delhi, Haryana, and Karnataka note that elopements, particularly those that are inter-caste, have been met with strongly adverse responses (Chowdhry 2007, Mody 2008). In some cases, couples are legally separated by parents who report to the police that their daughters have been kidnapped, young couples are publicly shamed or murdered, and others commit suicide. Such violent responses to elopements are unheard of in Pariwarbasti. Thus, it appears that developmental idealism, in so far as it

pertains to spouse selection, has found much greater acceptance in Pariwarbasti than in other Indian contexts.

The key to Pariwarbasti's unusual acceptance of elopement and inter-caste marriage is the unique ethnicity and history of the Darjeeling Hills. The practice of arranged marriage and accompanying beliefs – acquired in part, if not entirely, through Sanskritization – may well have been shallowly rooted among Tibeto-Burman groups. As noted above, Macfarlane (1961) noted that the Gurung in 1960s Nepal practiced both arranged marriage and a culture of romance among youth. Such youthful romance was neither encouraged nor tolerated among high castes (Chowdhry 2007, Parry 1979, Raheja and Gold 1994). Underlying Sanskritized, high caste culture in Pariwarbasti, are Tibeto-Burman cultures that are more compatible with Western, now global, culture and developmental idealism. In turn, this facilitated a faster and more thorough adoption of developmental idealism in Parwarbasti, compared to many other Indian locales. As Srinivas' theory suggested, Sanskritization did precede Westernization and the local caste context shaped the pace and nature of the changes. The lack of dominant high caste groups in Pariwarbasti may have led to a slow and shallowly rooted process of Sanskritization, while also facilitating a rapid adoption of developmental idealism.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to research on family change by illustrating how multiple overlapping layers of local context shape schemas about family life. The schemas found in Pariwarbasti appear to be strongly influenced by global cultural models found within developmental idealism. However, people in Pariwarbasti have not adopted developmental idealism wholesale. Instead, their schemas also bear the imprint of Indian high caste culture and values that run counter to developmental idealism. At the same time, the unusual acceptance of elopements and love marriage in Pariwarbasti within the national Indian context further point to the influence of indigenous Tibeto-Burman cultures found in the Darjeeling Hills.

This study also contributes to a foundation for future research on family change in India and similar contexts. In the future, new data collections will help us further document and understand the process of family change by examining the broader applicability of the theories and schemas examined here. This study suggests, for example, that local cultural contexts, conflicting attitudes about caste and religion, and concerns about inter-generational relationships affect the practice and acceptance of self-choice marriage. Thus, future surveys on the family in South Asian contexts should include questions that measure these factors, as well as developmental idealism.

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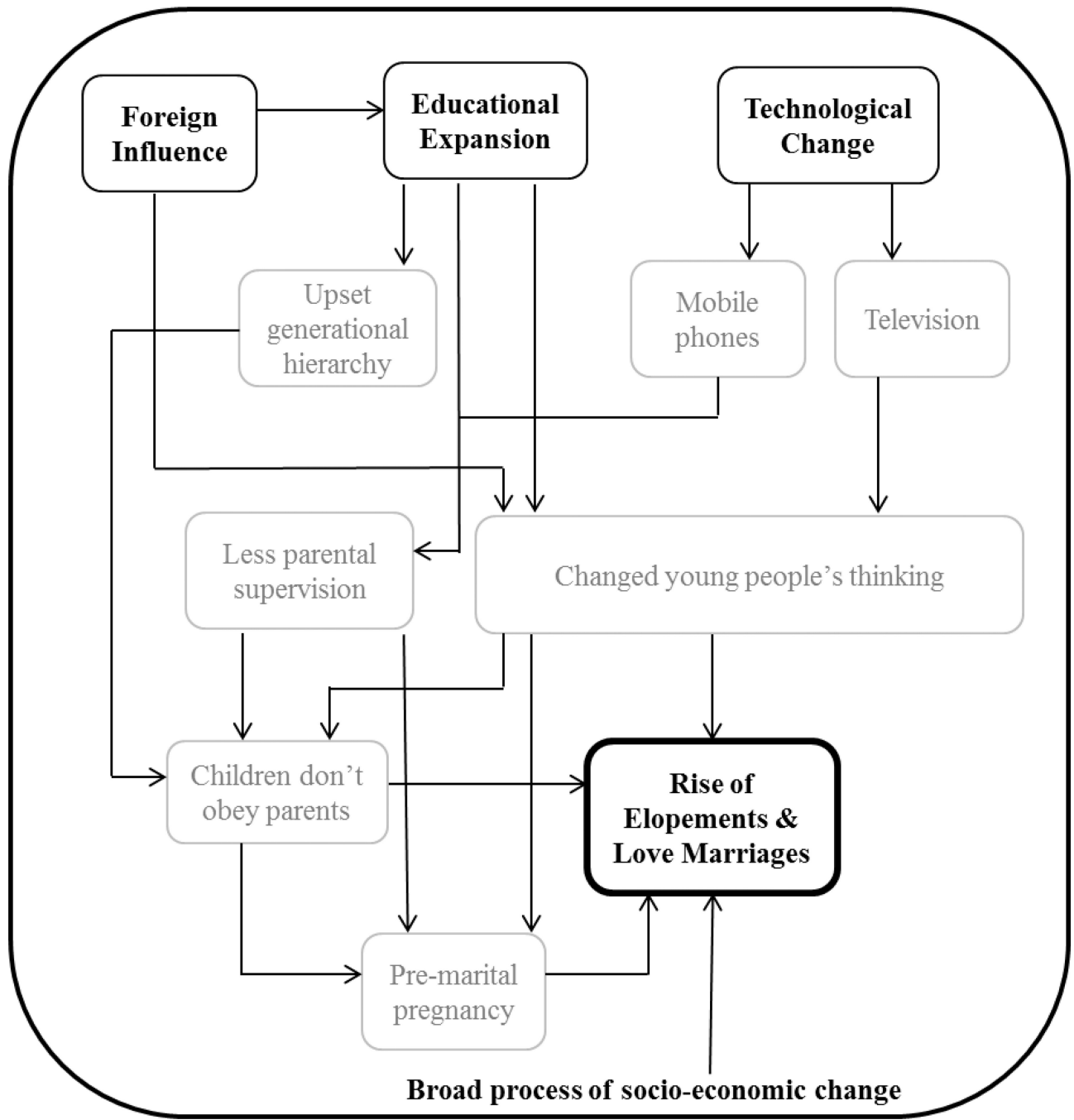


Figure 1.
 Respondents' perceptions of why marriage behaviors have changed

Table 1

Characteristics of respondents (N=30).

	n
Gender	
Women	15
Men	15
Life course position	
Unmarried	10
Married with child <10	10
Married with married child	10
Education	
0–4 years	7
5–9 years	7
10+ years	16
Caste/Ethnic Group	
Bahun-Chhetri	7
Tibeto-Burman	18
Dalit	5
Religion	
Hindu	25
Buddhist	3
Christian	2
Age	
20–24	10
25–49	11
50–69	9

Table 2

Defining characteristics of different types of marriage.

Love Marriage and Elopement	Arranged Marriage	Arranged Love Marriage
Couple meets on their own	Boy's family approaches girl's family	Couple meets on their own
Love develops before marriage	Love expected to develop after marriage	Love develops before marriage
Couple choose each other without parents' consent	Family members choose spouse, but couple consents	Couple choose each other, but get parents' consent
Couple may be different castes and religions	Couple must be the same caste and religion	Couple must be the same caste and religion
Couple elopes without parents' knowledge	Couple participates in engagement ceremony	Couple participates in engagement ceremony
Couple begins cohabiting without a wedding ceremony	Families exchange gifts and engage in other caste specific traditions surrounding the wedding	Families exchange gifts and engage in other caste specific traditions surrounding the wedding
Couple is formally married after cohabiting	Couple is formally married before cohabiting	Couple is formally married before cohabiting

Table 3

Characteristics of marriage types that respondents' identified and evaluated as positive or negative in nature. Characteristics that were perceived positively are in bold.

Love Marriages and Elopements	Arranged Marriages
Choosing own spouse is inherently good	Family choosing is not as inherently good
Result in better couple relationships	Result in worse couple relationships
May disappoint parents	Make parents happy
Don't benefit wives' relationship with in-laws	Help ensure that wives get along with in-laws
Can damage women's future natal family support	Reinforce women's ties with natal family
Not prestigious and honorable	Prestigious and honorable
Inter-caste marriages should be accepted or valued	Same caste marriages are inherently good and preserve caste cultures and traditions
Inter-caste couples are treated poorly by some	Same caste couples are treated well by all
Some couples elope hastily when too young	Take place when couple is ready and mature