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Non-ceremonial gift-exchange among *didis* in Kamathipura

Exploring gift-giving in Asia's largest red-light district

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Abstract

Everyday invisible and hidden non-ceremonial gifts are offered to ease challenges. These gifts create and enhance social bonds as people exchange with those they feel connected to and identify with. By answering the question "*How is gift-giving used by female sex workers (FSWs) in Kamathipura?*" the thesis explores how gift-exchange helps FSWs in Asia's largest red-light district, cope with everyday hardships and how these practices affect their social bonds. Using semi-structured interviews, this study finds that FSWs exchange two types of gifts. The first are non-material in nature, like emotional support, care and knowledge. The others are material gifts like food, money, a means to avoid prison when detained by the police and physical security. A major finding of this study was that FSWs exchange client referrals and warnings about dangerous customers. It was observed that the purpose of exchanging gifts was so that one day, when needed, they may get back the support they once gave. Lastly, these exchanges were found to maintain and strengthen their social bonds. The lack of them, on the contrary, hinders the creation of perdurable social relations. Furthermore, among the women who exchange alliances of care, empathy and protection were found, denoting community spirit.

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Acronyms and key terms

Didi	Sister (hindi)
FSW	Female sex worker
Gharwali	Brothel madam (hindi)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ITPA	Immoral Trafficking and Prevention Act
Khala	Mother's sister (hindi).
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and weddings, are examples of landmark occasions which encourage gift-giving. On a daily basis however, invisible and even hidden non-ceremonial gifts continue to be offered to ease everyday challenges. Examples include caring for old or sick people, advice to friends, rides to someone in need and so on. Hence gifts are clearly "the cement which holds society together" (Thoen, 2006, p. 19), and yet as Vaughan (1997) points out, even if they are a cornerstone of life they are often denied and even ignored.

Typically thought of as a transfer of objects, gifts are proof of social ties (Carrier, 1991; Gupta et al., 2008; Komter, 2007). They have the power to create and enhance bonds by identifying givers, receivers and their mutual existence (Skageby, 2010), since people only give gifts to those they identify and connect with. Having said this, identification and connection are words seldom used to describe the relationships among sex workers. Furthermore, several studies of the sex industry have pointed to how competition, rivalry, mistrust and lack of support and solidarity prevail (Busza, 2004; Dalla, 2002; Devine et al., 2010; Evans and Lambert, 2008; Guha et al. 2012; Kongelf et al., 2015). And yet, in the highly unlikely example of Mumbai, a complex urban environment where female sex workers (FSWs)[1] do not identify with each other due to their diverse backgrounds (Kongelf et al., 2015), I noticed instances of gift giving.[2]

In the case of India, a multitude of research studies and interventions funded by NGO and governmental institutions have focused on HIV prevention and the eradication of human trafficking (Ahmed and Seshu, 2012; Kotiswaran, 2011; Shah, 2014). Unfortunately, the lack of research on the everyday life of FSWs has contributed to narratives portraying them as victims of trafficking or vectors of disease. This portrayal has left other spheres of these FSWs' lives completely ignored. As such there

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[1] FSWs, will be used throughout this thesis. However, at certain points the term 'sex worker(s)' is used without the abbreviation to refer to all kinds of sex workers (female, male, transgender) or whenever reviewing a study where the sex worker's gender was not differentiated.
[2] Initially, this research was envisioned to collect data on instances of support between FSWs. However, during the data analysis, it became clear that the exchange of goods and services in order to support each other had the characteristics of gift-exchange.

is an urgent need to study what is happening on the ground; from understanding how they cope with being sick, needing emotional comfort to needing physical help when dealing with aggressive customers. By doing so, one could arrive at a more nuanced understanding of FSWs' lived experiences and reveal instances of solidarity between them.

Kamathipura is Asia's largest red-light district. It is located in the heart of Mumbai where the majority of the FSWs are migrants without support networks. Adding to the fact that discrimination against women is deeply rooted in the patriarchal society of India (UN, 2014) and that said discrimination intensifies in the case of FSWs (Cornish, 2006; Gezinski and Karandikar, 2013; Shah, 2014), one can understand why the FSWs of Kamathipura represent an interesting case to study gift exchange practices.

1.1. Purpose of the study and research questions

Contrary to stigmatized characterizations of FSWs as morally deficient, I believe that we can grasp a more grounded understanding of the relationships between them by delving into their gift-giving practices. Quoting Mary Douglas (Komter, 2007, p. 101): "The theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity". For this reason, this thesis deploys gift-giving theory in order to explore and analyze how FSWs in Kamathipura use non-ceremonial[3] gift-exchange and how these practices affect their social bonds.[4]

The question guiding this research is the following: *How is gift-giving used by FSW in Kamathipura?* In addressing this main research question, the following sub-questions will also be explored:

- *What type of non-ceremonial gifts are exchanged among FSWs?*
- *How does gift-giving among FSWs affect their social bonds?*

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[3] Refers to gifts offered in everyday circumstances without the prerequisite of a celebration.
[4] Social bonds refer to interpersonal ties FSWs develop by exchanging gifts.

To sum up, the focus of this thesis is on the exchange of objects and services i.e. gifts, not as economic transactions but as a means to cope with everyday hardships, which consequently shape social bonds.

1.2. Contribution to literature

First of all, this thesis contributes to a proliferating body of feminist literature which advocates for a *women's human rights approach* towards sex work.[5] It does so by revealing the agency of FSWs in everyday interactions with their peers. Second, despite its vast academic tradition, gift-giving theory has not been studied within the context of sex work as a means to deal with everyday hardships.[6] In this exploratory study, I contribute to research on how female migrants engage in gift-giving exchanges to overcome everyday hardships by exploring underappreciated nuances in the social bonds between FSWs. And lastly, I contribute to the existing literature on sex work in Kamathipura by revealing important practices of gift-giving among its FSWs.

1.3. Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided in eight parts. In the second chapter, I provide a landscape of sex work in India. The third contains a literature review of previous studies on how sex workers deal with difficulties. In the fourth, I present my theoretical framework based on gift-giving theory. The fifth chapter explores the methodology deployed, which then leads to the sixth chapter reviewing findings and analysis to answer my original research question. Finally, conclusions in chapter seven, with suggestions for future research in chapter eight.

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[5] This feminist stance emerged as a third approach to sex work in response to the two mainstream feminist positions that understand sex work as exploitation and the other as empowerment. This position recognizes that sex work is "marked by a complex interplay of occupational arrangements, power relations, coercion, choice and worker experiences" (Sagade and Forster, 2018 p. 39)

[6] There have indeed been studies using gift-giving theories to study the exchange of sex for other goods (Luke and Kurz, 2002; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001), but not as a practice used between sex workers to overcome everyday hardships.

Chapter 2: Setting the scene

2.1. Sex work legal framework

The legislation addressing and regulating sex work and trafficking in India is the Immoral Trafficking and Prevention Act (ITPA), established in 1986. It states that sex work is not illegal in India but must only be executed within highly specific boundaries. For example, it is illegal to own a brothel, to facilitate the usage of a premises as a brothel, to live on the earnings of prostitution or induce a person to prostitution and to solicit or seduce for the purpose of commercial sex. The ITPA permits policemen to conduct raids without any warrant and for any magistrate to remove a FSW from any place under his/her jurisdiction deeming it a matter of public interest. Furthermore, the law establishes that any female offender can be detained and sent to corrective institutions (Kotiswaran, 2011).[7]

Thus, it could be argued that FSWs occupy a binary position in the eyes of the law; they are either considered victims of brothel owners and pimps in need of rescue or villains who deserve to be chastised and banished. Another issue with this legislation is that it treats victims of human trafficking and women who choose to engage in sex work as the same.[8] For this reason, raids are often carried out to 'rescue' trafficked women but due to the lack of a clear distinction, FSWs are also targeted. This in turn provokes more violence against FSWs (Kotiswaran, 2011). Even the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, urges a review of ITPA ensuring "...that measures to address trafficking in persons do not overshadow the need for effective measures to protect the human rights of sex workers" (UN, 2014, p. 19).

It is important to observe how court judges have applied this law because their judgements mirror societal values. The following is a fragment of one such judgement by the highest judicial organ in India, the Supreme Court of Justice:

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[7] It is important to emphasize that the law only specifies that 'female offenders' are referred to corrective institutions in case of detention.
[8] The difference between sex work and trafficking according to UNDP is that the latter is characterized by lack of consent due to coercion, deception, or involvement of minors (Godwin, 2012).

Court was of the opinion that sex workers obviously cannot lead a life of dignity as long as they remain sex workers. Sex among human beings is different from sex among animals. Sex in humans has a cultural aspect to it also, and is not just a physical act. A sex worker who has to surrender her body to a man for money obviously is not leading a life of dignity. Ordinarily, no woman will willingly surrender her body to a man unless she loves and respects him. (Kush and Barupal, 2013, p. 133)

This judgement defends a provocative perspective that no woman ever willingly engages in sex work, without destroying her dignity. It exemplifies India's narrow approach to male and female gender-roles, which cannot conceive of a woman engaging in sex work as a livelihood strategy.

2.2. Sex work and FSWs in Indian society

By and large, Indian society view sex workers as a threat to "public health, sexual morality and civic values" (Saha, Bala and Saha, 2008, p. 1). As targets of social stigma, sex workers face widespread discrimination from their families, neighbours, authorities of social services, health services, police and even the justice system (Oprea, 2014). To illustrate, Cornish (2006, p. 465) reproduces the experiences of stigma which FSWs must confront:

...being rejected by their families, being considered open to sexual exploitation, being evicted from their rented flats, their daughters being considered unmarriable and their children being taunted at school.

Nevertheless, sex work commands a higher income than the average wage of many informal labour markets. By virtue of this fact, it could plausibly be chosen as a livelihood option, according to Sahni and Shankar (2013). As made evident in the First Pan-India Survey of Sex Workers, conducted in 2013, 73% of the surveyed sex workers reported having had experience in other types of jobs before or alongside sex work (Ibid). This means that for some women, sex work is not their main source of income, but they could use it to make ends meet (Sagade and Forster, 2018). Under this light, the governmental anti-trafficking discourse is problematic, for it undermines, ignores or even negates the experiences of millions of women migrants who choose sex work as a livelihood strategy (Sahni and Shankar, 2011).

2.3. Kamathipura: Asia's largest red-light district

Mumbai is considered the epicenter of sex work in India and in the heart of the city rests one of the largest red-light districts in Asia, Kamathipura (Gezinski and Karandikar, 2013; Joffre et al, 2008; Karandikar and Próspero, 2010).[9] The neighbourhood of roughly three-square miles is a hub of sex work and trafficking; it is deemed immoral and dangerous (Dalla, 2002). Although there is no official data, some scholars indicate that it houses around 5000 FSWs (Gezinski and Karandikar, 2013; Menen, 2007; Shah, 2006), a large number of which are migrants from rural areas of states like Maharashtra, Karnataka and West Bengal, while smaller numbers come from neighboring countries, like Bangladesh and Nepal (Karandikar and Próspero, 2010). In this sense, FSWs here are highly heterogeneous due to their differing cultural origins, language of choice, religious backgrounds and outwardly appearances. According to Kongelf et al. (2015) the characteristics of this population have created an environment of competition, mistrust and rivalry. This context has hindered HIV preventive interventions focussing on community mobilisation. She explains that these interventions have worked in other parts of India, but in Mumbai they failed.[10]

Several studies have focused on vividly describing the deplorable conditions of Kamathipura within a narrative of danger and moral decline. The lack of hygiene and public services, the public solicitation of sex, the quantity of pimps and brothel owners, and percentage of HIV positive women are just a few of the most studied topics (Gezinski and Karandikar, 2013; Joffre et al. 2008; Karandikar and Próspero, 2010). Such a one-sided depiction has contributed to the characterization of its FSWs as moral deviants and vectors of disease (Shah, 2006).

The consequences of this stigmatization affect everyone living in Kamathipura, even those not involved in the sex industry. For instance, brothel raids are a part of everyday life in Kamathipura, interrupting the daily routine of the families living there. Often

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[9] Kamathipura is located in the center of the city, but Mumbai's gentrification boom has led to the demolition of several decrepit buildings in which brothels were housed (Shah, 2014).

[10] For a detailed explanation see Kongelf, A. et al. (2015). Is Scale-Up of Community Mobilisation among Sex Workers Really Possible in Complex Urban Environments? The Case of Mumbai, India.

FSWs' daughters and other young female relatives are targeted in these raids which end up in extrajudicial detentions (Shah, 2014). NGOs are also part of the scenery in Kamathipura.[11] Most of them in accordance with governmental and international agenda, conduct anti-trafficking and HIV preventive interventions and sometimes even incentivize police to conduct raids (Ibid).

Most studies of Kamathipura respond to crises identified by policy makers, yet very few focus on the human beings behind Kamathipura's sensationalistic narrative. One of the only is Shah (2014), who focuses on how female migrants arrive in Kamathipura looking for a 'better life' and end up finding sex work as a livelihood strategy. She explains that most of these migrants do not own or control any land and most often belong to a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe.[12] Widowed or left by their husbands, they are heads of family and often support children and family left in their native towns singlehandedly.

Under these circumstances, Kamathipura represents an opportunity for survival in the informal sector. It offers stability in housing and basic amenities, such as access to electricity and water. As Shah (2014, p. 7) explains, sex work in Mumbai is better understood:

> ...through the analytics of migration, access to housing and water, and negotiations for work undertaken by people with few formal skills, and little or no formal education

Migrants who come to Kamathipura to engage in the sale of sex as a way of meeting their needs are seldom looked at as economic migrants, even though they actually are.

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[11] Shah (2014) quoting a brothel owner, explains that the efforts of local NGOs have had the effect of decreasing the number of underage women selling sex in the area.

[12] According to Srinivasan and kumar (1999, p. 3052), a unique characteristic of Indian society is the caste system. It refers to "The stratification of Indian population into sub-groups defined by caste, which is determined at birth." This is considered one of the most harmful obstacles to social development in India. The scheduled caste or a scheduled tribe, hence refers to those castes which are considered to be at the bottom rung of India's social order.

Chapter 3: Literature review

The existing research focuses mostly on the occupational hazards of the sex industry; issues like violence, the risk of contracting HIV and stigmatization (eg. Oprea, 2014; Panchanadeswaran et al., 2010; Pyett and Warr, 1999). By dedicating their attention almost exclusively to grave problems, researchers commonly disregard the simpler everyday struggles that FSWs must cope with. Struggles like not having enough money for food, a place to sleep, someone to turn to for advice and support. Even if these everyday hardships are not as severe as those aforementioned, they do represent challenges and points of friction which I believe are worth deeper study.

Before introducing the theoretical premises of my thesis, I use this chapter to provide a concise overview of the literature; specifically how it conceptually and empirically explores the difficulties faced by FSWs today. The first section will discuss occupational hazards along with survival strategies. The second section outlines everyday hardships and coping mechanisms.[13]

3.1. The occupational hazards of sex work and survival strategies

Typically, scholars have focused on extraordinary strains that make sex work hazardous. To illustrate, this section surveys literature from the global south, identifying the most studied subjects in the sex work context.

Researchers have thoroughly focused on the ways in which sex workers deal with violence from clients, intimate partners, pimps, brothel madams, other sex workers and at times, even the police. The most reported survival strategy is trusting their intuition or experience in assessing potential threats. Another is to develop cooperative networks with co-workers and managers, letting them know when and where they are meeting with a potential client. A third is to work at hours when they think the police

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[13] Here survival strategies and coping mechanisms are used to refer to the ways women deal with difficulties. The term 'survival strategies' is used in the context of occupational hazards i.e. stigmatization, violence and risk of contracting HIV. Whereas the term 'coping mechanisms' is used in the context of everyday hardships. It is worth mentioning though that my usage of these terms is relatively informal as I do not address the deeper psychological or sociological debates around them.

are less likely to show up (Dalla, 2002; El-Bassel et al., 2001; Liu, 2017; Nixon et al., 2002; O'Neill and Barbaret, 2000; Sanders, 2004; Sanders, 2005; Whittaker and Hart, 1996).

Another major focus of scholarly research has been the risk of contracting HIV. Survival strategies include, downgrading or denying the risk of infection. Some of the major findings report that FSWs may practice selective use of condoms which means that they use condoms with clients but not with intimate partners. Some choose to ignore their HIV-status altogether (Popoola, 2013; Syvertsen et al., 2013; Varga, 2001; Wong et al., 2019).

Another extensively studied topic is sex workers' survival strategies to deal with the stigma and moral judgments against their work. According to the major findings of this research, sex workers may choose to set boundaries between their working identity and their personal life, deny the profession by not referring to it directly or even hide the existence of their work from family members, friends, neighbours, etc. (Campbell, 2000).

As previously mentioned, existing research is heavily skewed towards the sensationalist events around the occupation of sex work. This focus leaves a gap in understanding how FSWs deal with more mundane challenges that arise in their everyday life. I will address this gap in greater detail in the following section.

3.2. Overcoming everyday hardships as a sex worker

As opposed to the previous section, very few scholars have attempted to understand the everyday hardships of FSWs. Of the handful that I was able to find, most relied on the following theories: social cohesion, social support and mutual aid. Their research touched on how FSWs deal with their everyday hardships,[14] and their coping

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[14] By everyday hardships this thesis refers to those distressing demands that are a part of everyday life, such as not having enough money for food, need to be cared for when sick, need for emotional comfort, etc.

mechanisms but did not build on the impact of these interactions on FSWs' social bonds.

This section focuses on how FSWs overcome everyday material hardships, like the lack of food or the need for money and non-material hardships such as the need for care, comfort or protection, by relying on other people from the sex industry. This means that the review will not refer to individualistic strategies.

Recently a lot of attention has been given to the ways in which social cohesion can enhance FSWs' daily lives. As scholars like Chan, Ho-Pong and Chan (2006) point out, the definition of social cohesion differs depending on the field of study the researcher, policy maker or academic subscribe to. As a result, a differing definition prevents its meaningful measurement and application.[15]

Drawing on Putman's theory of social capital, Fonner et al. (2014) examined *bonding social capital*[16] among sex workers measuring their amount of social cohesion. In this study, they define social cohesion as based on mutual aid, trust and solidarity (Fonner et al., 2014, p. 2). However, despite the volatile nature of social cohesion or the terms defining it,[17] no further theoretical consideration was provided. The interviews did reveal that more than 60% of the FSWs felt they could rely on each other for money, a ride to the hospital, dealing with difficult clients or whenever they need someone to discuss their problems with.

Shdaimah and Leon (2016, p. 57) investigated mutual aid among street based FSWs. They describe the interviewees as "empathetic actors who make meaningful alliances of caring and compassion with others". Acts of sharing food, cigarettes and advice on subjects such as where to find recovery houses, treatment programs, health insurance, transportation and how to deal with their everyday hardships were often reported. In

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[15] For example, one study could refer to social cohesion as connectedness between members of a group, whereas another referred to it as a longing for affiliation; inferring a lack of connectedness (Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier, 2018).

[16] Putman defines *bonding capital* as the relations existing between members of the same group as opposed to *bridging capital* that refers to the relations between members of different groups (Fonner et al., 2014).

[17] See Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier (2018), for a detailed analysis of the different definitions social cohesion has had.

any event, this assistance does not imply that FSW are completely altruistic. Much to the contrary sex workers set limits to this assistance by weighing the repercussions their help could have (Ibid).

Studies on social support have also shed some light on the ways sex workers overcome their everyday hardships. In spite of recognizing the complexity of the concept of social support no theoretical framework is provided. For instance, Qiao et al. (2015) conducted one of the first quantitative studies in China that analyzed FSWs' perceptions of social support by identifying the sources of support and their specific functions. Of the significant dataset of 1,022 FSWs surveyed, the author found that coworkers were perceived as the first source of informational support (advice) and that most of them believed they could also count on their coworkers when not feeling well or if they needed to discuss annoying issues (Ibid). This study is relevant as it identifies coworkers as the primary perceived source for both informational and emotional support.

The aforementioned studies provide a glimpse of the objects and services that sex workers exchange with each other. However, it must be noted that all these studies ground their analysis on empirical findings without using a theoretical framework. After a comprehensive analysis of these three theories, they were each discarded as none provide any insight on the occasions, motivations, consequences or expectations that emerged with the exchange of objects and services among sex workers. The reasons for this decision are presented in the following chart.

Theory	Social cohesion	Mutual aid	Social support
Reason for discarding it	Social cohesion theory refers to a characteristic of a group or society. It does not focus on interpersonal relationships, the exchange of objects and services or the impact that such an exchange would have on social bonds.	Mutual aid theory is studied in the context of formal organizations but rarely accounts for individuals. As it does not focus on motivations, occasions and impact on social bonds it has been discarded.	Social support theory focuses on the people that supply material, emotional or informational support rather than the social bonds and obligations that arise from the exchange of goods and services.

Having discarded the above 3 theories, and despite the fact that I was unable to find any other study using it, gift-giving theory was deemed the most suitable to analyze how women in Kamathipura cope with everyday hardships, for these reasons:

a) Unlike the aforementioned theories, gift-giving has been profusely studied. The literature provides pertinent sub-concepts to analyze the FSWs non-ceremonial gift exchanges.

b) It allows for a deeper understanding of the motivations, occasions, intentions, consequences of exchanging goods and services and its impact on social bonds (Skageby, 2010).

Chapter 4: Theoretical grounding:

4.1. Preliminary considerations

The literature on gift-giving can be traced back to Mauss's masterpiece "The Gift" published in 1925, widely considered the root of all anthropological understanding of exchange (Parry, 1986). It has been widely studied by the disciplines of sociology, economics and even marketing. Given the vastness of literature on the subject, this section will present a broad conceptual and theoretical survey of what the gift and gift-giving are. To do this, it will deploy Skageby's (2010) framework which focuses on the most prevalent elements identified within the gifting literature: other-orientation, bonding value and reciprocity.[18] These themes will provide elements to use in the analytical framework (see section 4.5).

4.2. The gift

Depending on the scholar, the gift has been assigned different characteristics. Cheal (1987, p. 152) establishes that "a gift is a ritual offering that is a sign of involvement in and connectedness to another". Frow (1997, p. 124) believes that gifts are not just objects but transactions and social relations. Camerer (1988) on the other hand, understands gifts as economic signals and social symbols. While scholars choose different characteristics to define what a gift is, I prefer to use Komter's (2007) broad interpretation of gifts in order to avoid excluding objects or services exchanged. This is further explained below.

As defined by Yan (2005) gifts offered in a ritualistic way are called ceremonial gifts, these take place in most collective and institutionalized festivities, such as Christmas. On the other hand, those that are spontaneous, individualistic and offered in everyday circumstances are called 'non-ceremonial gifts'; these are the main focus of this study.

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[18] Skageby developed a conceptual and theoretical framework in order to study social behavior in online networks and communities. Despite the substantial difference between the topics, the framework is used as it is the result of a comprehensive survey of the existing gift-giving literature where he found the aforementioned three themes.

The *motives* of gift-giving have also received a lot of attention among scholars. Most times, gifts are offered expecting reciprocity as it cannot always be assumed that they are altruistic and other-directed in nature. Some people offer gifts for higher purposes such as charity or religious offerings. Others to show power, prestige, reputation and fame. Some of them could also have negative motivations such as displaying hostility, hate or contempt, yet others are used to express positive feelings such as love, friendship or respect (Komter, 2007).

Gifts can also be studied depending on their *nature*. For instance, in her study of gift-giving in informal relations in the Netherlands, Komter (2001, p. 391) found that material gifts had the form of presents and money gifts whereas non-material gifts referred to hospitality (giving food or shelter at one's house) and giving care or help. Other kinds of non-material gifts are: support in all of its types: practical, financial, emotional (Thoen, 2006, p. 11), casual assistance, advice, connections, the provision of a safety net (Ben-Amos, 2008, p. 23), knowledge, positive emotions (Kamvounias, McGrath-Champ and Yip, 2008, p. 19) time, ideas, feelings and experiences (Belk and Coon, 1993, p. 403).

Thoen (2006, p. 11) builds on this and adds artistic or intellectual gifts which are gifts that originate from artistic or intellectual efforts of the giver, i.e. poems, paintings, etc. Vaughan (1997, p. 19) on the other hand, refers to words as gifts explaining that: "Words are the social verbal or written items that have been devised to satisfy communicative needs". Further the author invites us to stop thinking in economic terms and understand language as free gift-giving. Everyday words and sentences are given in abundance without expecting any payment in return. In this sense, language creates human bonds and provides an experience of nurturing each other.

Glimpsing these different forms of gifts, their multi-purpose symbolic 'utility' (Khalil, 1997), the occasions when they are offered and the diversity of motives demonstrates the subtle, nuanced and complex nature of the gift. Its eclectic nature makes it difficult to summarise in one general, universal definition (Komter, 2007). According to Komter (2007, p. 93) only by "illuminating both the variety of the forms of the gift and the universality of the underlying principle of reciprocity" one can have a better

understanding of what a gift is. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the broader the interpretation the more information it could provide in order to understand the full extent of the gift-giving practices FSWs engage in. For this reason, the study will deploy Komter's broad interpretation of what gifts are. Yet, as the main interest of this study is on those unrecognized gifts that are given in order to ease everyday hardships, I will only focus on non-ceremonial gifts.

Given this background, I argue that gift-giving theory lays the grounds for interpreting and analyzing how FSWs in Kamathipura deal with and overcome everyday hardships. Opposed to the findings in other studies regarding competition and lack of support in the sex industry (Busza, 2004; Busza and Schunter, 2001; Devine et al., 2010; Guha, et al. 2012; Kongelf et al. 2015), I propose analyzing everyday non-ceremonial gift exchanges to establish how these practices create, maintain and strengthen social bonds; subsequently creating meaningful alliances of care and empathy.

4.3. Gift-giving

Gift-giving entails a 'three-fold obligation': giving, receiving and giving in return. When these obligations are respected, the gift becomes the origin of subsequent exchange and facilitates the creation and maintenance of perdurable social bonds which, according to Mauss, is the main purpose of the gift exchange (Meler, 2014). The expectation of the return, along with the obligation that the recipient feels to reciprocate, binds the exchangers (Thoen, 2006).

A gift is defined by the relationship in which the exchange takes place, and not simply by the specific object or service provided (Tyler and Taylor, 1998). For this reason, the objects, the giver, the recipient and the relationships that bind them, are all intrinsically related. This can be contrasted to commodity giving which exists between two free and independent individuals who bind themselves temporarily: once the transaction is over, the relationship is over (Carrier, 1991).

As Komter (2007, p. 103) points out "acts of gift exchange are at the basis of human solidarity". Indeed, it promotes communication with other people, creates alliances

and makes possible mutual help (Komter, 1996). Within this context, not giving back implies the denial of "a social relationship with the other party, and hence violates public expectation and private belief" (Carrier, 1991, p. 123).

4.3.1. Other-orientation

According to Mauss, gift-giving combines opposing features (Komter, 2007). Even if most would consider self-centeredness and other-orientation[19] as contrary, in gift-giving they interact in a rather complex way. Sometimes they coexist and at other times they might act independently. For example, a service could be provided by recognizing another person's need and acting to satisfy it but in doing so also satisfies one's own needs (Skageby, 2010).

Now, there are two ways to explain this convergence:
a) By expanding the notion of self-centeredness, as Skageby explains:

> Gift economies can indeed support individual selfish motivations and needs, but these, when pursued by a larger number of people, converge to form common resources or positive externalities that create a 'sharing spirit' (Skageby 2010, p. 172 based on Bollier, 2001).

b) By broadening the notion of altruism to include expectations of selfish rewards; this is also referred to as 'impure altruism' (Skageby 2010 based on Andreoni, 1989, 1990).

4.3.2. Bonding value

The social aspect of gift giving deserves special attention. In general, the literature admits that the main goal of gift giving is the establishment, preservation and enhancement of social bonds whether competitive, cooperative or antagonistic (Laidlaw, 2000; Vaa et al., 1989; Yan, 2005). Hence, for a gift to be considered a gift it must be exchanged within an existing relationship or give birth to a new relationship.

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[19] Other-orientation refers to giving in order to satisfy somebody else' needs (Vaughan, 1997).

According to Fiske (1992), 4 models describe the types of existing social relationships: Community sharing, equality matching, authority ranking, and market pricing. *Community sharing* is the most common type of transaction within a group or dyad (Fiske, 2007). This model refers to relationships which take place among people that consider themselves equal members of the same group or dyad. The exchange between these members springs out of the feelings of kindness and generosity existing among them. The most common goods exchanged are food, care, and services (Ibid). Individuals that fall into this type of model experience feelings of connectedness and identification (Komter, 2005). In these cases, the exchange is focused on satisfying perceived needs because "if we belong together my needs and your needs are the same" (Fiske, 1992, p. 698).

In any event, these types of relationships are not permanent and will depend on the purpose of pursuit. This means that people might feel connected to one another in certain situations but not in others (Ibid.). For instance, a community of migrants could opt to live together and share food but not feel the same sharing spirit when it comes to sharing networks for job opportunities.

The second model of social relations is *equality matching.* It refers to relationships between people that, despite identifying themselves as different, consider themselves peers (Fiske,1992). Here, reciprocal exchange patterns are expected (Komter, 1996). In these relationships it is irrelevant *who gave what* because everyone is equal and eventually things even out. Indeed, the defining characteristic of this model is that things or services exchanged can be counted, measured or weighted which allow the exchangers to achieve equality by concrete means (Komter, 2007). Balance is the key to these types of relationships, failing which, individuals begin to keep track of "how far from equality they are, and what they would need to do to even things up" (Fiske, 1992, p. 691).

Authority ranking refers to social relationships characterized by asymmetry and inequality along a hierarchical social dimension. This means individuals in higher positions have prestige and privileges while subordinates are entitled to care and protection but are often controlled (ex. relationship doctor-patient, teacher-student, employer-employee; Fiske, 1992). In this type of relationship, exchange is motivated

by a "(conscious or unconscious) desire to emphasize one's own status or power position" (Komter, 2007, p. 98)

Finally, *market pricing* social relationships are based on rational choices and utility considerations. Most of the relationships under this model involve money and the payment or exchange of commodities has to be in proportion to what is received and in line with market prices or utilities. For example, the gifts offered by pharmaceutical companies to doctors so that they will prescribe their medicines (Fiske, 1992).

With these 4 models, Fiske challenges Malinowski and Sahlins assertion that an individual's proximity to a person determines the mode of exchange (i.e. the gifts offered to a son are not the same as the ones offered to a coworker; Komter, 2007). In fact, Fiske argues that it is the combination and interaction of these models which shapes an individual's identity, motives, norms and the ways she/he participate in groups and institutions vis-à-vis an exchange (Komter, 2005). For example, the gifts offered between teachers and pupils are not the same if they are involved in a love affair, as this relationship goes beyond the authority ranking model and should be understood in combination with the community sharing model.

4.3.3. Reciprocity

As per Mauss, even gifts that seem to be offered voluntary and spontaneously may in fact have an underlying obligation of return. This does not mean that the recipient has to return exactly the same thing that was given or even something of similar value as in barter, but a payback must be enacted (Vaa et al., 1989). The reasons for the obligation of reciprocity being so effective have been thoroughly studied.

In an effort to explain what makes reciprocity appear so efficient, Komter (2007), provides 5 reasons: survival value, recognition of the other, three-fold obligations, moral bind and combinations of generosity and self-interest. The following chart provides an explanation of the mentioned elements.

Why is the principle of reciprocity so efficient?	
Survival value	Aware of our shared vulnerability as human beings we rely on each other to survive. The consequence of the denial to reciprocate, could represent the individual's ex-communication, which diminishes survival chances.
Recognition of the other	To engage in reciprocal exchange both parties must recognize as allies. By doing so, the interdependency is evident. It is therefore in one's own interest to fulfil another's needs, in a way that one's future needs will also require fulfilment.
Three-fold obligations	The receiver feels in debt to the giver and therefore experiences the need to give back. Failure to comply with the three-fold obligation (giving, receiving and giving in return) would reject the bond and end the relationship.
Morally binding	Receiving a gift provokes a feeling of gratitude which becomes a moral force that drives us to reciprocate.
Combinations of other-orientation and self-interest	To comply with the requirements of social life by satisfying one's needs but also social expectations.

Based on Komter, A. (2007)

Gift-exchange must be interpreted beyond its apparent instrumental nature (i.e. giving and expecting reciprocity). As Komter (2005) argues, objectively speaking, most gift-giving practices seem to be part of reciprocal exchange cycles. It is important to note that their subjective validity cannot be undermined as individuals giving feel strongly that they are giving voluntarily.

4.4. Gift-exchange empirical research

No study was found regarding FSWs' use of gift-exchange as a way of dealing with everyday hardships. However, three studies were found in which this type of exchange is used but in a different context i.e. among single mothers and migrants. I believe the experiences of other populations in vulnerable circumstances can help to illustrate how these practices are used to deal with everyday hardships. To make a case, a brief summary of these studies is provided below.

Meler (2014) focused on the relation of Israeli Palestinian single mothers with their families and communities. Due to the fact that these women have a marginalized status, they are pressured to participate in a gift economy. In this context, the gift

exchange consists of these women receiving several types of concrete support and assistance but in return they are required to repay with obedience. According to this scholar, the gift economy, implies that each party has to 'pay' in some way (Meler, 2014). Some of these women reported receiving basic material support, such as a place to live, use of a car and gifts for the children. They also benefited from non-material gifts like receiving assistance from relatives who had more education than them to help their children in their studies, the opportunity to use the family's social networks in order to find jobs and receiving childcare help from relatives whenever they go to their job. Moreover, emotional support is considered a category of gift, by itself. It is offered by their parents which helps them cope with everyday struggles that stem from their marginalization. In return, the women must accept the supervision, policing and restrictions imposed by their families (Ibid).

Vaa et al. (1989), studied *Women Migrants' Survival Strategies in a Low-Income Bamako Neighborhood* and one of her focal points was to understand how mutual help and the exchange of gifts were used to meet daily expenses.[20] According to the scholars, the most typical daily gifts among women were help or a service, for instance, hairdressing, sweeping the floor, lending utensils, looking after a market stall, helping with shopping. Whereas among men the most typical form of a gift was a trinket or taking friends to enjoy a movie or a soccer match. Both women and men reported small sums of money as another type of gift. This would cover transport or small food items, like a soft drink, a bit of tomato paste, a piece of fruit or some sugar (Ibid).

In his study, Weeks (2012) shows how Lisbon's Cape Verdean labor immigrants have rationalized their struggle after the 2008 economic crisis and how they have used gifts of mutual help to cope with daily challenges. The gifts of mutual help most often exchanged can be material goods such as clothes, food, consumer products, building materials or services like a ride, childcare, use of appliances, etc. These gifts enhance social and moral forces as well as different sentiments that boost the social fabric between individuals (Ibid).

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[20] For more studies focusing on women engaging in networks of gift-giving and exchange, see Obbo (1981) and Lomnitz (1977).
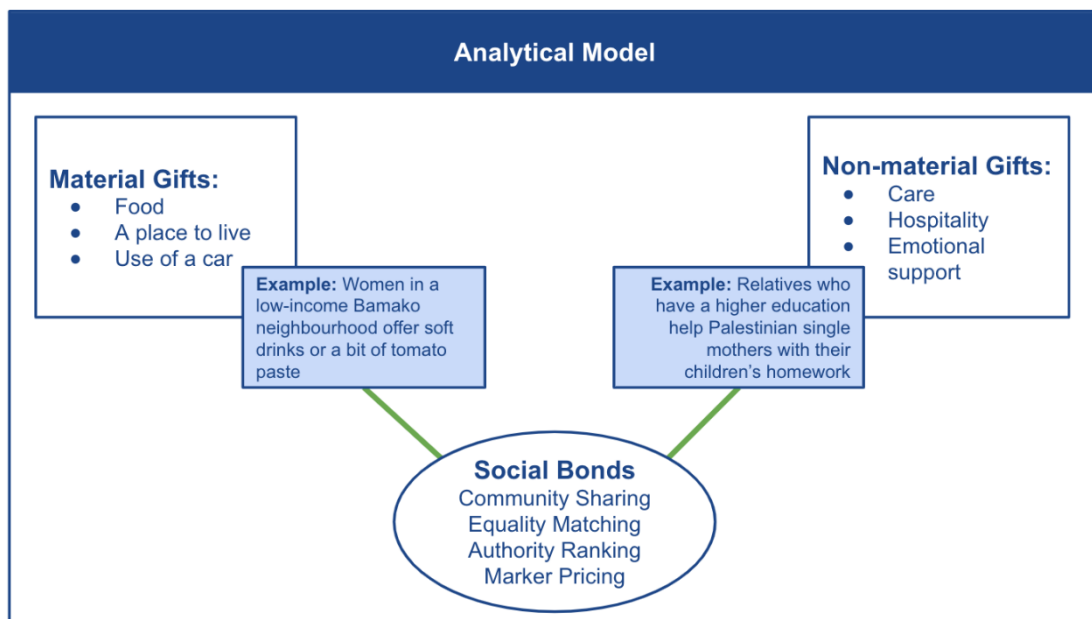
The following table shows why the authors have deemed important the study of the gift and social bonds, how each have identified gifts exchanged, subsequently chose to classify them and how each classification differs:

Scholar	Types of gifts		
Meler: Divides gifts according to their nature	**Material**	**Non-material**	**Emotional Support**
	Place to live, use of car, gifts for children	Assistance with children's education, sharing networks, childcare	Mostly provided by parents
Importance	Draws attention to relations of authority that spring out of gift-exchange (i.e. women accept supervision)		
Vaa: Divides gifts according to the sex of the exchangers (As this study was published in 1988, the author refers only to women and men, when referring to gender)	**Women**	**Men**	
	Help to sweep the courtyard, hairdressing, lending utensils, assistance with shopping, looking after a market stall	Trinkets, little treats, extra tea or tomato paste, taking friends to the cinema or a soccer match, help drawing water, with chores and washing clothes	
Importance	Draws attention to how women use gift-giving to make ends meet		
Weeks: Divides gifts according to their nature	**Material**	**Services**	
	Clothes, food, consumer products and building materials	Rides, childcare and use of appliances	
Importance	Draws attention to community bonding among migrants		

These studies have underscored the importance of studying gifts and the social bonds they give rise to. They have also shed some light on what kind of non-ceremonial gifts are exchanged on a daily basis. The authors, however, do not adhere to a common classification framework, opting for a very narrow approach. To better understand the gifts that FSWs exchange, a broader classification is fundamental. For this reason, none of the three can be used instead, a customized categorization will be used from the theoretical elements provided in section 4.3.

4.5. Analytical model

Drawing on elements provided by the literature review above and the gift-giving theory I aim to answer the research question guiding this study: *How is gift-giving used by FSWs in Kamathipura?* The analysis will be organized in the following way:

Analytical Model

Material Gifts:
- Food
- A place to live
- Use of a car

Example: Women in a low-income Bamako neighbourhood offer soft drinks or a bit of tomato paste

Non-material Gifts:
- Care
- Hospitality
- Emotional support

Example: Relatives who have a higher education help Palestinian single mothers with their children's homework

Social Bonds
Community Sharing
Equality Matching
Authority Ranking
Marker Pricing

First, an exploration of the types of non-ceremonial gifts accompanied by the experiences of women who exchange them is provided. This part of the analysis aims to answer the question: *What type of non-ceremonial gifts are exchanged among FSWs?* As seen in section 4.4, it is important to note that the literature has not been consistent in explaining how gifts should be categorised. For this reason, following Komter's classification gifts have been divided in material and non-material. When studying non-material gifts Komter (2005) only refers to care and hospitality,[21] despite the fact that other scholars have included additional types of gifts within this category such as support, knowledge and time. For analytical purposes and in the spirit of using a broad interpretation of gifts (see section 4.2), this category will include all sorts of non-material goods. In this regard, all goods or services which have a physical manifestation will fall into the category ´material gifts´, and those which do not will be classified as ´non-material gifts´.

Second, based on the gift-giving social bonding value (see section 4.3.2), an analysis of how sex workers' social bonds are affected by gift exchanges will be provided. Given the emphasis that participants put on describing their relationships with gift-exchanging peers, it was deemed relevant to analyze how gift-giving affects their social bonds, in an independent section. Additionally, the other elements of the theory

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[21] Komter acknowledges other type of nonmaterial gifts, nevertheless, does not use them in her study.

(other-orientation and reciprocity) will be addressed when deemed pertinent but not in a specific section. All in all, the aim of this section is to answer the question: *How does gift-giving affect the sex workers social bonds?* To this end, I will analyze the social bonds of women who choose to participate in gift exchange in groups and in dyads but also those, who for different circumstances, do not.

Chapter 5: Methodology

Traditionally, FSWs have had little to no participation or control in what is being said about them. This has led to a misrepresentation of their lived experiences (Nencel, 2017). For this reason, a methodology that would present their everyday experiences of gift-giving, in their own words, was followed.

In line with Ackerly (2006, p. 6), the term methodology (or theoretical method) in this chapter is used not in a positivist sense but to indicate an "intellectual process…guiding self-conscious reflections on epistemological assumptions, ontological perspective, ethical responsibilities, and method choices". In this vein, this section describes and seeks to justify the choices made throughout this research. It presents the research design, data collection and analysis. Additionally, it discusses ethical considerations and limitations.

5.1. Standpoint approach

Since the 1970s the relationship between sex work and feminism has been debated (Skilbrei and Spanger, 2017). Even till this date, there is no unified stance towards sex work. Of the stances that exist, the most discussed perspectives range from considering it the biggest expression of women's exploitation (Neo-abolitionists theories) to a form of employment or career (Sex positivism; Gerassi, 2015). However, as Kesler (2002) explains feminism has failed the women involved in sex work because the actual FSWs who academics have been talking about have not been included in this debate. For this reason, I decided to use a feminist standpoint approach. This perspective highlights the importance of considering women's daily life as a starting point and challenges us to understand a different worldview through the eyes and experiences of those same women (oppressed women and other vulnerable groups; Skilbrei and Spanger, 2017). The advantage of using this approach is that it begins with the assumption that those who directly experience domination will best know the issues related to their oppression, as compared to people that have never experienced it (Ibid).

The belief that any woman would understand what another feels and experiences because both suffer from discrimination in patriarchal systems has been highly criticized. Critics against this theory claim that it is essentialistic and that it incarcerates women in a universal category, one of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. For this reason, the study adheres to the current stream of standpoint theory, which proclaims that alternative knowledge can be grounded in women's material experiences taking into account their multiplicity and diversity. For example, focusing on the structural positions derived from ethnicity, sexuality, disability, class and age (Kokushkin, 2014).

There exists no universally accepted categorization of a sex worker. As Nencel (2017) explains, sex work needs to be researched in a contextualized way, taking into consideration geographical locations and temporal dimensions. Here, Haraway's (1991) idea of situated knowledge aptly explains that knowledge is partial and produced in specific locations. By honouring FSWs' voices in Kamathipura as well as my own positionality, I study their experiences of gift-giving without pretending to portray an absolute reality of the phenomena. My normative standpoint also needs to be disclosed: In choosing to use gift-theory I aim to challenge mainstream characterizations of FSWs as vulnerable, oppressed, violated and stigmatized. Instead I draw attention to the quotidian and reciprocal side of this industry.

5.2. Research design

Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze the types of gifts that are exchanged in Kamathipura and the social bonds that arise from these exchanges, a qualitative study seemed the most suitable option. This choice allows the women being studied to have relatively more control over the study. The case study design combined with a standpoint approach provided a space for the participants to share their stories in a way that could highlight the issues and experiences they considered relevant. Moreover, this design balances the power difference between the researcher and participants, creating a more consensual relationship (Creswell, 2009; Nencel, 2017).

I chose Kamathipura brothel-based FSWs as a case study for several reasons: First, a great amount of FSWs in Kamathipura come from other states in India and from other countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh (Karandikar and Prospero, 2010). This means that the women living there often do not share the same language, religion and caste (see section 2.3). According to Gaikwad et al (2012), among highly diverse sex workers in urban settings, most FSWs considered each other rivals. These characteristics provided quite a challenging scenario for the existence of gift giving practices among each other. Lastly, Kamathipura in people's imaginations represents the most famous red-light district in India, according to several scholars (Karandikar and Prospero, 2010; Shah, 2006).

5.3. Data collection

5.3.1. Gaining access to the field and sampling

The legal status of sex work (Sanders, 2006) and their stigmatization (Atkinson and Flint, 2001) represent a big challenge when planning to access the field. Moreover, as explained by Hubbard (1999), simply locating and contacting sex workers can be complicated. In Kamathipura reaching women living and working in brothels is extremely difficult without a sex worker-led union or some other kind of organizing framework (Shah, 2006). As I do not speak Hindi, building rapport with potential participants by myself was nearly impossible. Under these circumstances my only possibility was to gain access through a gatekeeper NGO (Bryman, 2001). As Agustin (2004, p. 6) points out, in order to avoid "outright lies, omissions and sad stories" by FSWs, researchers should spend a significant amount of time doing observations and building rapport with their potential participants. For this reason, I chose the NGO where I interned for 6 months as an entry point. The NGO's name is not provided to further protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

The NGO has operated in Kamathipura for decades. Its main purpose is to empower and contribute to the well-being of women selling sex. Although I did not have direct contact on a daily basis with the women, I did frequently interact with them in monthly meetings, workshops, trainings, etc. I also collaborated in the after-school classes

which the daughters of some of the sex workers attend. Therefore, some rapport was already built before conducting my interviews.

During a monthly meeting the field director of the organization informed the women about my study stating that their participation in it was completely voluntary. From the pool of volunteers, interview participants were randomly selected according to their availability (Creswell, 2009).

5.3.2. Participants characteristics

In total 14 brothel-based FSWs were interviewed ranging in age from 50 to 20 years old. All of them were married except for 1. Only two interviewees reported not having children. Out of the 14 interviewees, 11 were Indian, 2 from Nepal and 1 from Bangladesh. The fact that none of them came from Mumbai was expected as Kamathipura is known for hosting a lot of migrants (see section 2.3). Only 2 women reported that their family had knowledge of their work. 7 interviewees disclosed that they were HIV positive. Two women reported having worked for 9 years which is the least amount of time, while 1 reported having worked 28 years which is the maximum amount of time. The names used throughout the study are pseudonyms to further protect the identity of the interviewees. In order to visualize all the participant's information, please refer to Appendix 1.

Three types of brothel-based FSW were identified:
a) FSWs living and working in the brothel under the supervision of a *gharwali* lady (Brothel madam). They are provided food and shelter in return for a percentage of their daily income. According to these interviewees it is usually 50% of their incomes, but this amount can vary. In total 4 of the participants work under this arrangement.
b) Independent FSWs who rent a room in the brothel. These rooms are located in a separate section from where they service clients. They do not receive food and pay a monthly rent instead of dividing the daily income. In total 9
c) Sex workers who live in other places and only come to Kamathipura to work. They have to pay a daily rent. Only one of the participants works under this

modality. To visualize the different dynamics between the sex workers, the *gharwali* lady and the landlord please see Appendix 2.

5.3.3. Methods: Semi-structured interviews

Standpoint epistemology requires that knowledge should be constructed by honouring the voices of the marginalised. According to Nencel (2017) the optimal way of doing research with FSWs is through direct involvement of the studied group in the whole research process, or by creating a space where the group can share their stories in their own way, or both.

Due to time limitations in the field semi-structured interviews were conducted. Aware of my own conceptual scheme and cultural baggage, before interviewing the participants, I went through my interview guide with the interpreter, the CEO and field director of the NGO. As discussed by Sinha (2017) the purpose of this review could potentially be that the NGO would like to control the researcher's access to information by making decisions about what questions to ask. Nevertheless, in my case this review was most useful to avoid any misperception or mistranslation both linguistically and culturally (Mclean, 2008). Interestingly, the first thing that was pointed out was that when referring to the interviewees we should address them as *didis* ("sisters" in Hindi) because the women do not refer to themselves as sex workers. Moreover, I was also told that when referring to the actual servicing of a client that I should refer to it as their work. This suggests that although not referring to themselves as sex workers due to its negative charge they do see sex work as work. A few more suggestions were made, all of them suggested subtle changes in framing the questions, without altering the content.

The NGO's center is considered a safe place among the women and was therefore deemed the best place to conduct the interviews. Despite differing nationalities, all of the FSWs interviewed spoke Hindi. During the interviews the questions and responses were translated in real-time from English to Hindi and back to English. All of the interviews were recorded on a two-way channel microphone as wav files for a lossless playback experience. During the interviews the participants were again informed about

the aim of the research. As Gezinski and Karandikar (2013) explain, given the high rate of illiteracy among participants and cultural norms in Kamathipura, it is better to record oral consent, as requiring signatures to establish consent is not a standard practice.

The interviews had a relatively open, flexible and interactive approach. They were conducted in a friendly conversational style accompanied by a cup of tea while sitting on the floor in a triangular configuration as suggested by Edwards (1998). This style visibly made the women feel at ease. It also allowed them to delve deeper on topics they felt passionate about. This approach allows the interviewee to freely share their own perspectives, perceptions, experiences, understandings, interpretations and interactions of the studied topic, in line with what standpoint epistemology advocates for (Bryman, Liao and Lewis-Beck, 2004). All of the interviews were positive experiences, with some interviewees even highlighting that it felt good to talk about the deeper aspects of their life.

The interviews were inspired by feminist theories on everyday life (Elias and Rai, 2019) and social support frameworks (Qiao et al., 2015). The questions in the interviews were around the women's use of time, space, types of violence and their sources of emotional, material and informational support. After every interview I had a debriefing session with the interpreter as to how the interview went, ways of making it better, any challenges encountered and ways to formulate questions that were not clear.

After their interviews each participant received Rs. 300 (4.16 USD) and a bag with toiletries which the organization agreed to. I learnt that the participants earn between Rs. 100-300 per client which can vary depending on the power of negotiation of the FSW. The use of monetary incentives to recruit participants has been highly debated. For instance, Sanders (2006) equated the relationship of researcher and sex worker with the relationship of client and sex worker, as for her, paying for gaining access to their personal stories is similar as paying for gaining access to their bodies, contributing to their exploitation. However, I agree with Reed et al., (2014) when she urges researchers to consider that the amount of time spent in an interview (including commuting time) interferes with a sex worker's daily work routine. It reduces the

earnings of the day which in their case are crucial to meet their basic needs. For this reason, providing them with this token of appreciation seemed a fair practice and a demonstration of respect for their time.

5.3.4. Interpreter and translator

The interpreter is a bilingual, 28-year-old, Indian woman, who serves as a program manager at the gatekeeper NGO. She was chosen because she is a social worker accustomed to interacting with the target population. As she works in a different center than the one where the interviews took place, the participants did not know this person. I believe that her presence positively impacted the interviews as she demonstrated sympathy, consideration and respect for the participants. This added to the friendly, conversational style of the interviews.

An English-speaking Hindi translator did the translations word for word while I typed. Due to the conversational style of the interviews, the transcriptions were a challenge. I did however find this experience most useful as she explained cultural expressions and their nuanced meanings which were not explained during the interviews by the interpreter.

5.4. Coding and analysis

After the transcriptions were completed, I followed the analytic approach by starting to read the transcripts without contemplating any interpretation (Bryman, 2001). In a second step, I highlighted the most repeated or important points and created several nodes using NVIVO 12. After reading all the findings it was clear that using social support theories to analyze them would run short. The answers provided by the interviewees were rich and detailed. They not only pointed to the people providing support but actually described the material and non-material objects and services that were exchanged and how these have an impact on their social bonds. For this reason, gift-giving theory was deemed the most suitable to analyze these practices.

I then examined the interviews again and used themes that were found either in my literature review or in the empirical data. I examined the data a third time once I had

my theoretical and analytical framework done. This threefold process helped me truly grasp the categories that relate directly to my research question.

5.5. Ethical considerations and limitations

5.5.1. Positionality and reflexivity

As England (1994) explains researchers do not enter the field with empty minds. My personal biases did play a role during the data collection, analysis and interpretation phases of this research. I identify as a western, heterosexual woman. I adhere to sex work perspectives challenging traditional approaches that confine sex workers as either agents or victims (O'Neill, 2000). I believe that women who engage with sex work are agents striving to make a living in an environment marked by social, economical and political constraints (see section 2.3). Here agency rather than a choice, should be understand as the "capacity to act and necessitates a consideration of the system or context that mediates and structures those capacities" (Shah, 2014, p. 198). In this light I recognize that structural factors affect both the agency and the exploitation of sex workers (Kapur, 2002; Sagade and Forster, 2018).

I have purposefully used the terms "sex workers" and "sex work" as according to several scholars it is used to highlight the circumstances in which the women in the global south get involved in the industry (Kempadoo, 1999; Kotiswaran, 2011). As Kempadoo (1999, p. 226) refers: "it allows a recognition of the simultaneity of structures of domination and female agency" in order to find livelihood strategies within a capitalist patriarchy. During the analysis and findings chapter, I will use the term *didis* or women in order to honor the participants choice to refrain from referring to themselves as FSWs.

It is crucial to situate ourselves in our research and be aware of how this location has an impact in all the research process (England, 1994). Using standpoint approach represents a challenge to the researcher as undoubtedly one's positionality affects the research. In my case the question: Is a western master student with no experience

selling sex the most suitable person to explore FSWs' everyday lives in Kamathipura? accompanied me throughout this research.

Studies have highlighted the value of having peers interviewing sex workers (Nehel, 2017). However, in Campbell and Mzaidume's (2001) study this did not play in their favour. The women in their study refused to participate in the research because they were jealous of their peers being remunerated for conducting the interview. This does not mean that non sex workers are the most suitable persons to do it but it demonstrates the complexity of finding a suitable researcher.

Certainly, the fact that I am a woman and that I am around the same age as most of the interviewees was an asset. As Hubbard (1999) acknowledges when wanting to do participatory research with sex workers his gender and class background had a negative impact on his attempt. Women fear that researchers will get a lot of money by disclosing their stories to the public. However, as I spent six months in the organization and as I was introduced by the field director of the organization (a woman who the participants hold in high regard) who assured the women of my academic intentions, I faced no objections. Having interned at the NGO also helped me overcome the fact that I am perceived as a foreigner because I became a "known foreigner" for them. In addition, taking Hindi classes and dressing in local attire allowed me to converse in a more casual demeanor with the women reducing the distance between researcher and participant and to some extent, even power perceptions.

Most feminists advocate for research based on empathy and mutual respect recognizing the reliance on the researched individual. During the interviews I made sure to let the participant know that I saw them as experts of their own lives and experiences. In my research this translated into prioritizing their stories over any other source of information, including personal and academic stances.

5.5.2. Limitations

The language barrier was the biggest limitation. Despite the live translations during the interviews some minor mistakes were identified at the transcription phase. Pieces of information which probably were not deemed important by the interpreter were not translated. This prevented me from posing follow up questions that could have been useful for the study. Also, the translation of a particular question was not completely accurate, which frustrated the attempt to understand if personal traits had an impact when providing support. Finally, it is possible that some respondents might have answered the questions the way they believed the gatekeeper NGO or me wanted them to.

Chapter 6: Findings and analysis

6.1. Non-material gifts

This section will refer to all non-material objects and services exchange between the *didis* in a non-ceremonial context in order to cope with everyday hardships. As explained objects that lack a physical and tangible manifestation pertain to this group.

6.1.1. Emotional support

Similar to Qiao's research, in this study peers were identified as the first source of emotional support, which among non-material gifts, was the most reported non-ceremonial gift. As seen with Meler's (2014) study, this gift is perceived as a gift that allows women to cope with day to day emotional distress by providing comfort, reliability, courage and relief. Deepa who is 20 years old and is HIV positive, explains that: "Sometimes during the day I get stressed that this has happened to me. I have this illness" when this happens the *didis* living with her cheer her up.

Having lived for 15 years in the same brothel, Gita relies on the other *didis* living with her to speak about any concerns that she is facing. In the same way, Gita listens to her friends whenever they need her to.

> If I have a problem in the village, I can share it with you, if you have a problem at home you can share it with me. Everybody will listen to everybody. We all come together to support each other.

Amrita on the other hand, does not have a support network like Gita Nevertheless, she refers to emotional support as a gift that she exchanges with a single friend.

> She has no one, I also don't have anyone. We think ourselves to be there for each other. She gives me a lot of courage.

As shown, the women exchange emotional support with each other. This type of exchange is considered a gift exchange as it is need-oriented rather than profit-oriented, which Vaughan (1997) explains is characteristic of the gift-exchange.

Several of the interviewees also intimated that sharing with their peers makes them feel "nice" or "light". Amrita for instance stated:

> I talk to others, sometimes they make me understand things, sometimes I make them understand things and after that I feel lighter".

According to Malika, "What is wrong in sharing? You feel nice. If they understand, it's good, if not it is also ok". This suggests that having someone to talk to is considered a gift by itself, whether she gets good advice in return or not.

The exchange of emotional support is based on talking and sharing with each other. Indeed, words not only satisfy an emotional need but also a communicative need; to bond and ultimately a need for relationships (Vaughan, 1997). Therefore, denying this type of exchange, denies the existence of the social relationship itself (Carrier, 1991). Everyday Nisha shares her personal issues with her peers. "If I don't share, what can I do? If I do not share, then they get angry." As her friends share their personal issues, they expect Nisha to share as well. Not sharing with them might be perceived as she does not want to maintain a relationship with them.

6.1.2. Care

Among *didis* taking care of each other was repeatedly observed. In most cases the gift of care was given with the expectation that one day they will probably get it back. Gita, explains how women working at the same brothel as her behave whenever someone is sick:

> If somebody is sick, if she can't get up, we take her to the doctor, we will get the medicine for her, then we will feed her, if she wants anything we will get it for her. If you are sick, I will help you. If I am sick, you will help me.

Gayatri who has worked independently for the last 10 years, explains that although her room is small, whenever she is sick "I ask a friend to stay with me for 2 to 4 days, if she can come, she comes and if she also has a problem then I take care of her".

In the aforementioned instances, the gift of care includes taking someone to the doctor, buying medicines, feeding them and taking the time to make sure she gets better. The *didis* do not give for the sake of giving, but so that one day, in their time of need, they may get back the support they require as well. It can therefore be inferred that this is a way of creating alliances. When providing care in this way, the motivations cannot purely be conceived as self-centered. In reality, these are cases where the notion of self-centeredness must be expanded to create what Bollier (2001) refers to as *sharing spirit.* This means that the care provided by these *didis*, is deposited in an imaginary common pool of resources, which Gita or Gayatri can rely on in their time of need, in the future. Thus, in accordance to Shdaimah and Leon (2016) this research found as well that the constant exchange of help created alliances of care between FSWs.

6.1.3. Knowledge

Although rare, two interviewees reported receiving and providing help in times when they did not have any clients, thus sharing knowledge related to sex-work. Gita shared that:

> If 3 or 4 days have passed and there is no business, in those situations, my *didis* sometimes share clients with me, when I have clients and they don't then I share clients with them.

Likewise, Indira reported that:

> Yes, if she does not have clients, then I send clients to them, let it be, she does not have work. Then when I don't have clients, they also send them.

These are examples of how women help their peers by referring them to clients. Didis also share information about aggressive customers. Susmita for instance, shared that her *didis* have told her: "...this person is not good. Don't go with him". Disregarding studies that have characterized women's relationships as competitive (Kongelf et al.,

2015), this proves how nuanced their reality is. Here, both *didis* (one as a giver and the other as a taker) are bound by the expectation of reciprocity (Thoen, 2006) as it is the main reason and origin of subsequent exchanges of this nature. It is important to emphasize that this kind of gift was reported to be offered only between *didis* that feel really close to each other and that most often work in the same brothel.

The second type of knowledge is health-related knowledge. Nisha explained she teaches other *didis* about HIV. Regardless of being HIV positive she believes she knows more than her peers since she has been in Kamathipura for a longer period of time. The knowledge Nisha shares is well received among her friends and actually strengthens their social bonds. Her friends on the other hand reciprocate by visiting whenever she does not feel well. As Vaa (1989) expresses in her study, gift-giving entails a repayment regardless of the difference in nature.

A third type of knowledge they share is knowledge that may help diversifying their income base or step out of sex-work altogether. Gayatri reported that when she was a child she learned to stitch and knit in her village. Whenever she does not feel like working, she uses these skills to make some money. "I have taught a lot of *didis* wool work, how to knit a sweater, how to make socks, etc" she said. As in Meler's (2014) study, sharing a network is also another type of gift among *didis*. When asked if she helped other *didis* when they lacked work, she said:

> When somebody does not want to work, but she knows how to stitch, in that case I talk to the company, to the contractor … we show them these places … there have been a lot of people who have left this job or want to leave this profession.

Fourthly, women teach each other how to read and write. Most of the women of Kamathipura are illiterate, for this reason a lot of NGOs have implemented adult literacy programs in the area. "The *didis* have homework sometimes, we help each other, and I am learning how to write my name" reported Amrita. Indeed, during monthly meetings held in the organization I could also witness how women helped others write their names.

Lastly, women reported receiving everyday life advice from their friends. Prerana for instance commented the following: "They say take care of your own money, keep it in your pocket, if you leave it around, somebody will take it". For someone who just arrived from a small rural town, accessing public services can be quite intimidating in terms of addresses, queues, offices, etc. "Do you know the hospital? I know the hospital and I take them to the hospital" indicated Amrita. Since she has been in Mumbai for a fair amount of time, she shares her knowledge with the newer *didis*.

Knowledge as a gift refers to information related to sex work, health, other sources of income, education and everyday issues. A common factor in this theme is that the gifts originated in the feeling of identification with other women and its purpose is to satisfy needs (Vaughan, 1997). They identify with the other women not as FSWs but as human beings in need. It is out of this virtue that they offer the knowledge they have.

6.2. Material gifts

6.2.1. Food and money

Although less frequent, several women reported giving and receiving material gifts. Food and money are the most common non-ceremonial material gifts. Prerana explains her motivations for giving food to her peers: "I cannot see anyone sad, because I have seen a lot of sadness since my childhood. So, if someone does not have, I give them food". Prerana's motivation to give food to her peers could be defined as altruistic and other-oriented (Komter, 2007). Indeed, her motivation is to satisfy the need for food of her peers without expecting anything in return.

Money gifts, though given, are rather uncommon. Deepa, explains: "When they need help, I tell them to take money from me. When I need help, you'll help me, when it's a small amount…" Susmita refers to the times her friends have helped her financially despite not having much for their own needs. "My friend helps me monetarily even though she doesn't have money" Further, she explains:

> They always ask how is work coming along. In case there is no work, they
> give me emotional stability by telling me that it's ok, you will eventually

get work, don't worry, and they tell, do you have enough money to sustain yourself? If not, they give me financial help also.

Malika refers to the fact that her friends not only come to visit her when she is sick but also help her with small amounts of money such as 100 or 200 rupees and food. In case of facing any financial hardship, these gifts represent a great help.

6.2.2. Material gifts to avoid prison

According to the interviewees, police detain *didis* for one of two reasons: a) When their papers are not in order and b) When they are found soliciting in the streets. Out of the 14 interviewees, 3 reported that a friend gave money to the police in order to get them out of jail. Uzma describes her experience paying the police in the following way:

> Once they took me, my friend was there, they picked me up from the street. Then she took her husband and came to the police station. She had brought money. The minute I came out, I returned the money. Then another time, she was in a similar incident and I went and got her released.

There are other ways of helping *didis* when they face this kind of situation. Amrita explains:

> I have helped in my own way. Not with money … She is a woman from my village, she got caught, and then the police said you have documents, on your documents we can release her. That way I helped her, I signed.

In this sense, besides paying money to get a friend released, a *didi* may also present their own documents and become their friend's guarantor. This is another type of gift. As mentioned a lot of the women working in Kamathipura are migrants. Hence when verifying documents, the policemen target Nepali and Bangladeshi looking *didis*. In this sense, this type of gift is commonly observed in the particular case of Kamathipura.

The 3 *didis* who have received this kind of help reported having repaid the favor when the opportunity arose. Reciprocity in this case, is based in two of the elements explained by Komter (2007; see section 4.3.3). FSWs reciprocate due to its survival value: if they go to jail, they will not work hence they will not have money for their daily expenses. Additionally, they recognize their interdependency and the benefit of having other *didis* as allies.

6.2.3. The gift of physical security

Some of the interviewees reported episodes where they had to deal with customers who were drunk or aggressive. Even the women who do not participate in gift-giving reported either having received help or provided help at some point. When asked, Prerana explained that the *didis* working in her brothel pull off aggressive customers and that she has returned this help since: "If somebody helps us, then even I have to help them".

It is clear that physical security is a gift of great importance among *didis*. As reported by the majority of *didis* they always return the help as they too were once in need. Interestingly with this statement Prerana illustrates the morally binding value of reciprocity (see section 4.3.3). Since Prerana has received help from her *didis*, she feels compelled to also intervene whenever there are aggressive clients.

Even Preeti, who throughout the interview consistently repeated that she did not exchange any gift, reported having helped:

> It's never happened to me, but I help other *didis* in these cases. I go by their room, bang on the door, shout from outside, talk to the *didi* and the customer to calm them down.

Despite not having experienced any violent situations with any of her clients, Preeti reported having helped other *didis* who work in the same brothel as her. In this sense, it is not out of the feeling of paying back that she has done it, but it could be implied that it is a way of morally binding the *didis* to help her in the future, should the need arise.

Despite the fact that most gift-giving practices seem to be part of reciprocal exchange cycles, in most cases and this in particular, there is an expectation of getting something in return (Komter, 2005). As the *didis* are the primary source of support and protection in case of a problem with any client a combination of elements make reciprocity efficient. On one hand, its survival value and on the other the recognition of the *didis* as allies. Alliances with the goal of protecting each other are therefore created, because when facing danger: "It is better to be able to count on each other".

6.3. Social bonds

The stories of non-ceremonial gift exchange described throughout this thesis were reported to happen only between *didis* working in the same brothel and in some cases only with particular *didis* in dyads. This detail is significant because it demonstrates that participants are selective in their gift-exchange; meaning, they only exchange with those they feel close to. To answer the question: *How does gift-giving affect FSWs' social bonds*? I will analyze how gift-giving has shaped FSWs' social bonds. First, I will study *didis* who identify themselves as members of a group and then those who identify only with a single *didi.* I will end by analyzing how the lack of gift-giving affects FSWs.

6.3.1. Sense of connectedness and identification with a group of *didis*

Although every *didi* has her reasons for feeling close to other *didis,* throughout the interviews a few were mentioned repeatedly. These feelings were based on the following grounds: "I have no one, they have no one", "I feel I can talk with them about everything". Others felt comfortable because they have lived together for several years. These reasons made them feel part of a group of equals, as opposed to other women who they did not related to (Fiske, 1992). Moreover, the daily exchange of gifts previously described has shaped their social bonds in such a way that they even describe the relationship as 'being sisters'.[22] Nisha's case helps to illustrate how the

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[22] Using the word '*behen'* which means blood sister in hindi.

fact of living together has created a deep and meaningful bond. Nisha is Nepali, she lives in a small town where she has her own house. For the past 28 years she comes to Kamathipura to work whenever she needs money for her kids. Despite the fact that there are a lot of brothels in Kamathipura, Nisha shared that she always comes back to the same brothel where she first started. When asked how is the relationship with the *didis* with whom she exchanges gifts, she replied:

> At home? We all live together. We take money from this one. We take money from that one in the family and we cook together.

The use of the word *home* to talk about the brothel where Nisha lives and the fact that she refers to the other *didis* living with her as *family*, denote bonds of affection and a close relationship.

The feeling of identification, connectedness and the bonds of affection between members of a group are common characteristics of relationships that fall into the community sharing model (Fiske, 2007, see section 4.3.2) Therefore, it could be inferred that the continuous exchange of gifts between the *didis* maintained and strengthened their bonds. According to the community sharing model, the motives for gift-exchange are based on kindness and generosity. To illustrate, Gayatri shares that she is really fond of cooking and whenever she cooks nice food she likes to treat her friends:

> In my free time, I can make good food… If I make good food, I call all my neighbours and I make them eat properly. Pulav, Biryani. I am very good at Indian breads, lentils. I don't like excess of spices, oil, etc

However, as Fiske explains the identification with a group is not permanent. Members can be selective about their gift-giving practices. In this case for instance, Gayatri identifies with the other *didis* and therefore shares food with them, but yet when it comes to exchange childcare services, she does not feel connected anymore. Indeed, Gayatri differentiates herself from the group in this particular issue because as she shared, she does not trust any of her friends to take care of her children, only in the organization where she keeps them.

> If the center was not there, I wouldn't have kept the kids with me… I cannot leave the kids with anyone. I don't have that kind of trust with anyone here.

It is important to understand that the feeling of communal sharing exists around certain gifts but not in the case of all types of gifts. As such, the majority of the interviewees expressed that they would not trust any *didi* to take care of their children.

6.3.2. Dyadic relationships

Community sharing is not only common in groups of people but also in dyads. As opposed to Nisha and Gayatri, during the whole interview, Indira only talked about the exchange of gifts occurring with a particular *didi* whom she really feels close to. Indira also shared how she would even take care of her friend's sons. With a big smile on her face she stated that: "...they call me *khala"* (mother's sister in hindi).

Malika as well referred only to one *didi*: "I talk to my *didi*, she is the lady who lent me money. I know her for 24 years. Other than that, I don't talk to anyone." The fact that she lends Malika a large amount of money without charging any interest is highly appreciated by her. When asked, none of the *didis* said that they had this type of relationship. Hence despite involving a monetary exchange this is considered a gift, as the other available sources i.e. Loan sharks charge high interest rates.

Prerana recalled that only one *didi* had ever taken her to the hospital:

> The person who took me to the hospital has passed away, she was a *didi*. She helped me a lot, and since she passed away, I feel alone".

As explained by Skageby (2010), gifts are more than a simple exchange of goods or services, they have the power to shape and strengthen social relations. It could be suggested that the consistent help provided deepened their relationship and strengthened their bonds. As a consequence, now Prerana mourns the loss of her friend.

The exceptionality of these gifts; childcare, lending money without interest and taking someone to the hospital (when nobody else has done it before), denote how close they feel to each other. As explained (see section 4.3.2) members of a dyad treat each other as equivalent and undifferentiated (Vodosek, 2009). These examples could suggest how the exchange of these types of gifts strengthens their relationship, their identification with and connection to as well.

The social bonds that were described and analyzed throughout these 2 sections denote the spirit of community that exists between them. Alliances of care, empathy and protection were reported by almost all the participants. Some of them identified as a group, others as members of a dyad. Overall, this research found that the relationship between most of the participants were positive and friendly in accordance with Shdaimah and Leon's (2016) study presented in section 3.2.

6.3.3. Women who do not engage in gift-giving

When Divya arrived in Mumbai she had a serious car accident which led to her being admitted to a hospital. Once she recovered a Nepali woman brought her straight from the hospital to Kamathipura and sold her to a *gharwali.* After two years Divya repaid the g*harwali* the price she had originally paid for her, and then started working independently. Although, her family owns a coconut farm she stays in Mumbai. She explains she rather stay there to be close to a big hospital where she can get her HIV medication for free. Because of what happened to her, Divya has lost trust in everyone and that is why she stays away from most people. As she explains she does not even exchange the gift of words.

> I eat with the 5 women who work at the same place. They come with small babies and then they leave. We sit in a line, and eat… I haven't asked where they are from … We eat in silence.

As Vaughan (1997) explains, language creates human bonds. The fact that these women do not even speak to each other denotes a lack of interest in creating any bond between them.

When Amrita was 20 years old, she decided to come to Kamathipura. As she explains her family was very poor and she had 6 sisters and no brothers. During the 10 years that she has been working she only talks about exchanges with one *didi*. During the interview she barely spoke about this *didi,* instead focussing predominantly on her lack of support in overcoming daily hardships.

> I don't have a husband or parents, I do not get love from anyone, and everyone has betrayed me and gone. I have also explained to my daughter, if there is food, eat, if there is no food, keep your mouth shut and go off to sleep, don't beg anyone.

As opposed to other women who find in gift-giving a way of coping with everyday hardships, she prefers to send her daughter to sleep with an empty stomach. As she explains, if she accepts anything from the other *didis*: "I will have to pay them back at some point". As explained by Thoen (2006) the expectation of the return along with the obligation that the recipient feels to reciprocate ties individuals. Amrita's description illustrates that women are mindful of the commitment that arises with the exchange of gifts.

Finally, Priya is from Bangladesh. She comes to Kamathipura only for work and then she returns to her house. During the whole interview she constantly repeated not exchanging gifts with anyone. The only gift she exchanges despite not acknowledging it was the gift of physical security. Overall, she feels really depressed and wishes she could find a place to stay. She shares that she has witnessed other people exchanging help, yet she explains she has never received any. "I have seen in front of my eyes, that everyone else helps everyone else. But, no one helps me."

By engaging in gift-giving practices the women understand that they are bound to each other. Some decide they do not want this binding and choose not to participate. Others, on the contrary, may be excluded from even having the choice to participate by the *didis.* Whatever the reason, the visible consequences are that they do not receive any help to cope with everyday hardships and they have not been able to build lasting relationships. Nevertheless, the non-participation is not total as one of them did report exchanging gifts of physical security. Although the participation in gift exchanges is

selective, it was observed that the more the women participate the more friends they reported to have and vice versa. The women who reported not engaging in gift-exchanges also reported feeling sad and even depressed. This clearly shows the impact that gift-giving has in creating and maintaining social bonds.

7. Conclusions

The research question guiding this thesis was: *How is gift-giving used by sex workers in Kamathipura?* It was found that the exchange of non-ceremonial gifts is used as a way of coping with everyday hardships and for maintaining and strengthening social bonds between FSWs. These findings were mirrored in the studies conducted by Meler (2014), Vaa (1989) and Weeks (2012). This was highlighted when exploring gifts that are commonly exchanged between FSWs in order to answer the first sub question: *What type of non-ceremonial gifts are exchanged among FSWs?* Based on Komter's broad interpretation of gifts, non-material and material gifts were found to be exchanged on a day-to-day basis.

Emotional support was the most reported non-material nonceremonial gift exchanged. It provides *didis* with comfort, reliability, courage and relief to face everyday hardships. Another common gift is *Care.* When sick FSWs receive assistance in going to the doctor, purchasing medicine, making food and routine health checkups. Finally, knowledge, which refers to gifts of information related to: sex work, health, other sources of income, education and everyday issues. A major finding of this study was that FSWs exchange client referrals and warnings about dangerous customers.

Material gifts are also offered on a daily basis. *Food* was the object exchanged the most. Although rare, *money* is also exchanged in order to satisfy needs, when lacking work. Other context specific gifts were also found. The first, was *a means to avoid prison*; when detained by the police, *didis* would help each other in two ways. Either by paying *money* to the police to release the *didi* or by lending their *identification documents* and becoming their guarantors. Lastly, *physical security* is also exchanged, whenever encountering a violent or drunk client. Interestingly, the constant exchange of this gift was found to create alliances of protection.

Gift-giving theory consists of 3 elements; other-orientation, bonding value, reciprocity. In this thesis I devoted a specific section of the analysis to bonding value but not toward *other orientation* and *reciprocity*. As explained in the analytical framework (see section 4.5), these elements were studied throughout the analysis to further address the main research question. Regarding other-orientation it was found that indeed, all these exchanges are need-oriented as opposed to profit-oriented. Although the *didis* truly feel that they are giving in order to satisfy the needs of others, consciously or unconsciously they all expect reciprocity. For this reason, the motivations for exchanging are at the same time *other-oriented* and *self-oriented*. The obligation of *reciprocity* was also mentioned by a significant number of interviewees. It was found that *didis* in Kamathipura often return what has been given, and Komter's 5 elements of reciprocity stand true, that is: a) To increase their survival chances, b) To establish alliances, c) To keep the cycle of exchange, d) To comply with what is morally correct, and e) To comply with the requirements of social life by satisfying one's needs but also social expectations.

The last research question was to find out *How does gift-giving among FSWs affect their social bonds?* In order to answer this question, Fiske's 4 models of social relations were used. The findings placed the social bonds between the *didis* in the model of communal sharing. Their social bonds were close, rooted in generosity and kindness, due to their feelings of connectedness to and identification with each other. These bonds have created alliances of care and empathy. However, it was observed that FSWs engage in selective gift-giving. This means that the *didis* might identify at the moment of exchanging certain gifts but not at others. This assertion was demonstrated through an example where one *didi* would identify with and feel connected to another when exchanging food, but not at the moment of exchanging childcare services. FSWs cannot be regarded as homogeneous, because they are a rather diverse group. Furthermore, their relationships cannot be studied with a binary lens of good vs bad. On the contrary, the complexity of their relationships and the uniqueness of each individual should be acknowledged. For instance, some *didis* would identify with a group of other *didis* living in the same brothel as them, some would only identify within a dyad, and others with not even a single *didi*. In the case of dyads, the *didis* involved would experience a much stronger bond. This is validated

by observing the nature of the gifts exchanged; childcare and money without interest. Finally, the situation of the *didis* who do not participate in gift exchange was analyzed. It was found that the lack of gift-exchange excludes them from building perdurable social bonds having to deal with everyday hardships by themselves.

In accordance to Shdaimah and Leon's (2016) study, it was found that FSWs create alliances of empathy and care. Therefore, it contradicts studies that have portrayed them as rivals. By looking at the daily lives of FSWs, certain instances in which FSWs do identify with and feel connected to each other were found. These findings could be useful in developmental projects oriented toward community mobilization between FSWs; since only by focusing on FSWs nuanced reality, tailored interventions could be designed. The need for this type of intervention was also one of Kongelf's (2015) concluding remarks after conducting research on the reasons why a particular HIV-prevention program that succeeded in other cities in India, failed in Mumbai (see section 2.3).

The use of gift-giving theory illuminates the complex and interdependent dynamics of the sex work context in Kamathipura. I hope that this description and analysis of the participants' stories depicts them as individuals who strive to make a better life in an environment embedded with restrictions. FSWs non-ceremonial gift-exchange is not grounded in altruism but on the contrary, it is a way to guarantee the fulfilment of their needs. Needs that they feel comfortable servicing only with people they feel connected to or identify with. This is the salient feature of FSWs in Kamathipura.

8. Future research

Gift-giving theory has been fundamental in shedding light on FSWs social bonds. Given the lack of studies using this theory, in this context, the opportunities for research are abundant. While studying the gift exchange between peers several other relationships worth exploring appeared, such as FSW-*gharwali* and FSW-client which could be described by Fiske's authority ranking model. Further exploring these relationships could help provide a more holistic view of the existing gift-giving

practices within a brothel and the impact on their social bonds. Research on gift-giving patterns is also suggested based on the evidence of preferential exchange among *didis* of the same nationality. Moreover, this study only focused on brothel-based FSWs, hence it is still unknown how street-based FSWs cope with everyday hardships.

Due to the exploratory nature of the interview questions, [23] there still exists room to investigate how FSWs use gift-exchange with people outside the bounds of community sharing. In this sense, it would be useful to see if they participate in exchanges with people that belong to other types of models giving rise to alternative bonds and power relations.

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[23] As explained in section 5.3.3. the questions were partially based on social support theory and everyday life, the questions were framed in such a way that the participants only spoke about really close friends.

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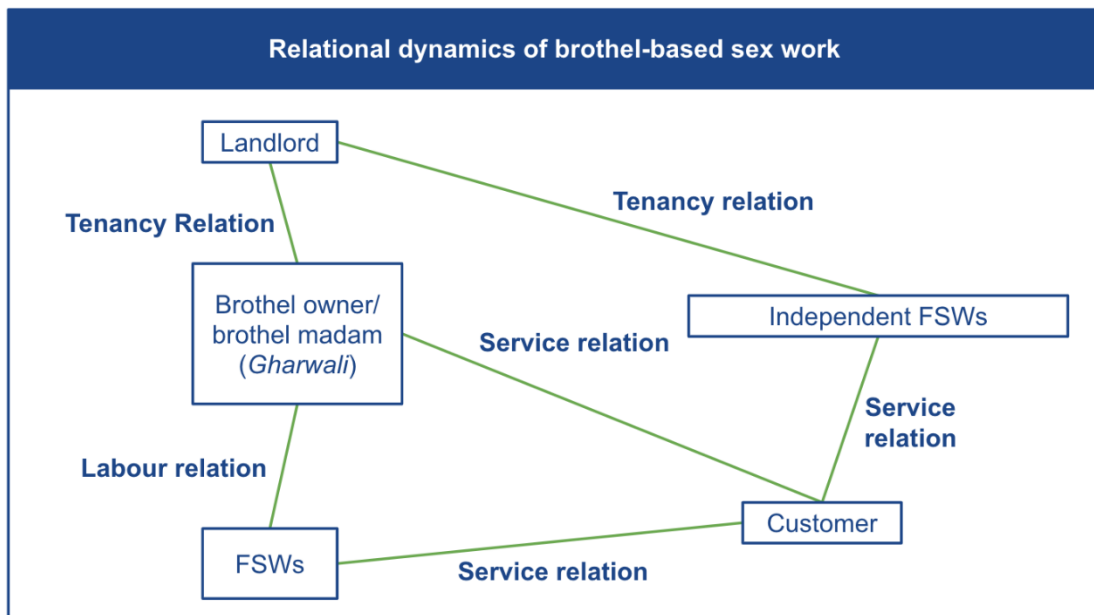
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Appendix 1

No.	Name	Age	Marital status	No. of children	Origin	Family knows about the profession		HIV positive		Living in a brothel	Renting a room in a brothel	Years in the profession
						Yes	No	Yes	No			
1	Divya	30	Married	1	Bangalore		X	X			X	13
2	Prerana	35	Single	0	Nepal		X	X		X		20
3	Nisha	42	Married	3	Nepal		X	X		X		28
4	Deepa	20	Married	0	Odisha	X		X			X	9
5	Malika	50	Married	3	Calcutta	X		X			X	26
6	Amrita	30	Married	1	Andhra Pradesh		X	X		X		10
7	Priya	37	Married	3	Bangladesh		X	X			X	16
8	Preeti	27	Married	2	Calcutta	-	-	-	-		X	-
9	Gita	30	Married	1	Calcutta		X		X	X		12-13
10	Gayatri	40	Married	2	Bihar		X	-	-		X	25
11	Indira	30	Married	3	Calcutta		X	-	-		X	12
12	Susmita	35	Married	1	Calcutta	-	-	-	-		X	-
13	Latika	40-50	Married	3	Calcutta	-	-	-	-		X	9
14	Uzma	30	Married	1	Calcutta	-	-	-	-		X	10

Appendix 2

Kotiswaran, P.,2011. *Dangerous sex, invisible labor. Sex work and the law in India,* p. 141