Are there only ugly men buying beautiful women in prostitution? - The intersection of money, power and potency in the prostitution encounter

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This paper is based on a qualitative study in which 26 male heterosexual clients of prostitutes in Germany were interviewed. The interview material gives insight in how prostitution not only is a space to exercise or live masculinity but also a space in which masculinity is produced and reproduced in particular ways - for instance, the neglect of characteristics typically associated with being female (such as emotional and relational sex), the experience of a strong male sex drive, the connection of male sexuality with vision, and the cultural link between male sexuality and money. In my presentation I will focus on the last issue, the link between money, power and potency. Money has been theorised as being a powerful means – not only in prostitution. I will argue, however, that money creates ambivalence in the context of prostitution. This ambivalence is based on the historical background of money in Europe that links it very clearly to the issue of potency/castration as well as the fact that money is not a factual exchange value but a social medium for exchange. Furthermore, it implies that men who go to prostitutes pay for a service that otherwise they could not have. For this reason, some men are emotionally depending on the fantasy of a mutual relationship. This need creates a mystery on the side of the prostitute that is related to the mystery of the female orgasm in general (one can never be sure of what she really feels).

The relationship of money, power, and potency is not a linear one. In order to recognize it one has to gaze into different layers of social relations as well as cultural history. Additionally, it shows how money is gendered not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms, which makes it an important part of the reproduction of gender identity through prostitution.