Exploring the inter-linkages between sexuality, gender expression and work among men who sell sex to men in Mumbai (India)

Report

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Co-authored by:
Ankur Srivastava
Vivek Raj Anand (Mentor)

Address for Correspondence:
The Humsafar Trust
3rd Floor, Manthan Plaza
Vakola Market, Nehru Road
Santacruz (East), Mumbai: 400055
www.humsafar.org
Phone: +91-022- 26673800/ 26650547
Email: hst.pmu@gmail.com

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Syed Javed
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study entitled, ‘Exploring the inter-linkages between sexuality, gender expression and work among men who sell sex to men in Mumbai (India)’ was conducted as a part of SANAM Fellowship Programme. This study aimed at looking at the various meanings attached to sexuality and sex work; and how one negotiates with one’s masculinity, identity and body in sex work. The study also examined how male bodies gets constructed as objects of desire and appeal, and how one in sex work has to fit into the brackets of desirability in sex market. The paradigm chosen for the research is qualitative. The study was conducted with six men who sell sex to men using in-depth interviewing method in Mumbai (India). The findings revealed that men who sell sex to men is a heterogeneous population which may differ in terms of how one identifies self, work, client system, role in sex, etc. It was also found that men in sex work who do not identify as ‘gay’ had very stereotypical image of ‘gay’ persons and were averse the idea of any association with the group or identity. The study also found that men in sex work need to undertake body projects like gym or parlour services in order to appear attractive, desiring and appealing. Cross-dressing and waxed bodies were also seen some ways used to get more clients.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

“We believe that making money from sex is but selling a part of our body which is in no way different from selling our brains or physical labour.”

(A Statement of Women in Prostitution, VAMP and SANGRAM)

The above statement refers to the debate on ‘exploitation and agency’ in women sex work. It argues against the held notions of ‘vulnerabilities’, ‘plight’, ‘force’ that have been associated with the women in sex work in a male dominated society. Prostitution/sex work has been often claimed to be one of the oldest profession, though the claim is made to seek acceptance in the society; it nevertheless has a long history. Sex work is generally equated with women in sex work, though the HIV/AIDS epidemic has established the presence of men who sell sex. (Shinde, 2009)

Applying one of the lenses often used by theorists to look at women is sex work, of that of ‘patriarchal nature of society’; some interesting observations can be made about male sex work. It is argued that ‘prostitution’ has been seen as a means to provide for the men in society, who claim to have a higher social positioning. Going by the same rule of hierarchies and power, this population of male sex workers sell sex not only to women clients but also to men at large and often to married couples. ‘Men being available for men’ might seem a little incoherent with the given argument, but it holds its validity when the ‘masculinity’ of the buyer and seller is put under question.

Sex work has always been stigmatized given the strict value systems that are laid by social, cultural, religious and political influences in India. The presence of strong stigma around same-sex behaviour and ‘shameful, immoral’ act of selling sex makes the men who sell sex to men prone to more stigma, harassment and discrimination.

Male sex worker is not a homogenous group. There are those who sell sex to only men (often referred under the same banner as ‘men who have sex with men’) and there are those whose primarily client base is women (often referred to as ‘gigolos’).
but also sell sex to men. Irrespective of the client profile, male sex worker’s sexual identity could vary. There could be men who sell sex to men, but do not identify as homosexuals or any other identity based on that. Entry point in sex work may also differ, for some it is a primary source of income and for others it may be a supplementary source of income. And unlike female sex work which is primarily linked to financial situation and often caste hierarchy one is placed in and often caste, the male sex work might not be dependent entirely on these social stratifier. The scanty of research studies on this subject poses more questions on the issue than answers them. Khan (1999) in his study with male sex workers in India and Bangladesh has mentioned, that where on one hand, we have social conditions ‘where poverty, hunger, homelessness and family deprivation are rife, and where significant numbers of such ‘workers’ below the age of 14 are primary wage earners for their families’ But then there are also others for whom it is an easy way of making money. Many of the men in sex work are also married to women, unlike female sex work which largely operates from red-light area; male sex work doesn’t operate from brothels. Soliciting in case of men would take place a lot using forms of media (like internet, newspaper, mobile phones, etc.) though street based sex work also happens. It is often argued in case of female sex work that because of the lower literacy rate and employment skills, their vulnerable socio-economic situation a woman is forced to take up sex work. But in case of male sex work in India, we still do not have an answer to what initiates the entry of a man in sex work. The network used by men to seek clients, working conditions, profile of sex workers and clients, etc are still blurred and need further probe.

This study is an attempt to unravel the social context and conditions in which male sex work operates. The study has focused on the ways in which men negotiate with their sexuality and gender expression in different spaces. It will analyse the processes one goes through when one takes up sex work as a source of income and the factors that facilitates it. The type of sexual behaviour (penetrating and being penetrated or active and passive) one engages in also is related to how one sees ‘masculinity’ or ‘being a real man’. The study will try to explore various meanings and expression attached to masculinity by the studied population. Currently the researches, articles on the subject done in India have largely explored the risk behaviour and vulnerability to infections. There is still a wide range of issues that need to be studied about this
population, including masculinity which will help to strengthen the intervention programmes and counselling modules to provide better services.

1.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1.1 The Body

The dualist approach on ‘body’ has since long captured the debates in sociology. The ‘nature’ versus ‘culture’ divide has put body’s social consciousness and its material properties at different poles.

The Naturalistic understanding of ‘body’ laid its emphasis on pre-social and biological imperatives of body on which structures of self, society and culture are built. It also argued that the inequalities in the society is not a product of social construction but is determined by the power of biological body. The gender inequalities were presupposed to be a result of women’s bodies which were weak and unstable. This argument has been challenged not in the sociological realm but also amongst biologist and scientist. Contrary to this is the Social Constructionist argument which talks about body as a construction of social values and historical forces. (Shelling, 1997)

Goffman and Foucault’s work have placed ‘body’ at the centre of interaction-order. Goffman’s approach to body can be seen at three levels; firstly, he observes body as a material entity which can be controlled by individuals to guide social interactions; secondly, the body though not is actually produced by social forces, the meanings attributed to it are determined by shared vocabulary; and lastly body mediates the linkage between one’s sense of self identity and social identity. (Shelling, 1997) As with Foucault, it is the mind and our thinking abilities which inscribe meanings to our bodies. “For Foucault, the body is a ‘surface of inscription’ marked by dominant cultural norms (of criminality, sanity or sexuality), but holds the possibility of inscribing itself on social practices through resistance. Instead of emphasizing how bodies resist and subvert power, however, Foucault’s emphasis is on how particular forms of power can manipulate the ‘political economy of the body’ to produce bodies which suffer systemic subordination.” (Law, 2000, pp 13) Foucault’s epistemological standpoint rejects ‘body’ as a materialist project and an object of study. His focus
remains on the social and cultural meanings that are imposed by the prevalent discourses. (Shelling 1997, Law, 2000)

Thus social constructionists in a process of distancing from biological reductionism and giving importance to mind over body have ignored body as a material and physical being which cannot be explained by social relations. And also has continued to work in the binaries rather opposing them such as mind/body, nature/culture and subject/object. “Burkitt (1987) refers [body] to as a ‘socio-natural entity’...It is simultaneously biological and social quality of the body which makes it at once such an obvious, and yet such an elusive phenomenon.” (Shelling, 1997, pp 82)

1.1.2 Body projects

Body has seen changes in the light of cultural forces and also the power manifested on it. Chinese foot-binding, western corsets, tattooing and piercing for centuries have involved the use of tools and materials to alter the shape and size of the body. In the recent times the body projects have gone a radical change with change in the technologies. There have been more than two million breast implant and enhancement operations in US since 1960s. Increasing number of men are also going for chest implant operation for a muscular appearance Penis extension or enlargement are also now available options. Similarly plastic surgery and idealized form of body/self is yet another form of changes that bodies undergo to match a particular standard set up in the society. Thus the various body projects are merely a training to shape our bodies as what is acceptable and desirable in a particular culture. (Benson, 1997)

The Gym culture especially among men is a direct effect of such an understanding of body and masculinity as stated by various social and cultural forces. “Duston [1995] has plausibly suggested that the development of photography as well the development of theatrical display of male ‘strong men’ encouraged the sense that was at stake was what the male body looked like rather than what it could do” (Benson, 1997, pp 145)

The advances in medicines have created pills (steroids) to enhance body mass; making it clear that appearing ‘masculine’ is more important than its essence; the idea behind body building is to produce body which qualifies desirable muscular size, shape and tone. (Benson, 1997; Mansfiled & McGinn, 1993)
1.1.3 Desirability and Masculinity

Masculinity as discussed above is constructed by the current sense of desirability as laid down by social market. The hairy chest and moustache in seventies was the ‘appealing’ quotient. But with changes in technologies and modernization of ‘bodies’ sense of what is ‘appealing’ and ‘desiring’ changed. Waxed chests and clean shaved face replaced hairy bodies. The body show now has become marketable. Gym toned body, six pack abs and biceps have started defining the new metro-sexual man. The male bodies in the television have commenced a new market that has considered a wide range of women viewers and also is aware of its gay viewership. Shirtless men and men in under-wears on television are shaping new sense of ‘sensuality’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘desirability’. The popular US TV series like ‘Queer As Folks’ responded to the mentioned new viewership; the protagonist who also is in advertising business clearly states that ‘everything is about sex’ and ‘sex sells’. The constructs of sexuality and desirability are often laid down by the dominant ideas that are shaped by the market.

Garnon and Simon (1973) as cited in Carol S Vance, ‘It is not the physical aspects of sexuality but the social aspects that generate the arousal and organize the action’. The male power assertion is made through male sexual coerciveness which derives legitimacy from the culture. She also refers to Foucault where he spoke of ‘bodies and their pleasure’ and how differently they have been categorized into different sexual discourses and different sexual identities. ‘The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’ (Foucault, 1979 as cited in Vance, 1989). It is interesting that how by stigmatizing ‘homosexuality’, the heterosexual norms and institutions are preserved. He also observed that ‘body and its pleasure’ can only escape power if the identities in which we have categorized human experiences are thrown. (Vance, 1989)

With the increase in the new market that is concerned about female viewership has brought about some concerns over the display of masculinity. There are nude and semi- nude bodies of men on display on television which on one hand set standards for men in sense of how to appear desirable and on the other hand with increase sensuality attached to men’s body a sense of homo-phobia also gets set. Hence masculinity and body show cannot be understood in isolation, its linkage with sexuality becomes important.
A great deal has also been written on masculinity and homosexuality and exploring the inter-linkages and negotiations. Jay Clarkson (2005) in his study on television series and websites has found that ‘these gay men resist both the construction of straight masculinity as consumer masculinity because, ironically, it was too gay, they simultaneously reject what they see as limited representation of gay men for the lack of traditionally masculine performances for the potential influence that they fear will warp heterosexual audiences. Thus, these men seem to be situated squarely between an emerging masculinity that is based in feminine consumption and a traditional masculinity that is based in homophobia and misogyny.’ There is a sense of losing masculinity in its hegemonic sense and also a sense of recreating masculinity that befits the present nature of flamboyant sexuality.

This new market has also made men bodies for sale, not to say men selling sex is a recent concept but women buying sell sex seems more possible and acceptable. But it is not only women to whom men sell sex. The male sex workers are seen providing pleasure to their male clients as well. But the issue of sexuality and sexual identity is not at question here, rather the power dynamics under which male sex work operates. A man necessarily is not same-sex oriented or identified to sell sex to men. In the gay community, male sex work is easily accessible and accepted; as it just translates into a transaction for sex, and there isn’t any stigma attached to the act of sex. At the same time the male sex workers selling sex to men become double marginalized as they are not only engaging in sex work but also in same-sex behaviour which in itself is seen as a threat to masculinity and also an stigmatized behaviour.

1.1.4 Labour in Sex Work
Looking at the concept of ‘labour’ becomes essential to understand sex work. As discussed above when talking about sex workers and their client system, the choice is not always as free. Though there is always an agency in terms of making a decision which lies in the hand of the men who are in sex work, still there is a certain range of choices that is available. To start with a person in sex work is not always in control of the desirability factor. The attractiveness of the buyer (here client) in the market is of not that important as that of the person selling sex. Similarly in case of male sex workers often selling sex to male clients (for those who identify self as straight) is a matter of ‘labour’ they are engaging into. Rather putting one’s body on sale for
money thus becomes a personal choice (bound by market conditions where work operates).

‘John Locke is famous for this dictum:" Every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his"(1993, 274). This dictum allows for the commodification of a person's bodily capacity to labor.’ (Davidson, 2002)

There is an important question that needs a little more debate though it is seen entirely impossible to do so unless attaching moral judgements to the argument. The question is that whether the bodily sexual capacities can be considered as one’s property and voluntary transfer of his or her rights over the body in exchange of some material gain can be considered as ‘sexual labour’. The Marxist critique of this liberal understanding of labour, contract and property would be: that ‘sexual labour’ as a contract ignores the social, cultural and political power that give way for such a contract to happen. It is understood that no one can alienate oneself from labour and hence there is no exchange of labour for money in any market; rather it is the power and control over a person’s body that is gained in order to demand for desired labour. Hence, in case of sex work, the client in exchange of money gets control of the person to whom the client can ask to do labor (sexual) for a definite period of time. And during that time the seller (here the sex worker) has to surrender his/her will over the body. Hence it is class and social relation that dictates the power over body and the sexual contract in the market.

In the modern scenario where market needs drive the production, the presence of male sex work seems to be inevitable. This sexual contract can also be seen in terms of global market needs of consumption and production. An interview based research carried out in Philippines, explains the changing forms of sexual labour in a transnational and ‘gay’ urban neighbourhood ‘which is shaped by state initiatives on sustainable tourism and international gay travel. In place of treating hospitality as ‘work’, ... draw [s] on the concept of emotional labor to understand hospitality as an expression of ‘gay’ and local identities and as a celebration of desire and place. I propose that studies of sexual labor in urban spaces struggling with development must contend with expressions of desire rather than treating sexuality as a commodity exchanged in global tourism.’(Collins, 2007)
The developing countries do not only face the problem as mentioned by Collins (2007) of looking at sex and desire as commodities exchangeable in global market but more than that the issue of health risks. The HIV/AIDS epidemic more than anything else has stigmatized and criminalised the bodies that weren’t deem suitable in the given moral and normative social paradigm. “Recognizing the existence of multiple constructed realities, and identifying the power/knowledge regimes that allow particular views to gain currency, is important in the context of power, sex work and HIV/AIDS. On the one hand, there is a need for a language of power and position, since sex workers have become the targets of local, national and global HIV/AIDS education campaigns. The normativities of HIV prevention assume sex workers require education, thereby ascribing a stigmatized sex worker identity: the female, Southeast Asian prostitute is understood as infected and infecting. On the other hand, these regimes of power and knowledge have resonance in everyday life. They police the practices of commercial sex, for example, as well as the experience of inhabiting a body coded as diseased.” (Law, 2000, pg 14)

1.1.5 Male Sex Work in India

The cultural apparatus under which male sex work operates in India is also significant in making this possible not only hard to reach but mostly invisible. Given multiple nature of realities, people are often seen negotiation with their sense of being and identity. The complex nature of social stratifier like caste, class, region, linguistics, religion, etc plays a very important role in defining self. Given the cultural context, not many men would actually term themselves as ‘male sex workers’ because they are selling sex. Also because of the stigma attached to sex work, men selling sex, homosexuality, etc people sometime may or may not identify with any such identities. The problem of labels and identities thus further complex the issue of what is termed as ‘sex work’. Writers like Shivananda Khan (1999) are against the labelling of selling sex as ‘sex work’ as he believes that ‘For most men and women who sell their bodies for cash, for clothing, for food, for shelter; it is their only option... Too often there is no other choice, no power to negotiate labour terms and working conditions’. Khan has not only expressed his disagreement against the use of word ‘sex work’ but has also demanded the use of colloquial and culturally relative vocabulary in order to refer sexuality and identity related terms. Where on the other hand, writers like Bindumadhav V. Khare (2008) hold an opinion that ‘there is no political identity
associated with...which is why I prefer using the scientific categories and would prefer to do away with the cultural context entirely.’ Here scientific categories would refer to ‘male sex workers’ while culturally Shinde et al (2009) conducted a study in Mumbai with male sex workers (it included men who have sex with men and transgender persons). Though in the research they basically studied their risk behaviour and vulnerabilities, the findings included MSM being a high risk group, inconsistent condom usage and high STI/HIV infections. Shinde has also suggested that qualitative research would be essential to bring forth the social aspects of sex work and their negotiation skills. There is another study that was conducted on Male Sex Workers as a pilot study in three cities - Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Vijayawada by Network of Indian Male Sex Workers Kolkata (NIMSW). The report was published in 2006. Some of the findings from the report mention the difficulty to reach out to the male sex worker population for health intervention because the groups are hidden and are also hard to identify. Economic reasons were listed as one of the important reason for men to be in sex work. It was reported, ‘As individuals, many MSW suffer from a sense of low esteem, poor confidence fuelled by stigma when identified as sex worker’. (NIMSW, 2006)
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

People’s life experiences lie neither in isolation nor in abstraction. In order to understand any phenomenon, it is important to view it historically and culturally specifically in a given time and space. Sexual labour similarly should be understood in continuity from its historic conceptualization to its contemporary form of construction. Qualitative Research Methodology seemed most appropriate to the kind of the study the researcher entitled to took; Uwe Flick (2007) views that “…qualitative research uses text as empirical material (instead of numbers), starts from the notion of the social construction of realities under study, is instead in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study”.

As the study entailed to understand the meanings attached with sex work, body and negotiation/ expression of masculinity, issue of power and agency as experienced by men who are in sex work; the approach used in the study is Explorative in nature. As stated by Marshall, C. and Rossman, G B. (1999) exploratory study investigates little understood phenomena; identifies or discover important categories of meaning; and to generate hypotheses for future research. The study using qualitative methodology of explorative in nature tried to understand construction of masculinity in context of the participants. It incorporated their subjective lived experiences and was validated by the socio-political environment where they are placed. It also tried to look at the various cultural constructions of body, gender and sexualities as understood and defined by the participant themselves.

This chapter on methodology will look at techniques and methods used to explore the issue of male sex work, it’s characteristics and issues of gender and power in an elucidate form. It will lay out the research objectives and research questions; give operational definitions to the terms and words used, sampling and its characteristics, methods and tools of data collection, location of the study, method of data analysis used, scope and limitation of the study.
2.1 Research Questions
How does commodification of male body takes place in male sex work and what are the various kinds of power equations that govern this kind of transaction?
How to men in sex-work understand labour and access their agency in the given socio-cultural and economic power structure with their clients?
How do male sex workers negotiate their sense of masculinity, sexuality with sex work?
How do men in sex work perceive what it means to be a man and what are the various markers by which they exhibit their masculinity?

2.2 Research Objectives
To understand the use of body and labour in sex work and the power equations that governs this transaction
To understand ‘agency’ as accessed by male sex workers in the given socio-cultural and economic power structures where sex work operates
To explore the sense of being a man and expression of masculinity as understood by male sex workers

2.3 Place of Study
The study was located in the city of Mumbai. Mumbai is believed to have the highest number of male sex workers operating as compared to other cities in India. There are organizations and groups working with male sex workers on the issue of health and safe sex behaviour, which make this population comparatively accessible here than at other places.

2.4 Sampling
2.4.1 Sampling technique
Purposive snow-ball sampling was used to locate 6 participants with an inclusion-exclusion criterion. The participants were men who are 18 years or more and whose primary or supplementary source of income is through sex work. One who self identify as transgender or transsexual person or one who doesn’t agree with the terms of the consent form was not be allowed to participate in the study. Since the population under study is an invisible population and some of the participants might be married and not open about their work, it would be difficult to approach them
directly. Therefore groups or organizations, who work with this population, were contacted for building initial contacts. The participants were also asked to refer other people who would be willing to participate in this study and qualify the inclusion-exclusion criteria to the researcher.

2.5 Methods of Data collection

The method of data collection in the study used is In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted, as the study entails to look at the construction of masculinity and negotiation with sexuality and sex work of men who are in sex work. The method used provides the space to document experiences of the participants in an elaborate form, which is a crucial aspect of the study.

2.6 Tools for Data collection

Interview guide were used as tools for data collection. Interview guide has a broad framework of questions as guidelines for interview. These questions are framed according to the objectives of the study, keeping in mind that the data from the interview should also correspond to the objectives. At the same time, interview guide also gives freedom to the participants to frame and structure responses. “...This, in fact, is an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant’s views it, not as the researcher views it.” (Marshall, C. et al, 1999)

At the same time interview guide provides a systemization in the questioning which is necessary to fulfil the purpose of the study.

Interview guide was made to capture the life history, significant details, and important events in order to understand the various dimensions of male sex work, the power play, agency and exploitation.

2.7 Data analysis

The analysis of the data was done manually by using content analysis. Coding and categorizing was used to analyse the data. “The main activities are to search for relevant parts of the data and by naming and classifying them. Through this process, a structure is developed as a step towards a comprehensive understanding of the issue, the field, and last but not the least the data themselves.” (Flick, 2007)
The common themes thus obtained from ‘coding and categorizing’ the case studies will be compared against each other, the comparative study of these themes will give an account of how similar or different the experiences of participants have been.

2.8 Data Safety plan
All the data files are stored with an id name and any information that may link the files to the participants will be deleted. All the audio files and the transcripts are stored with the researcher. And only the people involved in this research have an access to these files.

2.9 Ethical consideration
The research study here deals with sensitive and personal details of lives of the participants in order to understand male sex work, and what kind of power dynamics and exploitation takes place in such transactions. Issues regarding identities like gender, sexuality and work were explored. A lot of questions were about the difficult and uneasy part of one’s life where one was dealing with emotional trauma regarding economic stress, social stigma, sexuality, the research might make them go through and experience the past incidents once again. It might have also resulted into a lot of emotional venting out and angst against the society and people around through the process of data collection. Some of the participants might have been married and may not be out to their families about practicing sex work; hence it will be an ethical concern not to disclose any information with anyone whatsoever matter may be.

The researcher was aware about threat to emotional vulnerability the study might put the participant through; hence all the questions framed bear this in the mind. And at any given point in time the participant had an option of not answering to any question or even discontinue from the study. The participants in the starting of the interview process were made aware about the objectives and scope of the study and the framework of the interview; and only after the consent taken in writing the interview shall start.

2.10 Scope and Limitation of the Study
Scope: The study holds an important place from the perspective that it documents the lives of men in sex work. Issues of agency, negotiation, exploitation and power at sex work will be discussed. Nothing much is known about the male sex work in India,
moreover the given range of theoretical frameworks used to analyse female sex work not necessarily hold valid in the case of male sex work. This population has only been studied in HIV/AIDS health paradigm; hence it is more important to document the sociological and psychological aspects of their lives as male sex workers. Moreover, since there are very organizations working with this community, hence the conclusions of the study might also be helpful in understanding the needs and concerns of this community. Similarly, gaps could be defined between the needs of the community and services provided by the support system. This further will help to design intervention keeping specific needs of the community in mind. Moreover, this study will also supplement the existing body of knowledge on male sex workers in India and can be used for further research purposes.

Limitation: The current study is being placed in the city of Mumbai, and hence the results cannot be applied to understand males ex work in India, as the experiences of lives of male sex workers living in smaller cities remain unexplored. Also due to strict time frame, this study would work with a small sample size and might not be able to capture all the possible varied nature of male sex work. Moreover, since the population because of social and internalized stigma is a hidden population, the researcher would have to rely to organizations working with male sex workers.
3.1 Language, Labels and Identities

The researcher in this section will explore the meanings and understandings attached to the labels/identities taken up by the men in sex work. This section will explore and analyse how for individuals the concept of ‘self’, and the notion of ‘sexual attraction’, ‘sexual behaviour’ and ‘relationship’ have worked in determining one’s sexual identity. One’s understanding of different labels/identities based on one’s experiences and social context, one chose to apply or not apply labels on self. The section will not only explore what sexual identities are taken up by the participants but will also look at the meanings associated with those and reasoning for applying and not applying. This section will also look at how ‘sex work’ is defined and understood by the people practicing it. One of the main objectives of the study was to give the participants, men in sex work a space to describe their situations and their understanding of sex work. It is important to understand sex work from the lenses of those who are practicing it and also the processes and negotiations that go behind it.

3.1.1 Self perception and Sexual Identity

Identity becomes an important point of reference for understanding individuals in a given context. The process of identifying and personalizing identity is perhaps even more important factor because that contributes largely in the construction of self. Self perception of sexuality is amongst all one of the key factors that is responsible for the ‘label/identity’ one applies to self. In the given context, it is important to differentiate between sexuality and sexual identity.

‘Sexuality’ has been defined and perceived in various ways. Kessler (1996) has argued that how sexuality is viewed through an essentialist lens which claims that every individual has something innate which is the core of essence of one’s sexuality and one’s sexual orientation. The constructivists on the other hand have defined it as a product of social construction where the environment constructs an individual; not forgetting that the environment is also worked upon by various social, cultural and
historical forces acting on it in given time and space. L. Ramakrishan, (2006) has discussed that making distinction while discussing sexuality is terms of behaviour, attraction and identity is important for queer politics and discourses on public health. Attraction will refer to who an individual is attracted to, hence the gender or sex of the other person becomes important to define one’s sexuality. Similarly sexual behaviour will refer to who an individual is having sex with, here again the sex (sex refers to act of sex). Here also, the sex and gender of the other person is important.

The notion of sexual identity on the other hand is more loosely understood and hence it is on the onus of an individual to define. The sexual identity for an individual could be based on how one perceives sexuality as and how an individual wants to be perceived by other or to what group one wants to associate with. Hence one’s sense of sexual identity in that case, may or may not be in coherence with one’s sexual behaviour, rather depends on one’s self concept, comfort with labels, and the social context one is placed in. Rust (2011) has argued that in this cultural reconstruction individuals have started viewing sexuality as an identity, and hence those lacking a sexual identity are seen as deficient. Those who do not fit into the categories and created experimental spaces and have redefined categories to suit them.

This section would explore the various meanings participants have attached to labels and identities and also the reasons for applying the labels. Here, the researcher would like to define the sexual identities as social and political categories. This would also provide a base to understand the varied range of meanings and perceptions that the participants have attached to sexual identities and sometimes have also redefined them. In socio- political understanding the term ‘straight’ would refer to a person whose sexual attraction and behaviour is towards a member of opposite sex. The term ‘gay’ would refer to a person whose attraction and behaviour is towards a member of same sex, while ‘bisexual’ will refer to a person whose attraction and behaviour is towards both the sexes or genders.

“Straight... it means that mostly my liking is in women, but as I told you that I also do it with male; the attraction is lesser towards males, but not the same as it is towards women.” (Amit, 22 years old)
Every person may have his or her own reasons to associate any identity with self and it will also depend on how the person wants to be perceived by self and people around. Amit views himself as a ‘straight’ person depending on his sexual attraction, which he finds more towards women than men. As discussed above, sexual attraction is seen as one of the most common markers by individuals to base their sense of sexuality. Though Amit admits his attraction (lesser degree) towards men and also there is an evident presence of sexual behaviour with men (due to sex work), still he prefers to use the word ‘straight’ to identify self rather than any other sexual identity. ‘Straight’ also is a socially desirable identity and given the presence of strong homophobia that surrounds the society, it is not very difficult to understand why would one use this identity. Also since his first sense of sexual being, his attraction and behaviour was with a woman, it is likely that he continues with that sense of being, by using ‘straight’ as an identity.

“...basically I am a bisexual, but I enjoy sex more with men. I can sleep with a girl as well.” (James, 25 years old)

“I am a bisexual. I do with both males and females, both relation and sex. ....I am attracted towards both men and women. I never had sex with a woman” (Abdul, 24 years old)

James and Abdul have defined themselves as ‘bisexual’. Drawing from the last quote, here also there is a strong influence of ‘sexual attraction and behaviour’ as factors to consider one’s sexual identity. James has mentioned the enjoying sex more with men, but the ability to have sex with a woman has be considered while basing his sense of sexual identity; while Abdul who has never had any sexual experience with a woman, still bases his sense of identity on the premise of sexual attraction which is towards both men and women, and believes that is able to have sexual relations with both as well. There is an acceptance of sexual attraction/ behaviour towards both the genders, unlike the Amit while defining one’s sexual identity. What is interesting to note here also, is the fact that ability to have sex with a woman is an important consideration, including the evident sexual behaviour with men. In terms of desirability as discussed
earlier also, ability to have sexual relation with women is still considered more desirable in a homophobic environment, where one get’s more space to negotiate.

“I am a bisexual: I can have sex with both men and women. Gay means those who are only interested in men, and they walk in a way that you can make out that he is ‘kothi’. You can also make out bisexual but mostly they look straight. Straight means that they look ‘panthi’, ‘boy’, ‘not- gay’ and bisexual is interested in both men and women.” (Dinesh, 20 years old)

Similar to the last two accounts, Dinesh also identify himself as a bisexual person. Dinesh has based his sense of identity on behaviour and identifies as a bisexual person. The interesting part in his narrative is the impetus he has given to the behaviour which is stereotypically associated with sexual identities and has used that understanding to discuss his sexual identity. He doesn’t identify as a gay person, as according to him the ‘gay men’ are effeminate in their mannerism and hence can be pointed out in public space while ‘bisexual men’ according to him are more ‘straight’ acting which would qualify as hegemonic understanding of being a man. He also used certain identities which need a little description here, the word ‘Kothi’ is a colloquial term that is used to define a effeminate homosexual man, while the word, ‘Panthi’ would refer to a masculine man who though has sex with men but is believed to have primary attraction towards women. The stereotypical understanding of labels/identities and the values attached to them are also important factors that are considered by an individual before applying a label to self. The one which is more acceptable in the society becomes the one which is more desirable.

“I say I am gay. Gay means gay, one who likes boys, has sex with boys, talks and shares with boys and more...” (Rohan, 20 years old)

“Gay, when people do male to male sex...” (Sanjay, 24 years old)
In the given narratives by Rohan and Sanjay, both have identified self as gay person. Here there is a consistency in terms of basing one’s sexual identity on one’s behaviour. Sexual behaviour in these cases can also be regarded being accompanied with sexual attraction, as there is a sense of identification with term ‘gay’. Rohan has mentioned about the aspects of being in a relationship with another man while basing his understanding of what it means to be gay. ‘Gay’ here then would not only mean having sexual activity with men, but also the ability to carry out a relationship with a man where emotions and feelings are also involved.

Sexual identity is a self defined concept and is in coherence with one’s perception of self. The participants based on one’s level of acceptability of one’s attraction and behaviour towards men or women have identified as gay, straight or bisexual. It was not surprising to see that in the given social and cultural understanding around same-sex behaviour that few have chosen either to ignore the sexual activity with men or have included the ability to perform with a woman as markers of their perception of their sexuality. With given set of realities where one lives, social desirability cannot be ignored; but what is important to observe is irrespective of having male clients as the biggest consumers of their bodies, these male sex workers may or may not identify with sexual identities that are based on same-sex behaviour.

3.1.2 Defining sex work

Men who sell sex based on their understanding of the client networks, markets and exchange of money define what ‘sex work’ means to them. There were a lot of terms that were used by the participants to talk about selling sex, like, ‘sex work’, ‘line’, ‘escort services’, ‘commercial line’, ‘massage services’. These words though are coherent in terms of their basic premise which is ‘sex for exchange which can be money or gifts’, but each term also carries a route in which this transaction takes place, which depends on either mode of getting a client or services provided or profits to self. The reasons for entering into sex work and its importance in generating money are also discussed as issues that are important while defining sex work.
“I don’t know much, but I think it is an easy way to earn money, very easy way. You just need to go and sleep with someone for an hour and you will get 10000 or 15000 per session. So I think it is an easy way to earn money.” (James, 25 years old)

James observes sex work or selling sex as a means to make money and easy living. The easiness with which money can be made in sex work in comparison to other means and the time required makes it a profitable opportunity for both the participants. Given the market in which one operates, earning money is directly proportional to one’s education and skill sets. Sex work in that regard can also be seen as an easier way to make more money in lesser time in comparison to other job options. Also to mention that ‘making money’ is the premise of sex work and hence individuals enter it either to solve their current financial situations or see sex work as easier way to afford their lifestyle. With degree in post graduation, and earlier salary of forty thousand, James believes that sex work can be an easier option for him to sustain himself in this city and without changing his lifestyle. Though the word, ‘easy money’ has been used a lot of time in the narrative, still one need to be cautious that sex work can also be exhaustive in terms of maintaining it as a secret/ hidden employment from others, the process of finding and negotiation with agents and clients and fear of police and cheaters, can make sex work a difficult and risky choice one makes.

“The line... it means escort service, no one openly says sex... so people who are in this line they understand this word, so when you tell ‘escort’ they understand, and they ask are you top, bottom, versatile or bisexual or straight. So if you just say escort service they understand.” (Abdul, 24 years old)

The above statement hints at the hidden nature and underground operation of sex work. Abdul has mentioned about ‘line’ referring it to ‘escort services’. Escort services as a terminology will also mean the class of the client one is referring to and the money exchange that is happening. Escort services are hired at a more expensive rate and by that logic are hired by a particular class of client cohort. Usage of sexual labels like ‘top’, ‘bottom’, ‘versatile’, ‘bisexual’, and ‘straight’ also refers to a variety of options that are made available in the sex market and the consumers for that.
‘Bisexual’ and ‘straight’ are the sexual labels that refer to sex workers’ ability to perform with men or women or both. ‘Top’, ‘bottom’ and ‘versatile’ are the positions in sexual acts taken up by the sex worker. ‘Top’ refers to a person who penetrates; ‘bottom’ refers to the one who is penetrated; and ‘versatile’ is the person who penetrates and can be penetrated as well. When Abdul mentioned that the client would know what it means by ‘escort services’, there is also an understanding of knowledge and language which is taken in account. People who are interested and are into buying sex, in that regard will also be well versed with the terminology that is used in this trade. So depending on what the client wants to seek, he may ask for an escort who can give those services.

“Sex work...it is with clients. In sex sometime we do oral sex, sometime it is just spending time. There is an exchange of money, sometime gifts also like laptop, mobile.” (Rohan, 20 years old)

“When client come we do sex for money...sometime also get gifts. When there is a profit we go. There we do body massage and sex, well body massage is only an excuse” (Sanjay, 24 years old)

The above statements from Rohan and Sanjay talk about the exchange of money in sex work and also an exchange of ‘gifts’ that might take place. Rohan in the statement mentions type of sex that is sometime asked by the client to perform and also ‘spending time’ which can be requested. Sex work in that regard, may also be about spending time with client which may or may not include sex. While Sanjay has talked about ‘massage’ as the garb under which sex work operates. Since seeking massage is still considered as a reasonable, non-questioned service largely, hence under the pretext of massage, sex can be bought. It is easier for pimps/agents to give ads in newspapers and web pages for ‘massages’ as soliciting sex in India remains illegal. And also it is easier for clients to seek sex in the name of massage without any defamation. As a market technique, ‘massage’ seems like an intelligent way to make the trade happen in public arena.
3.2 Masculinity, Body and Sexuality

This section would explore what forms of bodies are considered as desirable, and what men in sex work do in order to attain such body proto-types. It will look at various markers of desirability that are embodied by men in sex work, and how they continue to sell their bodies in the market. It will also discuss the inter-linkage between body, sexuality and masculinity of the men in sex work. This section will look into the market that is created where male bodies are found desirable, appealing and are celebrated. This market has seen commodification and objectification of male bodies and an audience is created who enjoys these bodies and is ready to pay for them. In a very consumerist understanding these celebrated and deemed fit, ‘male bodies’ are created as a proto-type of desired bodies. Social and economical changes in the society, has made certain women coming from privileged backgrounds as consumers of male bodies and services. And more importantly these male bodies are appreciated and availed for services by both gay and straight identified men. Men, like in female sex trade, in male sex trade also remain the biggest consumers.

3.2.1 Body, Desirability and Market

There is evidently a booming market for male bodies. Advertisements, films, modelling, etc. have created new sensibilities and audiences who appreciate male bodies on-screen. The underwear advertisements have established that women sitting in front of TV sets are also potential consumers, in addition to the gay audiences which would enjoy and appreciate such ads. The market has not only created space where male bodies can be celebrated, it has also laid down rules of the game. The market has defined ‘attractiveness’ and ‘desirability’ of certain kind of male bodies. There is a proto-type of male bodies that are desirable. The men in sex work do not remain out of this ambit of desires and market. The business which takes place on body as a site, the rules of market apply here as well. Male sex workers negotiate the market terms and attempt to compete with others in business.

"Without personality there is nothing in this world. One should look smart. If you are going somewhere you should get shave done; shaving is necessary, hair should look nice. For example I am going to get a client, so body should look good... personality, should wear tight fitting t-shirt. The person from front should feel attracted. ...always wear fitting clothes. I don’t get waxing done. (Amit, 22 years old)"
“...this is something which I tell everyone, ‘dikhoge to bikoge, iss field mein to aisa hi hai’ (if you look well, you will sell well! looks matter in this field). So we even have to take care about clothes and all. You should look classy and decent in clothes, you can’t look shabby and rowdy or over funky. Because a lot of people don’t even like that. Decent and casual, basically you should look decent, classy, it should look from a class. He should think that this man has a class.” (James, 25 years old)

Amit and James have mentioned about ‘personality’ and ‘looks’ as important and necessary markers in sex work. The two have mentioned that the outer appearance should be such that the opposite person must feel attracted, and that would also involve dressing well. James focuses on ‘looks’ where they explain that the outer appearance and looks are the prime objects of attraction, as that is the first thing a person can see in a public space. In the same breath, Amit and James mention about the kind of clothes and grooming in terms of hair and beard that needs to be done before one makes self available. These are also considered as markers of male desirability.

“I go to the gym, get massage at times, and follow a diet to maintain my look. Once, I got a facial. I take out my body hair myself with a blade. I wear formal clothes to attract clients. I follow my routine of workout. I don’t have any pimples. I use and continue only one face wash. When I was working I used to do body building also, so I thought I should make use of my body.” (Abdul, 24 years old)

“I get a shave done, apply powder and perfume...wear shoes, jeans and goggles. I get facial done once in a month. Also get bleach, eye-brows made and waxing” (Sanjay, 24 years old)

Abdul and Sanjay have put more emphasis on bodies and their desirability. On one hand we have Abdul who is a gym goer and emphasises on working out, but at the same time also mentions taking care of skin by using a face wash. He makes it clear that he keeps his body fit and in shape so it can be sold in the market. While on the other hand, we have Sanjay who resorts to regular facials, bleach, eye brows and waxing as ways to make his body look desirable and attractive. He is the one who takes more care of skin rather than shape. The varied range of body engagements one
delves in also talks about the market for that varied range of bodies. There will be gym goers and parlour goers, although this boundary is not a strict one. There is also a relation between one’s sexual identity and perception, and the kind of body one would like to have to carry out that image. Since Abdul, as discussed earlier, recognises self as a bisexual person and wants to have a girlfriend, he chose to have a gym toned, fit and in-shape body. Sanjay who identifies self as a gay person is ready to challenge all the masculinity texts and rewrite it for self by resorting to parlour services. So in order to carry out image of a bisexual and gay person, one grooms one’s body accordingly.

“As I told you I do so much sex, with males and also girlfriend; so I might get infections, so as I told you anything may happen, but I always use condom. And after going home, I take a bath with dettol soap, will wash my face. And also since I do so much, lose energy, so body will also get weak, will get weakness, so it is fixed that daily I go to gym. And then I also eat bananas and eggs, daily gym is fixed. So I take proper care of my body.” (Amit, 22 years old)

“I get waxing done, and take care of my looks. I use Dove soap and face wash. I drink juice everyday in morning and milk in night. I need to maintain my body. Sometime also get facial done.” (Rohan, 20 years old)

The above statements from Amit and Rohan talk about not only the physical appearance of the body that needs to be maintained but also the strength and health. Both the participants have mentioned the need to have healthy bodies. Amit mentions that how he uses condom and also an antiseptic soap to get rid of infections. He also stresses that a healthy life style in terms of working out in a gym and good food habits are required to care of the body. Rohan also talks about that how taking care of health by monitoring the food intake is equally important as to taking care of skin and seeking parlour services.

“In sex work how much good you look and how much you can satisfy your client, you get paid accordingly. Mostly they like that you should look slim and smart’. (Dinesh, 20 years old)
In the above statements of Dinesh describes the trend of what is expected out of him by client in sex work. Dinesh holds the view that men in sex work, as their earning depends on sex, need to be good at satisfying their partners sexually. And more importantly as one gets attracted initially based on one’s physical appearance therefore ‘good looks’ matter a lot. He believes that good looks and good performance in bed are the key reasons on which rates/ money are/ is negotiated.

3.2.2 Masculinity, Sexuality and Pleasure

Men in sex work are often seen grappling with their sexuality and sense of their gendered being. There is not always coherence in one’s sexual behaviour and identity/perception one has of self. There may also be a resistance to identify with certain groups or identities based on the stereotypes and stigma attached with them. As discussed in earlier section, by making male bodies available for objectification, masculinity has also experienced changes and shifts. This section will explore how one negotiates with their sense of masculinity in sex work. It will look at the various meanings attached with sexual behaviour and body in sex work; and then how it translates in their gender performance. Male sex workers place satisfaction and expectation of clients higher than their own, hence sometimes the sex worker has to negotiate his gender performance according to the client’s demand.

“...I do male to male also. But I like more with women. With gay it is different, you can make out about them. With gay, people get to know. If they go somewhere people can figure out that he is gay by observing and they are into these things. What happens is, if we talk about gay, wherever he goes he will keep staring so the other person/third person can figure out that he is gay.

I never felt that MSM are that (not men enough). I also do it, sir. Never felt that, I also enjoy it.” (Amit, 22 years old)

“I look straight, others look gay. Their way of talking, walking is different and by looking at their face one can make out that they are gay. When I walk and talk I don’t look gay. Even though I have sex with men and get attracted to them people think I am a normal person.
...straight means I look like normal men; others have a different way of walking and talking. I want to look normal and I don’t want people to know. I don’t want my friends to know. Nowadays people ask for massage but then they want to have sex.

I want to have an affair with a girl. I don’t like at all when men hold hands and walk.” (Abdul, 24 years old)

Here we have two very interesting narratives by Amit and Abdul who identify self as ‘straight’ and ‘bisexual’ respectively. Amit is very clear that although he does engage in sexual behaviour with men, he likes it more with women. Moreover he also portrays a stereotypical image of a gay person, which is probably also the reason for him not wanting to associate with that identity. He talks about gay men, as a homogenous group who by their appearance are more likely to be recognized as ‘gay’ persons in a public space. Appearance here would mean, not only the way they dress but also the way they carry out their selves in public spaces which could be effeminate behaviour and also staring at men, both being not acceptable behaviours of men. Abdul elaborates on the issue and talks about the mannerism of a gay person are such that he can be distinguished in a public space. While he himself believes that he carries out a ‘straight and normal’ image by acting the way men are supposed to behave. He is also averse to the idea of men holding men’s hands. The given description of a ‘gay’ man in public arena is a picture sketched of a stereotypical effeminate gay man; such a portrayal leaves less room for varied gender expressions exhibited by same-sex practising individuals. This also raises the issue of gender phobia which is experienced more than same-sex phobia. People practising same-sex behaviour might not associate or accept non-conformity of gender. In a public space, conforming to masculinity norms will give space to a lot of men practicing same-sex behaviour to go un-noticed. It is this same internalized stigma that sometimes can make an individual more averse to people whom they fear to be clubbed with hence stigmatized.

“I don’t go to parlour, so me and my friend he is also in sex work, we ask this girl to come home. So she does threading, bleach and facial; and waxing. Yes I get waxing.

No I don’t go to gym, I think the kind of body I have now is good. Sometime what happens is I need to also play passive role. So in passive part, they like someone who is slim or average types. So if I get gym build, then there are some who don’t like that,
so I think it’s better to look normal. I don’t like passive part but for money I have to do it.”  (James, 25 years old)

In comparison to earlier narratives of gym-toned bodies, James brings out the market value of non-gym-toned body. James takes parlour services and is not a gym-goer. He points out that in sex work, one has to look and maintain body in a way that is deemed fit by the client. Since there is no one client prototype, the demands from clients may also differ. In order to fulfil all sorts of client, a ‘normal’ body as quoted by him, a non-gym-toned body is better. He mentions that clients who are looking for passive partners (one who gets penetrated) might not like to have one with a gym-toned body hence an average body helps to cater to both roles of active (who penetrates) and passive partner. Here, one is also seen negotiating with one’s sense of masculinity which is flexible and depends on the client's demand.

“I get wax because sometimes client do not like hairy men and sometimes I need to cross-dress also. I wear tight dress and apply mascara. I like wearing western clothes while cross-dressing. I do it once in a month, go to party and disco and sometime client ask me to come cross-dressed. They have my pictures and they select the one they like. I get a lot of clients if I am cross-dressed. She-male look is really liked by people”  (Rohan, 20 years old)

“I get waxing because some men don’t like hairy men. And it looks clean and fair. Person from front shouldn’t see hair and go away; and sex also gets better.”  (Sanjay, 24 years old)

The last two narratives by Rohan and Sanjay talks about ‘waxing’ as way to make their bodies desirable to the clients. Waxing is mostly associated with women, but here men in order to attract and make bodies sellable to other men are seen waxing their bodies. Rohan and Sanjay have clearly mentioned that there are clients who do not like hairy men and hence they have to go for waxing to fit the market requirements. What is also interesting to note here is that some of the male clients demand men with waxed bodies, which again delves into the whole arena of masculinity. Waxed body has always been associated with female sexual appeal and desirability, men wanting the same from other men would then hint towards the
gender equation that is being negotiated in sex transaction. This is reconfirmed with Rohan who talks about cross-dressing as a means to attract more clients. For him waxing also becomes important here as he has to cross-dress also. Looking at the demand of waxed bodies and cross-dressers, the construction of gender of same-sex service providers can also be made. Since there could be male clients like sex workers who do not identify or associate with any same-sex identities; for them it becomes easier to convince self that the other person they are having sex with is more effeminate and comply by hetero-normative norms. There is also an attraction towards opposite gender, which might be a reason for expecting the partner to be more like a woman. Another important issue here is that all the three participants who are seen more comfortable with waxing their bodies and self (against masculinity norm) are the ones who identify themselves as gay persons. Hence, gay identity in itself can be seen challenging gender norms and strict boundaries of masculinity.

“I have got penetrated only once. I was having sex with a guy, and I penetrated him and then he wanted to do it to me, he was bisexual so I let him. It felt weird, that I was doing him and now he is doing me. I was feeling a little odd. Gay people get anal sex and bisexual don’t. With bisexual they just want to do sex so doesn’t matter who is the person.

I feel if I do it once, I will do it always. And then I might also get those feelings that I want to get penetrated. ... First time it felt odd but I liked it; but then I won’t ever do it again. If I do it often then I will also become like them (gay) and I will also behave and think of only men. And I don’t know if I would want to have sex with women. If I start enjoying getting penetrated then why will I go to women.

If I am in a relationship with a guy, and he is gay then I will do him (penetrate), in gay relationship the kothi gets penetrated by panthi. If the guy is bisexual they I might get it done from him.” (Dinesh, 20 years old)

The above excerpt from Dinesh’s narrative is interesting to look at the inter-linkages between sexual behaviour, sexual identity and masculinity. He has linked identity with sexual behaviour. For him, getting penetrated is linked to being gay or homosexual. Similarly a bisexual person who apparently is attracted to and has sex with both sexes – men and women doesn’t get penetrated. With these two premises, he finds it difficult to negotiate with his sexual behaviour when his sexual identity is that of a bisexual person. In simplistic understanding as he puts it, for a bisexual person the sex of the other person doesn’t matter and he would penetrate anyone –
man or woman. But with the same simplistic understanding of Dinesh, a gay man would mean a person who would get penetrated by any other man. The logical conclusion of this is what he later adds to, that, penetration in his case is possible only if the other person is also bisexual. He believes that there is no sex possible between two gay men, hence to be in a sexual relationship one needs to be a kothi (effeminate homosexual man) and other needs to be a panthi (masculine man, often identifies self as a straight person). By the same logic he doesn’t feel that there is a possibility that he can be penetrated if he is in a relationship with a gay person, but it is only possible if the other person is also bisexual. That is also one of the most important reasons that the only time when the he got penetrated was with a bisexual person. As being a bisexual himself, it is only possible for him to be penetrated by another man who is not gay, basically bisexual.

There is a strict definition of bisexual and gay and who penetrates whom according to which he operates. There are two important things that need discussion here, as in why he would not want to get penetrated. Firstly, Dinesh here acknowledges that he is a bisexual person. Being a bisexual person amounts to having penetrative sex with both men and women and self never getting penetrated by a man. Secondly, he has a fear that after getting penetrated by a man he might start liking it and might want to have it done always. According to him this would not be right as it may amount to him becoming like one of the gay persons who always want to get penetrated. And this also might impact his sexual behaviour with women, as after starting to like being penetrated he would prefer to have sex more with men than with women.

By this role reversal in sexual practice and getting penetrated, Dinesh feels a threat towards his masculinity also. Being penetrated, which is seen as a gay or effeminate thing to do, he feels would translate into his developing a liking for the same and this in turn would result into him becoming a gay person. As a bisexual man, he believes that he is engaging into penetrative sex with a man or woman where his masculinity doesn’t get questioned as he is the penetrator. On the other hand, being penetrated, which should not happen but if at all it does happen, he thinks is possible with only another bisexual person, because gay men only get penetrated. He has not only clearly defined people of what identities engage in what sexual behaviours, but also has projected his fear of getting converted into a gay person if he starts enjoying getting penetrated. The threat to his masculinity by getting converted into a gay person is
portrayed in his narrative where he would still adhere to bisexuality and continue the sexual role where he is the penetrator.

Male sex workers have taken up various body projects to fit the market criteria of desired bodies. Similar to the entertainment industry the sex market demands for bodies that are considered as desirable and appealing. Those who practice individual-based soliciting at streets, public places, pubs and parties have shared a greater importance of appearance as a method to attract clients. A range of body embodiments have been taken up by the participants to make their bodies more desirable and appealing. To have a gym-built body is desired more among the straight and some bisexual identified participants. Apart from the ones who are not accepting of their same-sex sexuality, most of the others take beauty parlour services like facial, massages, bleach, etc. to look appealing. But only the gay identified and few bisexual identified participants were seen getting their body waxed. Gym-toned bodies was seen as a stereotypical body desired by clients who are looking for active partners, while waxed chest and slim bodies were seen as desired by the clients looking for passive and versatile partners. Some participants also viewed non-gym toned bodies as more marketable as they can serve both the active and passive partners seeking clients. Non-gay identified participants have given description of a ‘gay’ man in public arena as that of a stereotypical effeminate gay man; such a portrayal leaves less room for varied gender expressions exhibited by same-sex practising individual. They are also seen being more uncomfortable with being associated with gay identity or group. There are certain roles in sex which are considered as non-masculine and hence the non-gay identified participants are seen reluctant to practice them. There is lesser flexibility in terms of sex roles, body projects, and gender performance that is projected in the narratives of men who are non-accepting of same-sex sexuality.

3.3 Negotiations and Pleasure in sex work

Sex work involves trading of body in exchange of money. The client has the power over the body for a decided period of time. This section will discuss the negotiations that are made by the male sex worker in that sexual transaction. Negotiation does not refer to compromises made by the male sex workers, but processes where the sex worker tries to have arrangement of the terms of the transaction or agreement with the
client. There are some negotiations that happen outside the bed-room and some inside the bed-room. Those that take place at the site of sexual transaction are the ones where the sex workers display their negotiating skills.

“I take money after sex, because if I have gone to his house, then if he doesn’t give us money. He stays in his colony area, so if doesn’t give money; so after work is done if he doesn’t pay, we are not going to be silent about it and even if we go to hotel, the client cares about his reputation.” (James, 25 years old)

Most of the participants have reported that the money exchange happens at the end of the sex with the client. They do not prefer taking the money before the act of sex. The sex workers do not feel threatened by the idea that they might not be paid by the client post sex. The reasons they mentioned for taking money later are that of building trust in the client, so they may be called again by the client. Also they feel that in a situation like this there is always a surety that the client will pay them at the end. Since most of the sex acts happen either at client’s house or a hotel, it is the reputation of the client which is at stake. Hence the sex worker feels comfortable demanding the price for sex post the act.

“Sometime what happens is I need to also play passive role. So in passive part, they like someone who is slim or average types. So if I get gym build, then there are some who don’t like that, so I think it’s better to look normal.” (James, 25 years old)

“Some people don’t like Muslims, so they say no. I take a different name and go to people who don’t like Muslims. If I get rejected, I fell very awkward and get angry and cranky. I get angry if I go through an agent and the client does not pay me.” (Abdul, 24 years old)

In the given account by the participants the role of identities has been discussed in relation to sex work. Since the sex work happens for money, one’s own choices in terms of their identities, roles, etc get limited. James discusses that how there are times that the client would expect the sex worker to play a passive role. In such cases, if the sex worker is gym built he might be rejected by the client. Hence the sex worker chooses to have a body type that can fit for both active and passive roles. Here the sex
workers own identity in terms of who he identifies self (top or bottom) and how he wants his body to look then get negotiated by the norms of the market. The second participant describes that how he being a Muslim can be a reason for rejection from some clients. He describes that he feels angry if he is sent by an agent and client rejects him. The idea of rejection because of his Muslim identity is reduced by the participant by taking a Hindu name. In our culture where social stratifier like religion is considered important, there are clients who do not want to engage in an act of sex with a person from another religion, this is also explained by the presence of Islamophobia in the society. The sex worker in such situation prefers to change his name to reduce the possibility of being rejected and also to reach out to a wider client group for purely economic reasons.

3.2.4 Is there ‘pleasure’ in sex work?

Sex is considered to be a pleasurable act engaging in sexual arousal, acts and orgasm. The point is for whom sex is pleasurable in sex work. Sex work as it is defined becomes a sexual contract, a transaction between two adults for exchange of body and money. The sex worker gives control over his body to another person in exchange of money. The site of sex work which is clearly drawn with the economics of the act and power positioning of the client versus the sex worker is usually not a very pleasure seeking site for the sex worker. This section will discuss what the sex worker think of pleasure in sex work, and what are the ways in which the male sex workers find sexual pleasure.

“...yes, there was no attraction towards men. There is enjoyment, but not the same as I told you that is with women. But yes I do enjoy.

...without money exchange, only 1-2 times I had sex. That is like, I have a friend, and he asks do you like me from heart.....so we went to lodge 1-2 times.” (Amit, 22 years old)

In the above statements Amit describes that how he doesn’t enjoy much having sex with a man as compared to with a woman. But in sex work the biggest client group that is available to a sex worker is that of men. Although the part of having sex with
another man doesn’t seem very pleasurable to him, nevertheless he engages in sexual
behaviour with men in exchange of money. He also states that he does go for un-paid
sex with another man with whom he finds pleasure. Though the frequency of unpaid
sex becomes lesser for men in sex work, but still that remain those spaces where sex
worker willingly participate in sexual acts for reasons limiting to pleasure and
satisfaction.

“Sometime if the client is of our choice we feel satisfied, otherwise no. But I don’t get
to have unpaid sex also, a lot of time gets consumed in this. And anyway I have to do
so much sex because of this that I hardly feel to do it outside.” (Rohan, 20 years old)

“Client is not of our choice and there is no feeling also towards him but have to do
sex anyway. I don’t enjoy much. While doing sex, we also get sometime satisfied.”
(Dinesh, 20 years old)

Rohan and Dinesh have mentioned the possibility of pleasure in sex with the client
though it is rare. They have discussed the incidents where the client was of their
choice and they enjoyed it. Dinesh describes that even though the client is not of our
choice there is an inbuilt element of satisfaction that starts coming when one have sex.
He says that in the process of having sex with the client whom initially he wasn’t
attracted to, he admits that he does feel pleasure in the act of sex.

“I do unpaid sex also. It depends, say I have an account on PR (a gay sex dating
website) and I like someone. See here in sex work it is not about our liking, the one
whom we don’t like, we have to do with him also. But then sometime you feel that I
want to do with someone who is of my choice.” (James, 25 years old)

James elaborates the part of having sex for pleasure. He describes that in sex work the
client is not of his choice or liking still since he is paying for the sex, the sex worker
has to have sex with him. The site of sexual transaction which is grounded in
economics and not satisfaction, gives no room for pleasure to be expected by the male
sex workers. The participants state that apart from sex work there are times when he
would want to have sex with someone who is of his choice for purely pleasure seeking. In such times, he uses internet websites not to solicit but cruise to find partners for sex who is of his choice. The participants here demarcate between sex work and sex for pleasure, and since in sex work there is no element of choice there is no pleasure. Hence for one’s own satisfaction and pleasure the sex worker chooses to find partners of their choice for unpaid sex.

### 3.2.5 Feelings

This section will discuss the feelings and emotion quotient attached to sex work of the participants. Sex work is attached with both taboo and money. It has been discussed that how the entry point for most of the men in sex work has been because of such situations in life where they needed money. With the stigma attached to sex work in the society, and also same- sex behaviour which is the largest part of the client system also evokes emotions in male sex worker. In the statements mentioned below of Amit and Dinesh, it can be seen that both of them feel positive about their work as sex workers. Amit seems to enjoy working as a sex worker as long as the family is ignorant about it. He states that he tells his parents that he is going for massage whenever he has a client to serve. The money aspect of the sex work and serving clients on regular basis makes one used- to the work. The participant # 6 describes that how he enjoys having sex and attaching work to something he likes makes him perform much better. Hence he can do much better in sex work, where his passion is also his work. He also mentions that sex work is an easy way to earn money. The economic aspect of the sex work in a way takes care of the emotional dilemma one has about their sex work. Rohan enjoy the part of the sex work where they get paid. The money aspect of sex work seems to compensate the feelings of guilt which initially comes in sex work.

“There was a time when I used to feel bad thinking about this. But now I enjoy my work, my clients are nice.” (Rohan, 20 years old)

Abdul has shared his dilemmas, fears and anxiety about his work. He mentions that how in the starting he used to feel bad and guilty for selling his body for money. He
also describes that how he comes from a well-to-do family, and certain behaviour like this are not expected from him. Abdul is a management graduate and has worked in corporate, but after losing his job in order to sustain self and support his lifestyle, sex work seemed like an easy option. He also shares his fears and anxieties related to sex work. He seems concerned that what if something goes wrong or he ends up being with police, it would also stain his family name and people will also get to know about it. He is also scared that there are so many diseases and infections he poses self to every time he goes to a stranger for sex in exchange for money. The participant is concerned about his health and reputation, which both seem to be at stake when he is working as a sex worker.

In this section on pleasure and emotions in sex work stated by the participants is that for the client, and in case of couple clients usually for the male clients. The participants in general have felt negative emotions like guilt and shame when they entered into sex work. The participants who were not comfortable with same-sex sexuality have displayed more and continued negative emotions attached to sex work and same-sex behaviour. In their current situation as a sex worker, most of the participants seem comfortable and accepting of their roles, though fear of getting infected or encountering any troubling situations have been listed. The participants with same-sex based identity have also displayed their desire of continuing with sex work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>NAME (changed)</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>PLACE OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>STAY IN MUMBAI WITH</th>
<th>SEXUAL IDENTITIES</th>
<th>CLIENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amit</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Stays with family</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bhopal</td>
<td>Stays alone</td>
<td>Bisexual (more attracted towards men)</td>
<td>Mostly men, couple clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Abdul</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Stays with family</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Men, and couple clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rohan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Stays with family</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Only men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sanjay</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>Stays with friends</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Mostly men, couple clients</td>
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Table 1: Profile of participants
CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study has taken various forms starting from its conceptualization to its final completion. On one hand it has successfully met the objectives and on the other has opened new arenas for discourse. It has asked much more questions than the answers it tried providing. In more than one way it has brought ‘sex work’ as an entry point for critically examining social structures, norms and institutions while carving out a space for itself. The study has tried to document the voices of people who live by ‘male sex worker’ as one of the many reality. It has captured the insecurities, vulnerabilities, anxieties, and pride that become a part of an individual who has continuously negotiated and hidden one’s aspect of sexuality and work. The aim of the study was to give space to men in sex workers to define and talk about their personal experiences and engagement with it, and also discuss the various ways in which bodies, desires, behaviours and gender gets constructed in sex market. This chapter will look at the trajectory this study followed,

The first chapter has provided a basic and much holistic understanding of male sex work. It sketches its understanding from the international perspective and moves to its perception in India. The cultural, social, historical, political and legal dimensions of same-sex and sex work have been presented. It also has included review of literature both international and national to analyse the gaps in order to base the rational for this research.

The second chapter is on Methodology and it begins with laying down the rationale for this study. The chapter has included the research objectives, research questions which this study entitles to answer, methods and techniques of sampling and data collection; plan for data analysis; and scope and limitations of the study.

The third chapter is a more important chapter; here we get to hear the voices of men in sex work. The first section of this chapter dealt with understanding various labels. The study presented that only half the number of participants identify self as ‘gay’ persons while the others as either ‘straight’ or ‘bisexual’. There was also a strong emphasis to the ability to have sex with a woman that was reasoned as one of markers
of their straight or bisexual identity. The participants also helped to define ‘male sex work’ which was largely seen as a transaction of sex for money and gifts. There were a number of ways in which clients are seek, it may vary from being in ‘commercial line’ by either soliciting or getting contacts through agents; through ‘massage’ contacts; as ‘escort services’. Sex work was also expressed as an easy way of making money. The second section of this chapter dealt with issues of body, desirability, masculinity and sexuality in sex work. It was discussed how there is a need for body projects in terms of seeking parlour services or gym in order to make bodies desirable, attractive and appealing. There was also a lot of emphasis on personality and appearance. There was also a mention of taking care of bodies and keeping it healthy in sex work. There was also a discussion on the gender aspect of male sex workers. There was a resistance from the ones who do not identify with any same-sex identities against ‘gay identity’. Non-gay identified participants were also seen maintaining the fact that they are different from the ‘gay-identified’; though they might do same things in sex, in terms of their gender expression they would prefer to look masculine in a hetero-normative way. It was also discussed that how in sex work, in order to fit the demands of market one is sometime required to wax their bodies or cross-dress. This form of gender non-conformity came largely through the voices of gay-identified male sex workers. The presence of hetero-normative forms of desires in between same-sex partners was also discussed.

To summarise, the study at one hand has successfully met the objectives and on the other hand has opened a range of new areas for discourse. It has put ‘sex work’ under the scrutiny of larger political forces of economy, gender and social desirability. It also establishes male sex worker as a non-homogenous group that differs in their sexual identities, gender performance, role in sex, mode of operation, body projects and the client system they serve. The relationship among the sex workers, the agents and the clients has also presented points of negotiations, opportunities, limitations and vulnerabilities that define the politics of the market in which this sexual transaction happens.
References:


