The fall of the communist regimes and the opening of borders between Finland and its eastern neighbours has had far-reaching consequences to the situation of commercial sex in Finland. The revival of sex business since the early 1990s was linked to the “supply” of sex workers from the politically and economically unstable neighbouring countries in the east. In Finland, the climate became more favourable for prostitution with the abolishment of the Vagrancy Act in 1987. A further explanatory factor for the “invasion” of commercial sex has been the changes in the gender culture and sexual liberation during the last couple of decades: values underlining individualism and hedonism have, in the prostitution discourse, resulted in the placement of the client’s pleasure before the abuse of the prostitute.

This paper is based on 24 narratives and 5 interviews of Finnish byers of sex. The focus of analysis is on how these men reproduce masculinity and ethnicity and related power expressions on the prostitute encounter. It is my assumption that in the context of sex business, and further, within the discussion concerning prostitution in present-day Finland, relationships of power between the genders are being produced and reproduced, challenged and renegotiated in social action. In a modern society the boundaries between gender roles have become exceedingly blurred. Therefore, commercial sex may offer some men a social space of “male emancipation”.

Following Sara Ahmed, I aim to examine the subject from the viewpoint of “stranger fetishism” and further, consumption(ing) of sex. Gendered and ethnic hierarchy in the prostitution context is also under consideration. Prostitution in Finland is ethnicized in a sense that most of the prostitutes are either Russian or Baltic women and the clients, correspondingly, Finnish men. “Domesticity” of the prostitutes may serve as an asset, but “exotism” is what seems to sustain the demand and interest of the clients.