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

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

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

III
Showcasing class anxiety

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

In 1999, as I was beginning to investigate local concepts related to 'class' in Madurai, I interviewed my long-time acquaintance Jayanthi, a retired domestic worker who is a monolingual Tamil speaker, about class terms and identities. We were discussing which Tamil words were closest to the American English concept of 'socioeconomic class'. Jayanthi eventually settled on *takuti*, a word that connotes, among other things, the social level ascribed to a person by others.[2] In Madurai, she and many other

I begin with brief excerpts from interviews with several people who could not even hope to be seen as middle class. Their observations illustrate three

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

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

> Murugan: It's someone whose clothing is dirty, unironed, torn, and unwashed, and whose hair is unoiled. They have no neatness (*n tnas ill ma irupp ṅka*).
>
> Sara: What do you mean by neatness?
>
> Murugan: Good clothes, new clothes.
>
> Sundaram: If we wear old clothes, we feel really uncomfortable.
>
> Anjali: We feel like we need to wear new clothes. If we're going out,[12] we'll wear the newest clothing we have.
>
> Sundaram: If I went out to meet you, and didn't have a nice out t on, I'd be embarrassed and feel like I should have worn nice clothing.

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

> Murugan: If you're standing across the road from us, you'll think, 'Poor things, they are suffering' (*p vam, kastappattiruk ṅka*), and we mustn't have people think that way. They'll think, 'Why did these people come out looking like this?'
>
> Sara: How would you feel?
>
> All three in unison: Ashamed.
>
> Anjali: We don't want anyone to know we are suffering, so we go out looking neat.

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

kutukkam tt ṅka).[13] Like the others, Chellamma's aim was to be neat and clean and presentable, not to be fashionable. In these cases, fashion is far less critical than decency.

Fundamentally, then, a person has to be decent in order to be recognisable, to be worthy of respectful interaction—in sum, to count in the public eye. (There are also negatively coded ways of interacting, as these accounts suggest, but as I discuss below, other evidence reveals that reciprocal interaction usually indicates that a person merits being seen.) The structure of this encounter deserves some attention. Those who go out, wishing to be seen, are already 'seeing' others as social beings. In the process of recognition, there is a reciprocal visual interaction, just as in *darsan*. 'Taking darsan' is the practice of seeing and being seen by a deity in Hindu (and sometimes Christian) worship, an 'exchange of vision' (Eck 1981: 6) and 'visual intermingling' (Pinney 2002: 364). People can also take darsan of other humans, as they frequently do when viewing political and religious leaders or celebrities, and Madurai residents' descriptions

'people who work in of ces don't require cell phones'. Despite this attempt at saving face, there was some embarrassment all around.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gaining a modicum of dignity also entangles people within the very hierarchical system whose effects they are trying to mitigate. This is not simply because performing according to the rules of the game can reproduce the hegemony of class, but more precisely because it sets the performers up to be evaluated by—and to evaluate—others through the diffuse social gaze. Dignity of this type is not an egalitarian 'human dignity', but a dignity dependent on the respectful gaze and address of judgemental others. In seeing and in presenting themselves in ways that invite being seen, these residents produce themselves as both subject and object in a eld of power relations (Foucault 1978, 1980). Those quoted in this article, all of whom strive to be recognised regardless of how 'high' they are in the class system, act as subjects when they themselves identify those by whom they want to be granted respect. They thereby

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

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