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Sugar for Sale: Constructions of Intimacy in the Sugar Bowl

Emily Zimmermann

The capitalist grasp of western society infiltrates even the most intimate moments, shaping desires, relationships, and bodies in its relentless pursuit of profit. Sexuality is fashioned into commodities that range from pornography and sex toys to labiaplasty and performance enhancing pills (Fahs 281). These products not only involve a transfer of money, but also move the consumer towards an 'ideal' sexuality that is represented in the media through advertisements, movies, and music videos.

In recent years, a new type of sexual commercialization has emerged. 'Seeking Arrangement' is a website that facilitates the search for a 'mutually beneficial relationship' between Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies. These relationships typically involve younger women seeking the company of older, wealthy men who will provide them financial aid in return for 'companionship.' In order to survey this unexplored territory, it is pertinent to begin by examining the social climate surrounding the development of this phenomenon. A discussion of the experiences of sex workers and clients will be used to establish the place of emotional intimacy in sex work. This discussion will be supplemented by an examination of the 'normalization' of the sex industry and 'new market morality.' Following this, a discourse analysis of user comments on the website Seeking Arrangement is provided. The discourse analysis shows that the dominant construction of sugar relationships involves a personal and sexual connection that is facilitated by the commodification of emotional intimacy. This type of emotionally intimate relationship is viewed positively by users, but also succumbs to the reproduction of gender inequality and the stigmatization of sex work.

I. Untangling Intimacy and Commodity in the Sex Industry

The relationships facilitated by Seeking Arrangement typically involve two aspects: (1) intimacy in sex work, and (2) consumption of sexuality. Once a theoretical framework for these elements is established, they will be synthesized into an analytical framework that can be applied to the sugar phenomenon.

I. Beyond Bodies

The place of emotional intimacy in sex work is sociologically complex because it departs from the assumption that sex is the only part of sex work. Pheterson, Prasad, and Sanders explore the discourse surrounding sex work by examining the experiences of clients and sex workers, with a particular focus on ‘regular clients.’

Pheterson takes a comparative approach to the exploration of ‘the whore stigma’ in sex work by contrasting the experiences of female sex workers with popular assumptions from social, psychological, and legal perspectives. The comparisons reveal that stigma surrounding sex work not only emanates from the sale of a woman’s body, but also the way that the sale socially corrupts the woman’s identity (Pheterson 39-48). When examining the popular conception of male clients, a gendered distinction is revealed; male clients are stigmatized for their sexual actions, but their actions do not debase their identity (Pheterson 48). These differing perceptions show that while clients and workers participate in the same sexual act, the act is imbued with extra meaning that extends to the identity of sex workers. Part of this extra meaning comes from the necessity of sex workers to go beyond the sex act to engage in emotional pampering and ego boosting of men (Pheterson 55). The emotional pampering comes from being the vessels onto which men impart a “secret” part of themselves by sharing their fantasies, preferences, and even identities (Pheterson 55). The ego-boosting requirement takes place outside of sex, where sex workers must reassure a man of his masculinity both privately and publically should he be unsuccessful in intercourse; this is a phenomenon that sex workers call “playing the whore” (Pheterson 41).

Another finding from Pheterson’s research is the dissatisfaction expressed by sex workers with legal regulations. Female sex workers reported that anti-pimping laws were used in racist and sexist ways against women and black men, while simultaneously allowing other abusive practices in sex work to go unaddressed (Pheterson 45). Sex workers claimed that a commercial regulation of sex work would allow for these problematic practices to be effectively targeted and allow them to organize in ways that they find to be safe (Pheterson 44-45).

Discursive changes surrounding gift versus commodity exchange can be identified and applied to shifts in the experience of sex work. In market economies with increasing commercialization, commodity exchange involving set prices is beginning to hold a sense of sincerity comparable to the practice of giving gifts, such as buying a date a present or paying for a spouse’s dinner (Prasad 183-85) In this context, the experience of selling or purchasing a partner’s sexual services may become valued in similar ways to sex between partners. Being a ‘regular client’ holds the possibility that one would experience this commodity exchange as an intimate

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and desirable relationship. Client interviewees demonstrate this sentiment in their comparisons of the insincerity in marriage with the honesty in this form of sex work. Male and female clients expressed that once a transfer of money occurs, there is an unspoken sense of integrity between parties that can rid the encounter of possible hypocrisies found in marriage (Prasad 199, 204, 209). Marital hypocrisy is said to result from one partner trading love and sex, which may be insincere, for the money and security it brings (Prasad 200). Prasad's study shows that, for some people, the free-market economy renders romantic love as unfavourable when compared to commercialized sex (205-06).

Sanders investigates male heterosexual clients' constructions of being a "regular" through qualitative interviews (Sanders 403). These relationships are characterized as involving "emotional labour", and exhibit behaviour found in conventional relationships including contact in-between visits, public outings, trust, and prioritizing mutual sexual satisfaction (Sanders 403-09). Some men specifically seek "the girlfriend experience", which can be conceptualized as a transformation of prostitution and a commercialization of emotional intimacy (Sanders 412-413). Sanders notes that the commercialization of "emotional labour" in the sex industry could be improved by the free market system in two ways (Sanders 411). First, as sex workers must often operate in secret, they are more exposed to abuse and exploitation; commercial regulation could allow this to be combated with legal protections offered by formal contracts (Sanders 412). Second, by keeping sex work stigmatized, stereotypes about male clients being abusive are perpetuated; commercial regulation could reveal and encourage the respectful way that many clients treat sex workers (Sanders 413). Sanders' exploration into the experiences of sex workers and clients demonstrates a transformation in the sex industry in which emotional intimacy and respect are valued.

II. Business is Booming

The commodification of sex is changing due to the normalization of sex work and importance of emotional intimacy. A review of recent economic and political changes can help identify how these shifts are contributing to the expansion of the sex industry.

Brent and Sanders discuss the effect of mainstreaming, neoliberalism, and late capitalism on the growth of the sex industry in Las Vegas and Leeds (40-41). Mainstreaming refers to the expansion of the sex industry due to the use of conventional business models, increased visibility, and growth of middle-class clients and middle-class sex workers; in turn, these trends encourage the normalization of the sex industry (43-44). Mainstreaming has been facilitated by a shift in social institu-

tions that regulate sexuality. Prior to the onset of industrialization, religion was the primary regulating force of sexuality. The declining influence of religion and rise of capitalism has led the free market to increasingly act as a regulating force (45). With the diminishing influence of religion, more liberal attitudes towards sexuality have gained traction; the market has fed on these changes through the expansion of the sex industry. Neoliberalism encourages these developments by making individual choice a “moral right”; responsabilization and individualization replace communal regulations of the past (46). One’s right to choose what they consume and how they live in regards to their sexuality is an element of the free market morality evidenced by the abandonment of sodomy and anti-pornography laws in favour of trusting the market’s regulation of sexuality (46). Freedom to choose is facilitated by the availability of new technologies, such as the Internet, which remain largely unregulated (46).

Brent and Sanders note that the expansion of the sex industry is facilitated by a decrease in the availability of jobs and an increase in cost of living (45-46). The struggle to obtain a living wage coupled with increasing debt from post-secondary education has led to rising numbers of middle-class sex workers, many of whom are female students. Another factor that contributes to sex work being a viable option for these women is the permeation of sexualized job requirements in mainstream work, such as in the service industry where servers may be required to dress suggestively for male patrons (45).¹

Post-industrial capitalism contributes to the normalization of the sex industry, which in turn transforms the meanings that sex consumers attribute to their own behaviour (Bernstein 392). The sex industry has become a multi-billion dollar business due to expansion, diversification, and the decrease in shame associated with participation. Bernstein’s research into client’s accounts of their experience with escorts demonstrates that they are “un-self-conscious” about their participation in these practices due to the act being viewed as consumption of a product rather than deviant behaviour (401). This points towards a noticeable shift in social attitudes; sex is now increasingly framed as a “recreational” activity rather than as an action for procreation (Bernstein 392-95).

According to Bernstein, the free market facilitates recreational consumption of sex in three ways. First, expansion of the sex industry promoted by a free market system allows for the growth of “specialized” services, such as fetish clubs and escorts for niche sexualities like BDSM (392). Second, it allows for “bounded authenticity”, which denotes the genuineness client’s attribute to sexual encounters with sex

¹ Despite the expansion of the sex industry, research shows that sex work is not completely acceptable; clients and workers deal with social stigma and are criminalized (Brent and Sanders 57, 60).

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workers (398). Genuineness comes from the act of purchasing, which rids the experience of the “messiness” of romantic relationships by clearly specifying expectations while still allowing for an emotional and sexual connection (402). These “bounded” and “authentic” sexual encounters are starting to be valued over the quick and impersonal nature of encounters with “streetwalkers” (402). Third, the free market’s organization influences clients’ perception of themselves as consumers of sex. A client’s participation is not out of desperation, but is purely as a consumer with desires – a consumer who has the right to make purchases without shame (400). As long as one can afford it, these men feel entitled to access numerous beautiful partners who will satisfy their sexual and emotional desires (400). “authentic” sexual encounters are starting to be valued over the quick and impersonal nature of encounters with “streetwalkers” (402). Third, the free market’s organization influences clients’ perception of themselves as consumers of sex. A client’s participation is not out of desperation, but is purely as a consumer with desires – a consumer who has the right to make purchases without shame (400). As long as one can afford it, these men feel entitled to access numerous beautiful partners who will satisfy their sexual and emotional desires (400).

The effects of free market neoliberalism on dating relationships provide a helpful point of comparison with interactions in the sex industry and in sugar relationships. Just as the neoliberal principle of individualization has opened up space in the market for growth of the sex industry, it has also transformed popular constructions of an ideal heterosexual dating relationship (Brent and Sanders 46). Relationships are increasingly based on emotional connections that foster love rather than being based on economic necessity as they were in the past (Eldén 5). Dating relationships are still premised on shared economic resources, yet this is secondary to romantic and emotional requirements (Ross and Mirowsky 67). Furthermore, due to processes of individualization, an ideal relationship requires “individual satisfaction” of both partners; each partner must get something from the relationship and has the choice to continue or end the relationship based on their level of satisfaction (Eldén 5). Ideal dating relationships are often constructed in therapeutic texts as involving “relationship work” such as communication with one’s partner about the relationship and respecting each other’s individuality (Eldén 7-8).

II. The Sugar Bowl

Founded in 2005 by Brandon Wade, Seeking Arrangement is an American-based website that has expanded internationally with over 3.6 million members worldwide. The Seeking Arrangement website works in a similar fashion to traditional dating websites where profiles are available to browse and include photos of users

and a description of their interests. Users can contact each other by sending messages, ‘favouriting’ one another, and sharing private photos. The main feature that sets this dating site apart from others is its focus on ‘arrangements’ between Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies or Sugar Mommas. Sugar Babies are defined on the website as “attractive people” who enjoy luxury and could use an “experienced mentor” to spoil them or provide financial security (“How it Works” 2013). Sugar babies are primarily young adults and are often students; 44% of Sugar Babies state on their profile that they are students (Bahadur 2013). Sugar Daddies or Mommas are described as “successful” and “generous” people; the average Sugar Daddy is 42 years old, single, has an income of \$524,127 and spends an average of \$5,692 a month on his Sugar Baby or Babies (Bahadur 2013). Sugar Daddies and Mommas seek the company of attractive people with whom they can foster their ideal relationship, whatever that may mean to them. Thus it is fitting that the site describes the arrangements between the two as “relationships on your terms (“How it Works” 2013).

The site characterizes traditional dating relationships as selfish, messy, and insincere, offering arrangements as an ideal substitute. The site works to create arrangements between people that are honest, forthright, and goal-directed. This distinction reflects the notion of ‘bounded authenticity’ by suggesting that contractual and commercial relationships are more genuine than traditional dating. Sugar Babies are granted free access to the site while Sugar Daddies are required to pay a membership fee. The site facilitates arrangements through the organization of user’s profiles. Sugar Daddies must list their income, net worth, the amount they are willing to pay, and what it is they are looking to get in return, whereas Sugar Babies state a general amount they are hoping to be paid. From here, the two partners can use this information to negotiate a personalized arrangement through messaging one another.²

III. Methods

I. Sample

The Seeking Arrangement website includes a blog with an active comment section that the website claims should be used to engage in “...a civil discussion about all things sugar...” (“About the Seeking Arrangement Sugar Daddy Blog” 2013). This blog provides a public forum for Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies to communicate. From this online forum, 748 comments were used for textual analysis. Comments chosen for analysis were posted by members of Seeking Arrangement and represent a wide range of experience levels with the website; comments chosen range from ‘newbies’ to experienced members. In the sampled comments, there was a roughly equal representation of Sugar Babies versus Sugar Daddies. All of the analysed

² It is estimated that 80% of sugar arrangements include sex (Higgins 2013).

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commenters in this sample were interested in heterosexual relationships and were not Sugar Mommies or male Sugar Babies. Accordingly, the findings will be framed in terms of heterosexual relationships between older men and younger women.

The Seeking Arrangement blogs are posted roughly once a week on topics related to sugar arrangements, ranging from how to make a successful profile to cultural differences. Members are invited to engage in casual discussion in the comment section. In order to obtain a range of recent responses, 3 blogs of a possible 500 from Seeking Arrangement's archives were selected; one blog was chosen from September 2013, October 2013, and November 2013. After examining these blogs, it became clear that the sampled data was sufficient for the purposes of this study because (1) the data began to reflect recurrent themes, and (2) no new themes arose. This is characteristic of discourse analysis, which often combines the steps of data collection and analysis in order to engage in "theoretical sampling" rather than more mathematically based sampling methods (Meyer 18). With the massive amount of data available on Seeking Arrangement (over 100,000 comments), focusing in-depth on 750 comments allowed for a detailed and concise analysis. By choosing three blogs from one year, the comments offer a snapshot of the state of the Sugar Bowl as 2013 drew to a close. In general, commenters' discussions did not solely revolve around the initial topic of the blog, thus comments were analyzed without reference to the blog itself.

II. Analysis

Textual discourse analysis was used to examine comments from the Seeking Arrangement blogs. Discourse analysis seeks to make the relationship between "language and power" salient through an examination of the discourse itself and the discourse's theoretical and historical background (Meyer 15; Wodak 2-3). This type of analysis seeks to answer how the text that is being studied reproduces power relations, ideology, and systemic inequality (Wodak 2). Discourse analysis is applicable to the investigation of Seeking Arrangement because it is a way to access participant's views on delicate and personal subjects.

The data was approached with an initial open-coding process where it was read and re-read to begin to establish initial patterns and themes. Many comments were irrelevant for the current research, such as those that detailed party and travel plans or those involving private jokes. Both party and travel plans involved little to do with the constructions of sugar arrangements and merely offered locations, times, and travel preparations. Private jokes were inaccessible for analysis because personal background of the commenters appeared necessary to fully understand the jokes. Despite these outliers, several main themes emerged. One initial pattern was the abundance of discussions related to prostitution and the repeated insistence that

sugar arrangements were incomparable. Using this and other initial themes such as discussions of honesty, relationships, and Sugar Baby and Sugar Daddy characteristics, the text was analysed again. Re-visiting data with theoretical and thematic considerations in mind is common for discourse analysis and is used to effectively group clusters of data together in meaningful and accurate ways. This final re-visiting of the data involved a closed structural analysis, which clearly established dominant themes and grouped together examples of the themes (Meyer 25).

Through this process, it became clear that the initial themes branched-off of the core theme of emotional intimacy in arrangements. This finding was supported by a prevalence of comments regarding each of the subthemes. Prevalence was determined based on comments coming from a variety of commenters and from a variety of Sugar Daddies and Sugar Babies. These themes suggest that arrangements between Sugar Daddies and Babies are constructed as emotionally intimate relationships based on close personal connections as opposed to simply sexual and economic transactions.

IV. Findings

Arrangements are constructed as intimate relationships, thus drawing some parallels to traditional dating relationships. This is demonstrated in Sweetie and onxy_percula's comments, "I look at a [Sugar Daddy] as a part-time boyfriend" and "the new [Sugar Baby] is the perfect part-time girlfriend." While arrangements are similar to dating in terms of a preference for monogamy, going on dates, and the involvement of an emotional connection, there are also important differences. The key factor that distinguishes arrangements is the explicit negotiation of expectations about economic benefits and time spent together. Explicitness of this kind is not typically part of dating relationships, but the value of this negotiation can be understood in terms of bounded authenticity and the individualization processes. In what follows, the construction of arrangements as intimate relationships will be explored through three subthemes: the construction of Sugar Babies, the relationship between arrangements and prostitution, and conventional features of arrangements.

I. Sugar Babies: 'Smoking Hot' Students

The Sugar World constructs a desirable Sugar Baby as both physically attractive and smart. This is exemplified by a quote on the main page of Seeking Arrangement: "Goal Seeking Sugar Baby: Attractive, intelligent, ambitious and goal oriented. Sugar Babies are students, actresses, models or girls & guys next door." These characteristics emphasize the importance of physical attractiveness, which excludes those who are not deemed attractive by men. In turn, members of the Sugar World

construct a desirable Sugar Baby in a way that is consistent with the objectification of female bodies. Ricklad101 describes a Sugar Baby as "...above average and super hot" and onxy_percula adds that his sugar baby is "...hot enough that Playboy invited her to audition." This notion is reinforced by the view of one sugar baby; SugarySpicey shares that "an SB should be smoking hot, why would an SD pursue her otherwise?" In addition to being 'smoking hot', Sugar Babies must also be unattainable and inaccessible in real life. For instance, FatBastardSD characterizes this in his description of using Seeking Arrangement to "...date SB's out of his league." A desirable Sugar Baby, however, must also be intelligent; intelligence is typically evidenced by the degree of education a Sugar Baby has achieved. Sugar Daddies agree with onyx_percula, who teases, "what is the sexiest part of a SB? It's between her ears not her legs." Similarly, Percy S states, "so many smart ladies on this site – intelligence is a turn on."

The way that desirable Sugar Babies are constructed shows the involvement of emotional and psychological intimacy in arrangements. Bernstein's work on the sex industry shows that commodification and personal choice underlie why some men think they deserve "multiple attractive partners" if they can pay the price (400). Sugar Daddies partially express this perceived right through the value placed on the beauty of the Sugar Babies that they are 'consuming.' Yet, sugar arrangements are unique in that the consumption of an intelligent woman is of significant value. Implicit in this valuation of intelligence is the assumption that intelligent women can provide these men with more than just sex and beauty; they can offer humour, ambition to the relationship, and lively conversation.

Sugar arrangements show that the sex industry is expanding to satisfy new desires, namely the desire for attractive women who are intelligent. On the surface, this implies a progressive image of women in which women are not only valued for their appearance. From the point of view of Sugar Daddies, the fact that Sugar Babies are intelligent signifies an element of free choice and desire because it suggests that the Sugar Baby is not doing this because she has no other options for work. The element of choice and desire appear crucial to the existence, or at least the illusion, of an emotionally intimate relationship that goes beyond sex. Moreover, Sugar Babies' comments indicate that they are proud to be thought of as intelligent and are happy to capitalize off of this trait.

II. Prostitution and Sugar

The Sugar World is careful to constantly reiterate that Sugar Babies are not whores, escorts, or prostitutes. This construction has the effect of obscuring the money-for-sex transaction in arrangements and representing the relationship as more conventional. This disclaimer is explicit on the website under the terms of agreement for signing up:

Please take note that we prohibit anyone from promoting illegal activities (such as prostitution) ... we reserve the right to, amongst other things, remove you from our website and ban you permanently. If you are an escort, please do not join this website.

Consistent with this disclaimer, Onxy_percula states, “a lot of newbie SDs seem to think the SBs are whores or ... a notch above a whore. General misconception; that somehow this is a sleazy thing to be involved in.” SugarySpicey similarly expresses, “[h]ell, I respect whores. But just as I am not a plumber (though I use a toilet) I am not a whore.”

Another way that those in the Sugar World separate their relationships from prostitution is through their insistence that arrangements are not explicitly about sex. Sugar Daddies and Babies emphasize that when sex is involved, the relationship also involves an emotionally intimate connection. Sugar Daddies like FatBastardSD and Ricklad 101 explain this kind of intimacy by noting that sugar arrangements are not simply about guaranteed sex. They claim that when sex is involved, it is “enhanced... [by] knowing each other.” Onxy_percula reinforces this conclusion by expressing that the “vast majority of time, effort and expense is spent outside the bedroom.” The denunciation of prostitution becomes more explicit when members express their negative views of ‘hobbying.’ In short, hobbying is a slang term used to describe the practice of frequenting escorts or paying for sex to a degree that it nears an addiction. As Onxy_percula says, “hobby...yuck is the word.” Sugar Babies share similar views, with SugarySpicey stating that “...these women charge \$8 USD-BARF!!!!...gross... revolting.”

The construction of sugar arrangements as distinct from prostitution serves the interests of the website, Sugar Babies, and Sugar Daddies. It is important for those who control the website to allow discussions like these in order to distance themselves from legal problems that would accompany allowing prostitutes to be on the website. Distancing the website from prostitution reflects Brents and Sanders’ claim about the changing nature of the sex industry; the site has adopted a conventional business model (distancing its practices from prostitution and utilizing a dating web-

site's organizational model), and includes the participation of high-class users (i.e. Sugar Daddies).

By criticizing prostitution, Sugar Babies distance themselves from whore stigma, which is typically associated with prostitution. Sugar Babies' criticisms deflect condemnation of the Sugar World while also perpetuating the stigmatization of sex workers by characterizing them as cheap, dirty, and promiscuous. The line that separates Sugar Babies from prostitutes is made clear when users condemn Sugar Babies with multiple Sugar Daddies. Gentle(man)soul explains, "this kind of multi-pleasuring puts her in an escort category rather than a young girl wanting mentoring and some help." Onyx_percula shares that "most SBs do not want more than one SD and I hear things like 'I would feel like an escort if I did that.'" Sugar Babies construct this in much the same way, with Laura stating, "[a] woman with multiple SDs is seen as being promiscuous and 'just after the money.'" Seeking Arrangement users, however, neither condemned the number of Sugar Babies with which a Sugar Daddy was in a relationship, nor the number of sexual exploits in which a Sugar Daddy had participated. Users on Seeking Arrangement are involved in reproducing dominant gender norms; users stigmatize women who have engaged in casual sex with numerous partners, but overlook the same quality in men (Beres 193; Shaw 353).

III. Sugar Relationships: 'White Knights' and 'Unicorns'

On Seeking Arrangement, relationships are constructed in a romanticised way akin to conventional dating in the sense that users want to find 'the one.' This search is exemplified by JazzySB who says, "I really just want to find *one* good SD [emphasis in original]." Don Amore adds his approach to this and says, "...we should be helping each other find the right SD or SB for each other." SugarySpicey demonstrates the joy in finding 'the one' by applauding, "congrats! You found your unicorn!" This search for a soul mate differs in the Sugar World from finding 'the one' outside of the website. The ideal match for Seeking Arrangement users is based not only on finding someone with shared interests, mutual attraction, and sharing an emotional connection, but is also based on finding someone compatible in terms of finances and time spent together. This *upfront* way of finding 'the one' reflects the notion of bounded authenticity in that it is direct, satisfying, and induces genuine emotional responses (Bernstein 398).

Sugar Daddies are known as 'white knights' in the sense that arrangements are romanticized in a way that resembles modern day love stories and childhood fairy tales. WCSO names the phenomenon, saying, "I know for many SD's the 'white knight syndrome' is what they love." Being a 'white knight' is explained by Flyr and Gentle(man)soul as helping a Sugar Baby succeed by being a "sounding board" to

help her “achieve her goals.” The value attached to meaningful relationships is exemplified on the main page of Seeking Arrangement under the description of Sugar Daddies, “[y]ou are always respectful and generous. You only live once, and you want to date the best. Some call you a mentor, sponsor or benefactor.”

When a Sugar Daddy or Baby finds ‘the one’, there is usually a mutual expectation that a certain level of monogamy will be part of the arrangement. Monogamy here sometimes carries the expectation that women will have no relationships outside of sugar arrangements. In other cases, it may only be expected that she will have no other Sugar Daddies. Expectations of monogamy are visible in Sugar Daddies’ comments like Gentle(man)soul who expresses that once he has fallen for a Sugar Baby, “other partners [then] become [an] impossibility.” When a Sugar Daddy or Baby is caught having more than one partner at the same time, the reaction is similar to reactions to cheating in dating relationships. Gtt_envy explains, “[m]y current SB who is (was) perfect in every way I just found out has 2 other SD’s and a boyfriend... but in all honesty if you are juggling that much. Why am I giving you so much?” JazzySB adds, “no one wants to feel like their being juggled.” Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies both understand their arrangements in ways that run parallel to heterosexual dating relationships as their constructions contain idealized notions of romance and monogamy.

In line with the construction of Sugar Daddies as ‘white knights’, comes a noticeable silence in discussions on Seeking Arrangement – there is no mention of safety issues for Sugar Babies. Even when flying abroad to meet a Sugar Daddy for the first time, the only concern is whether it will be worthwhile for the Sugar Daddy; DarkHorseSD says, “it’s a big risk from SD view.” Several studies have noted that sex workers are at a disproportionate risk of experiencing violence through rape, physical assault, and murder (Monto 161). While several factors cause these rates, including the notion of entitlement to sex in hegemonic masculinity, one factor is the commodification of sex (Monto 174). Studies show that men who view sex as a commodity are more likely to subscribe to rape myths and have violent sexual fantasies (Monto 174). The intertwining of sex and money on Seeking Arrangement imbues the purchaser (Sugar Daddies) with economic and gendered power over the purchased (Sugar Babies). The power difference in sugar relationships can make issues like consent problematic since Sugar Babies may feel compelled to engage in sex because of the gifts and money received. Despite this, Sugar Daddies overwhelmingly conceptualize their sugar relationships as involving emotional intimacy, and not as solely an economic exchange. While this suggests that Sugar Daddies may be less predisposed to violence against Sugar Babies, discussions that address this risk are noticeably absent from constructions of sugar relationships.

V. Conclusion

Seeking Arrangement is a dating website where sex, emotional intimacy, and commodification are intertwined in the expansion of the sex industry. The finding that Sugar Babies are constructed as both beautiful and intelligent reflects the mainstreaming of the sex industry which now caters to specialized needs (Bretners and Sanders 43). Seeking Arrangement offers a specialized service that provides access to relationships that are premised on emotional and personal connections with smart and attractive women. This specialization is seen in the site's use of a business model that is similar to that of other dating websites and the involvement of middle to high-class users. The specialized service offered by Seeking Arrangement results in the sale of relationships based in bounded authenticity. The 'authenticity' of sugar arrangements is evident in that they go beyond mere sex and towards emotional intimacy that involves dates, monogamy, and finding 'the one'; all of these are perceived by users as genuine. These relationships are also 'bounded' since they involve direct and upfront agreements about that for which the Sugar Daddy will be paying and how much it will cost. This relates to the wider social shift of relationships requiring individual emotional and sexual satisfaction for both partners (Eldén 5). The Seeking Arrangement website exemplifies this trend by securing satisfaction through arrangements that are negotiated in advance.

The findings of this study reveal gender inequality and the reproduction of stigma associated with sex work. User's constructions of Sugar Babies as needing to avoid promiscuity reproduces a wider process of shaming women for having multiple and/or casual sexual partners. The condemnation of promiscuity contributes to the ongoing existence of 'whore stigma' and the user's consistent attempts to remove themselves from any association with prostitution. In combination with the emphasis on emotional intimacy, attempts to break the association between prostitution and sugar arrangements implicitly work to silence discussions about safety concerns for Sugar Babies.

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