Varieties of Sugar Dating in Sweden: Content, Compensation, Motivations

Lena Gunnarsson 1 and Sofia Strid 2

1 Örebro University, 2 Örebro University

ABSTRACT

With the emergence and global proliferation of “sugar dating” websites, the phenomenon of sugar dating is increasingly on the public agenda. Sugar dating is described by these sites as dating arrangements based on an exchange of intimacy and companionship for financial or other forms of support. Given that sex is often part of the arrangements, claims are widespread, yet disputed, that sugar dating is a form of prostitution. Based on interviews and a survey questionnaire, this article maps the practice of heterosexual sugar dating in Sweden as described by “sugar babies” and “sugar daddies” themselves. It shows a striking diversity in regard to what sugar dating means for participants, both in terms of what they do when sugar dating and in terms of how money and/or other material goods are involved in arrangements. A further key difference between sugar dating arrangements is whether “sugar babies” enter them for purely instrumental reasons or enjoy them in and of themselves. Although not all kinds of sugar dating include sex, we argue that sugar dating sites should be seen as key actors in the expansion of the sex (and intimacy) industry, drawing on and articulating pre-existing tendencies within it.

KEYWORDS: compensated dating; prostitution; sex work; sugar daddy relations; sugar dating.

In 2006 the first “sugar dating” website, SeekingArrangement, was launched. Since then, this form of online site, facilitating arrangements between “sugar babies” and “sugar daddies/mamas,” has proliferated in number and geographical spread. Brandon Wade (2009), CEO and owner of SeekingArrangement, describes sugar dating as mutually beneficial arrangements where “financial, professional, or other forms of support” are exchanged for “intimacy, companionship, or other forms of attention” (p. 11). Although there is no mention of sex in Wade’s definition, research, news media, and reports from the police and social services confirm that sex is often part of sugar dating arrangements, leading to widespread claims that sugar dating is a cover for prostitution (Miller 2011; Motz 2014; Olsson 2019).

Sugar dating, as defined by Wade, did not emerge with the online sites that specialize in facilitating it. Just like explicit and sexually delimited forms of prostitution, arrangements based on an exchange of material goods for a more comprehensive form of personal availability have a long history.

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throughout the world (Kinsella 2011; Li 2015). However, the turning of sugar dating into a global business, attracting an increasing number of users,\(^1\) constitutes a radical shift in the sugar dating landscape and has placed the phenomenon on the public agenda.

In Sweden, sugar dating has been publicly debated since 2017, when its first sugar dating website went live. Since then, new sites have emerged, attracting a steadily increasing number of users, and attention from the media, police, and social services. The image of sugar dating broadly conveyed in Swedish media is that it is a cover for prostitution, where often very young people, sometimes minors, are sexually exploited by significantly older men (Olsson 2019; Svenska Dagbladet 2017).

In 1999, Sweden was the first country to criminalize the buying of sexual services, while keeping the selling legal. The Criminal Code (Ch.6 §11) defines the crime as securing a temporary sexual liaison by means of compensation. The law was part of a government bill stating that men’s ability to “buy access to women’s sex . . . is in conflict with the notion of all people’s equal worth and with aspirations towards full gender equality” (Swedish Gov. 1995). Subsequently, prostitution was explicitly framed as a form of men’s violence against women (Skilbrei and Holmström 2011). This legal and ideological frame constitutes the backdrop of sugar dating in Sweden, making it a phenomenon that is potentially both illegal and broadly conceived of as immoral.\(^2\)

Based on interviews and a questionnaire with Swedish sugar daters, this article provides a multifaceted account of heterosexual sugar dating in contemporary Sweden, centering on the question: What kind of arrangements are people engaged in under the label of “sugar dating”? Rather than starting from a clear definition of sugar dating, we take research participants’ own understandings and experiences of sugar dating as our point of departure. An important characteristic of sugar dating is its contested meaning, and defining it in advance would have prevented us from exploring the full range of ways that sugar dating is understood and practiced.

In the following, we first review previous research on sugar dating and locate our study in a broader research context outlining trends in the sex and intimacy industry. We then lay out a map of the striking diversity of sugar dating practices in Sweden, structured around three key dimensions: (1) the practical content of the sugar dating arrangement; (2) the form of compensation involved; and (3) the motivations of “sugar babies” for engaging in sugar dating.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON SUGAR DATING

To systematically review research on sugar dating is challenging, since it raises the question of what counts as sugar dating. The term “sugar dating” is mainly used in relation to the emergence of profiled sugar dating sites in the Global North (Deeks 2013; Hier 2017; Miller 2011; Motyl 2012; Nayar 2017), where the term “sugaring” is also sometimes employed (Scull 2020, 2021). In the Sub-Saharan African context, similar practices have long been studied under the label of “sugar daddy relations” (Brouard and Creve 2012; Kuate-Defo 2004; Toska et al. 2015). In East Asia (Chu and Laidler 2016; Lam 2003; Li 2015) and Eastern Europe (Swader et al. 2013; Swader and Vorobeva 2015), the term “compensated dating” is used for practices similar to sugar dating.

Even when researchers do use the same term, there is disagreement about its meaning. A key division is that whereas some equate sugar dating with prostitution (Deeks 2013; Lee and Shek 2013; Li 2015; Miller 2011), others clearly delimit it from prostitution or sex work (Scull 2020; Swader and Vorobeva 2015).\(^3\) Others acknowledge the overlap with prostitution or sex work while pointing out how sugar dating generally differs from what is referred to by Nayar (2017:335) as “more explicit forms of sex work” and by Chu and Laidler (2016:49) as “traditional commercial sex encounters.”

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\(^1\) Between 2014 and 2015, the margin of profit of the Denmark-based sugar dating site Sugardaters increased by 400 percent (Syrén 2017).

\(^2\) In heavily secularized Sweden, the condemnation of prostitution is not strongly associated with religious convictions but with broader moral conventions and gender equality ideals (Jonsson and Jakobsson 2017).

\(^3\) While Scull (2020) makes a strong case for the difference between sugar dating and prostitution on the whole, she categorizes some sugar dating arrangements as “sugar prostitution” (p. 143).
The following (overlapping) characteristics are pointed out in the literature as distinguishing features of sugar dating:

**Not Only Sex**

As the term suggests, sugar dating normally includes activities other than sex, such as going for dinners, and entails a more personal relationship (Chu and Laidler 2016; Scull 2020; Song and Morash 2016). Importantly, in some cases, sex is not part of the dating at all (Li 2015; Scull 2020).

**Authentic Feelings**

While being based on a key component of instrumental exchange, sugar dating is to some extent, at least ideally, driven by “mutual emotions” (Swader and Vorobeva 2015:324, emphasis in original). Nayyar (2017:335) argues that while “sugar babies” “embrace the economic underpinnings of their instrumental uses of intimacy,” they also emphasize the importance of “chemistry” and connection in their relationships. Some “sugar babies” want their sugar dating arrangements to result in marriage (Bhana and Pattman 2011; Scull 2020) and some arrangements do turn into regular romantic relationships (Chu and Laidler 2016).

**Informality**

Sugar dating exchanges are less formally regulated than more explicit or “professional” forms of prostitution. Rather than following a frank “pay-for-play” logic, economic compensation is often woven into the relational whole and seen as gifts rather than payment (Nayar 2017; Scull 2020; Swader and Vorobeva 2015). In some studies, sugar dating is associated with “transactional sex,” which is generally demarcated from “formal prostitution or sex work” (Stoebenau et al. 2011:2) and defined by Wamoyi et al. (2019) as “non-marital, non-commercial sexual relationships, motivated by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or other benefits” (pp. 1–2, emphasis added).

**Flexibility**

Chu and Laidler (2016) emphasize the flexibility and ambiguity of compensated dating arrangements, which “vary along a continuum between commercial at one end and conventional romantic at the other” and sometimes “transform from a bounded commercial and physical context to an unbounded non-commercial interpersonal context” (p. 62). Along a similar spectrum, Scull (2020) identifies seven different categories of sugar dating – sugar prostitution, compensated dating, compensated companionship, sugar dating, sugar friendships, sugar friendships with benefits, and pragmatic love. Indeed, the flexibility that some researchers point out as a core characteristic of sugar dating is one reason why it is difficult to neatly delimit the practice.

**Age Disparity**

As the terms “sugar baby” and “sugar daddy” convey, sugar dating normally involves an age disparity, but the degree to which research emphasizes this varies. In the East Asian context, compensated dating is sometimes referred to as “juvenile” or “teen prostitution” (Lee and Shek 2013; Li 2015) and popularly defined as “a date-like meeting […] where a middle-aged man and a school-aged girl spend time together, followed by sex and then the man’s provision of money or gifts to the girl” (Song and Morash 2016:67, emphasis added). Age differences generally characterize sugar dating in the African and Global North context too (Kuate-Defo 2004; Nayyar 2017), but here the younger party is more often an adult, and sometimes age difference is not at all a salient factor (Kaufman and Stavrou 2004; Swader and Vorobeva 2015).

**TRENDS IN THE SEX (AND INTIMACY) INDUSTRY**

This article is located in the field of research on prostitution/sex work that points to an increasing normalization or mainstreaming of commodified sex during the last decades. Not only has the sex
industry grown quantitatively; commodified sex is also increasingly accepted in the larger population, a process driven by technological developments and neoliberal restructuring (Brents and Sanders 2010). This process also involves a “gentrification” of the sex industry, with a growth in the number of middle-class women selling sex primarily to middle-class men through online arenas (Bernstein 2007; Cesario and Chancer 2009). Along with gentrification, new ways of marketing, blurring the line between non-sexual and sexual services, have also lent sexual transactions a more respectable allure (Brents and Sanders 2010).

This article particularly relates to the growing field of research on how intimacy, rather than sex only, is often a part of sexual services (Bernstein 2007; Plummer 2010). Bernstein uses the concept of “bounded authenticity” (2007) to denote the temporal and undemanding intimacy sought by many purchasers of sexual services. This demand has propelled the development of a genre of sexual services labelled as the girlfriend experience (GFE), which offers an experience beyond the carnal sexual act, including displays of affection along with company and conversation (Carbonero and Gómez Garrido 2018; Milrod and Monto 2012). Many men seek this form of intimacy since it is disassociated from what are considered the demanding downsides of non-commercial intimacy (Bernstein 2007). What is sought, argue Milrod and Monto (2012), is “an idealized version of a girlfriend who wants to have sex when and how the customer wants it, who cares about his interests and needs while making few emotional demands of him . . . and who comes to climax when he makes the effort to bring her there” (p. 807). They highlight that this may entail a particularly intense form of emotional labor for sex workers. Other research, however, indicates that “bounded authenticity” cannot altogether be discarded as pretense on the part of the sex worker, who may truly enjoy the company of their clients. Middle-class escorts often search for authenticity in their meeting with clients, something Carbonero and Gómez Garrido (2018:396) link to “the ethos of the new middle classes, according to which work is a place for self-realisation” (cf. Bernstein 2007).

METHODS AND MATERIALS
This article is based on a total of 24 semi-structured interviews with female4 “sugar babies” (15) and “sugar daddies” (9) with experience of heterosexual sugar dating in Sweden, and on qualitative and quantitative questionnaire data with 100 members of Sugardaters.se, a major sugar dating site in Sweden. Not all participants identify as “(sugar) baby” or “(sugar) daddy” and the terms may be experienced as derogatory (Scull 2020, 2021). While upholding a certain distance from the terms – indicated by the quotation marks – we do use them as empirically driven labels due to the lack of satisfactory alternative terms.

Interviews
When beginning to recruit interview participants, we made no delimitations regarding sexual orientation or gender. However, since we managed to recruit only two persons with experience of same-sex sugar dating and no “mamas” or male “babies” meeting “mamas,” we decided to delimit the study to heterosexual interactions between “daddies” and female “babies.”5 Regarding the interviewees’ experiences of sugar dating, in line with our intention to explore sugar dating without a pre-set definition, our only recruitment criterion was that the participants understood themselves to have such experience. Hence, in the recruitment leaflet, we did not define sugar dating or limit it to the use of sugar dating sites. A minimum age limit was set at 18 to avoid ethical issues associated with interviewing minors.

4 One participant identified as non-binary but presented as a woman when sugar dating. The other “baby” participants were cis-gender women.

5 The wider research project includes data from workshops with professionals working with sugar dating, which shows that sugar dating is widely present – and seems to increase – among men who have sex with men. Given the strong focus on heterosexual sugar dating in research, further studies on sugar dating within the LGBTQ community are needed.
The inquiry asked for adult people with “experience of sugar dating” and was circulated through a post at Sugardaters.se (arranged by the company for free); generic social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter); targeted social media posts (prostitution discussion forums, girls’ communities, LGBTQ forums, etc.); posts at Youth Guidance Centers and sexual health clinics around Sweden; direct forwarding of the inquiry to clients of social servants working with sugar dating; and advertising on Grindr, a social networking app for LGBTQ people. Our inclusive recruitment strategy resulted in a pool of participants with a broad spectrum of experiences of the practices they were/had been involved in under the label of “sugar dating.” The majority (19 of 24) had used profiled sugar dating sites (mainly Sugardaters, SeekingArrangement, or RichMeetBeautiful), while five had no experience of such sites and used other avenues (personal contacts or other internet forums) to get in touch with sugar dating partners. The age of “babies” in our sample was 18–41, while “daddies” were 37–52 years old.

All interviewees but three “babies” and one “daddy” were born in Sweden. Three of the Sweden-born "babies" had parents born abroad. All but two interviewees lived in Sweden at the time of the interview, most of them in bigger cities but some in rural areas. Most of the “daddies” (7) were professionals with high-income jobs (e.g., economist, researcher), two of whom held leading positions. One had a middle-income job in the health sector and one a blue-collar job. The “babies” were students (5), unemployed (1), on sick leave (1), sex workers (3), professionals (2), and “unskilled” workers (3). Three “daddies” were married/in permanent relationships at the time of their sugar dating experience, and six were single.

The interviews were conducted from May 2019 to May 2020, either face-to-face (8) or by audio or video conversation (16), depending on the participant’s preference and geographical location. Gunnarsson conducted all but two interviews, which were carried out by an intern. The questions addressed in the interviews concerned the person’s motivations for sugar dating, what it practically entailed for them to sugar date, and their subjective experience of it. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two and a half hours.

**Survey Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was designed based on previous surveys with people engaged in sugar dating, online dating, and prostitution. The questionnaire was reviewed for relevance, accuracy, and non-offensive content by experts in the field from, for example, social services, gender equality officers, county anti-prostitution coordinators, the police, as well as by a representative of a sugar dating site. It was piloted and implemented on Sugardaters.se in two phases, in August and October 2019. Banners were placed on the membership page of the site, targeting registered members. The public survey method, by default anonymous, was chosen over the respondent survey method, as the latter would have removed the anonymity of the respondents. Therefore, there is no complete listing of sample units and the response rate is unknown.

Two samples were surveyed: “sugar daddy/mama” and “sugar girl/boy,” the labels for registration used by the site. A total of 100 responses were gathered. In line with this article’s focus, the analysis draws on responses from the “sugar girl” subsample (n=46) and the “sugar daddy” subsample (n=37)—henceforth “baby” and “daddy.”

The questionnaire consisted of 24 short closed-ended and short open-ended questions, including background variables. The former questions gathered information on experiences of economic exchanges, frequency and number of dates, demographic background, including, for example, gender, age, and sexual orientation (Table 1), motivations for sugar dating (Table 2), and experiences of offering or using escort services. The majority were looking for heterosexual arrangements, but the heterosexual preference was stronger among the male respondents (97 percent) than among the female respondents (61 percent). Although the age limit to register on the site is 18, ten percent of the
Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents, Members of Sugardaters.se

| Membership Category | Sugar baby (n = 46) | Sugar daddy (n = 37) |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Age                 |                     |                      |
| • max               | 50                  | 70                   |
| • median            | 23                  | 50                   |
| • min               | 14                  | 28                   |
| Sexual orientation  |                     |                      |
| • Heterosexual      | 61%                 | 97%                  |
| • Homosexual        | 2%                  | –                    |
| • Bisexual          | 28%                 | –                    |
| • Pansexual         | 7%                  | –                    |
| • Do not want to say| –                   | 3%                   |
| Highest education   |                     |                      |
| • Comprehensive (year 1–9) | 17% | 3%                  |
| • Upper secondary (year 10–12) | 50% | 19%              |
| • University        | 33%                 | 78%                  |
| Employment          |                     |                      |
| • Permanent employment | 20% | 68%               |
| • Temporary employment | 17% | –                  |
| • Self-employed     | 7%                  | 30%                  |
| • Unemployed        | 17%                 | 3%                   |
| • Student           | 30%                 | –                    |
| Income              |                     |                      |
| • 0–10,000 Swedish kronor | 42% | 6%                 |
| • 10,000–20,000     | 29%                 |                      |
| • 20,000–30,000     | 20%                 | 14%                  |
| • 30,000–40,000     | 4%                  |                      |
| • 40,000–50,000     | 4%                  | 14%                  |
| • 50,000–60,000     | –                   | 14%                  |
| • 60,000–70,000     | –                   | 17%                  |
| • 70,000+           | –                   | 36%                  |
| Place of residence  |                     |                      |
| • Metropolitan area (≥200,000) | 49% | 41%              |
| • City (50,000–200,000) | 18% | 32%               |
| • Large town (20,000–50,000) | 14% | 5%               |
| • Small town (15,000–20,000) | 9%  | 8%                |
| • Village (<15,000) | 7%                  | 5%                   |
| • Countryside       | 4%                  | 8%                   |
| Country of birth    |                     |                      |
| • Sweden            | 91%                 | 92%                  |
| • Europe            | –                   | 3%                   |
| • Outside of Europe | 9%                  | 5%                   |
| Civil status        |                     |                      |
| • Married, civil partnership | –   | 28%              |
| • In a relationship | 9%                  | 19%                  |
| • Single            | 91%                 | 53%                  |
women reported being younger than 18 (14–17) (see Table 1, Figure 1 and Figure 2). The open-ended questions addressed the meanings and motivations around sugar dating. The interviews and the survey were conducted in Swedish. Gunnarsson translated data to be quoted into English.

Analysis

Both the interview and the survey data were analyzed qualitatively. While the interview data provided more depth, the survey data offered breadth. Some dimensions of the survey data were analyzed quantitatively, for example, age, gender, and sexual orientation. Interview transcriptions and qualitative survey responses were processed in NVivo through a combination of data-driven and concept-driven coding. The issue of how to classify sugar dating (especially in relation to prostitution) and the issue of instrumental vs. intrinsic motivations were conceptually key in the coding process. Analytical memo writing was used to document patterns and interesting themes during coding as well as a more holistic reading of the material. Based on the observation that the material represented a wide variety of practices and experiences, we sought out a way of categorizing these variations. It became clear that the experiences did not vary along one single axis, so, rather than dividing them into one set of categories (cf. Scull 2020), we chose to center the analysis around three key dimensions that emerged as the most decisive organizers of the differentiations: (1) The practical content of sugar dating arrangements: What do sugar daters do together? (2) The forms of compensation involved: How are “babies” compensated? and (3) “Babies” motivational grounds for sugar dating: To what extent do they partake in the arrangement because of the material benefits or because they appreciate the activities in and of themselves? In the following, the interview and survey data are

Table 2. Survey Responses: “What do you get out of sugar dating?”

|                          | Sugar baby (n = 46) | Sugar daddy (n = 37) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Money                    | 83%                 | –                    |
| Adventure/excitement     | 50%                 | 65%                  |
| Gifts (trips, things, gift cards) | 74%                 | –                    |
| Someone to talk to       | 44%                 | 54%                  |
| Validation/confidence    | 46%                 | 30%                  |
| Being looked after/cared for | 46%                 | 5%                   |
| Tenderness/intimacy      | 24%                 | 54%                  |
| Sex                      | 37%                 | 78%                  |
| Temporary relationship   | 24%                 | 45%                  |
| Independence             | 22%                 | –                    |
| Anxiety moderation       | 11%                 | 8%                   |
| Long term relationship   | 24%                 | 41%                  |
| Mentorship               | –                   | 27%                  |
| Career opportunities     | 13%                 | –                    |
| Status                   | 7%                  | 5%                   |
| Accommodation            | 11%                 | –                    |
| Love                     | 2%                  | 14%                  |
| Drugs                    | 0%                  | –                    |
| Other                    | 7%                  | 14%                  |

6 Swedish police report about sugar dating sites as an arena for men to sexually exploit minors (Svenska Dagbladet 2017). The unintentional inclusion of minors among the survey respondents raises ethical questions about our responsibility for engaging with their disclosures. Weighing the importance of absolute anonymity against our potential responsibility as researchers to reach out to particularly vulnerable participants, the former was deemed more pivotal.
analyzed jointly in terms of various categories of sugar dating relating to each differentiating dimension. When possible, numbers are provided regarding the frequency of each category among participants. Note, though, that the numbers are not necessarily representative of the broader population of sugar daters, and that participants often cannot be neatly divided into categories, since many have a range of different experiences and the questions driving the data generation were not designed to match this article’s analytical dimensions.
RESULTS

1. What Do Sugar Daters Do Together? Sex vs. Dating

The first dimension central for differentiating between varieties of sugar dating concerns the practical content of the sugar dating arrangement. The doing of sugar dating can be divided into three categories. In the first category, we find a mere sexual transaction; in the second, “babies” and “daddies” are engaged in a more comprehensive dating arrangement including sex but also other activities; in the third, the parties socialize in a dating-like fashion, but sex is not part of the arrangement.

**Sex Only**

Half of the “baby” interviewees (7 of 15) and one “daddy” interviewee (1 of 9) equated sugar dating either with the straightforward selling and buying of sex, or reported using sugar dating sites for this purpose, as the only way of using the site or as one way among others. In the survey responses, 13 percent of “baby” respondents and 3 percent of “daddy” respondents unambiguously equated sugar dating with prostitution or selling/buying sex. When asked about advantages of sugar dating compared to other forms of dating, one survey respondent stated, “It’s not a form of dating [smiley]; you sell and buy sex” (“baby,” 28). A recurrent theme in the material is that sugar dating is a glossy cover for prostitution, as articulated by another survey respondent: “This is prostitution. We’re into self-deception. No one of us wants to call ourselves hooker or john. So we changed the words and launched it in a nicer package” (“baby,” 25). This crude awareness about “the true nature” of sugar dating contrasts with the emphasis of previous research on how sugar daters tend to delimit what they do from prostitution and sex work (Chu and Laidler 2016; Nayar 2017) and could be related to Swedish media, where sugar dating as a cover for prostitution has been a recurring theme (Olsson 2019; Svenska Dagbladet 2017).

While this position equates sugar dating with the selling of sex, others used sugar dating sites to sell sex, but were ambiguous as to whether this qualified as sugar dating. Having been a member of a sugar dating site for a while, Mui (29, Asian-born) had gotten in touch only with men who wanted to pay her for sex. While searching for a man willing to commit to her long-term, she temporarily accepted these conditions and regularly met men for sex in exchange for money. To her this was not what it meant to be a “sugar baby” though; that was a label she associated with a steadier relationship of the kind we examine below.

In line with Chu and Laidler’s (2016) claim about the flexibility of compensated dating, many participants had experiences of different forms of sugar dating arrangements, where “simply” selling or buying sex was one among many practices. In contrast to those who held clear views about what sugar dating is—and, in particular, what it is not—some participants instead embraced the plasticity of sugar dating. Martin (41, white, Sweden-born) had used sugar dating sites to “simply” buy sex, but this was just one among many kinds of arrangements he had experience of. He explicitly emphasized flexibility, individual adaption, and negotiability as integral to the phenomenon of sugar dating. Similarly, Jakob (42, adopted, Middle Eastern-born) stated that “it feels as if there are just as many varieties of sugar dating as there are girls on this site [Sugardaters].”

Previous sociological research on sugar dating in the Global North (Nayar 2017; Scull 2020, 2021) aligns quite well with the websites’ own framing of sugar dating as something more complex and relational than the selling and buying of sex. Our material, however, shows a significant presence of “pay-for-play” arrangements where the sugar dating label works to disguise the true nature of the exchange. Our data clearly show how sugar dating websites serve as springboards for starting to sell or buy sex for people reluctant to use more explicit forums for sexual services. For example, none of the seven “baby” interviewees who “simply” sold sex under the label of sugar dating had sold sex through an explicit forum for sexual services; eight of the 46 “baby” survey respondents had sold sex through such forums, while eight had considered doing so; and of the six “baby” survey respondents who unhypocritically equated sugar dating with prostitution, three had previous experiences of selling
sex via forums for sexual services, while two of the three who had not, had not considered doing so either.

As exemplified by the case of Mui, discussed above, “babies” often become members of a sugar dating site in hopes of finding arrangements going beyond the simple selling of sex, but when approached by men offering them money in exchange for sex, they accept the offers. A further reoccurring theme is that even when participants express awareness of the blunt sexual commerce of sugar dating sites, the branding of sugar dating as something nobler and more normal than prostitution nevertheless made the step towards membership relatively small.

**Dating Including Sex**

Half of the “baby” interviewees (8 of 15) and most of the “daddy” interviewees (7 of 9) had experience of what is frequently referred to by this study’s participants and by sugar dating sites, as “real” sugar dating – that is, arrangements that extend beyond sex and mimic conventional dating (cf. Chu and Laidler 2016; Scull 2020; Song and Morash 2016). The differences from conventional dating lie primarily in that the sugar dating arrangements are (1) based on an economic deal and (2) mostly separate from the everyday lives of the “baby” and the “daddy” – indeed, half of the “daddy” survey respondents and a third of the “daddy” interviewees (3 of 9) were married/in stable relationships with other women. There are no expectations of committing to a relationship to be integrated with the rest of life, reflecting the no-strings-attached ideal prevalent in “sugar culture” (Scull 2020). Some participants used words such as “bubble” and “little world of make-believe” to describe how sugar dating activities take place in a separate, and mostly secret, sphere. Only Karl (52, white, Sweden-born) had experience of what Scull (2020) describes as arrangements in which the lives of “daddies” and “babies” are intertwined. He lived with his “baby,” and they acted as if they were in a regular relationship vis-à-vis friends and family.

The precise content of this category of sugar dating varies, but the set-up is often that the parties meet on a regular basis, each date starting with a dinner and/or other dating activities and ending with sex. Trips, spa visits, and shopping – paid for by the “daddy” – are other common activities. Arrangements may be short or long-term, and participants report that a first date is often used as a way of finding out whether there is “chemistry” (cf. Nayar 2017).

Sex is a vital part of this sort of sugar dating arrangement. Sometimes the requirement of sex is explicitly negotiated, and sometimes such expectations are tacit. In the latter case, the deal is often framed by participants as one where sex is not required but emerges spontaneously as a prolongation of the “non-sexual” dating, because both desire it. However, in most cases there is an awareness that the deal would break without some sexual availability. Another difference between arrangements in this category is that in some of them sex is an expected part of each date, whereas in others there is room for dates without sex (e.g., meeting for lunch) within a broader relationship that includes sex.

Two “baby” interviewees made it particularly clear that it was their company, not the sex, they were paid for. Leila (31, Sweden-born, Middle Eastern roots) stated, “You pay for my company and if it feels right, we can move on.” Later in the interview, however, she reluctantly conceded that what she really does is being paid for sex, exemplifying an ambivalence on this matter that is common across the interview material. Hanna (28, white, Sweden-born), who had extensive experience of sugar dating arrangements where sex was an important part, was more uncompromising in her claim that it is not the sex she is paid for. She gives weight to her claim by highlighting that when she had health problems some years ago and did not want to have sex with her “daddies” anymore, one of the four “daddies” with whom she had had sex continued his relationship with her: “He was totally okay with the fact that my sexual desire disappeared and said it wasn’t the most important. He transferred 2000 kronor to my account each month. And then I used to get cash, 500–2000 kronor, when we met.” Hanna was strongly invested in delimiting what she saw as “real sugar dating” from prostitution and invoked this “daddy” as a symbol of such proper sugar dating: “To me he is always a true daddy.”
However, although her experience with this particular “daddy” gives some support to her conviction that it was not primarily the sex she was paid for, the fact that most of her “daddies” did disappear seems to show that this conviction was largely a deception. It is a key theme in the material that there are plenty of “daddies” who expect sex to be part of arrangements. While many “babies” accept this, others complain about these men, who in their view do not know what sugar dating is truly about. As one “baby” survey respondent put it, “Many think they can buy some cheap gifts and then fuck you as they please” (“baby,” 23).

Dating without Sex

There are also cases of non-sexual sugar dating (cf. Li 2015; Scull 2020). One “baby” interviewee and one “daddy” interviewee had no experience of sugar dating including sex, and yet two “baby” interviewees reported about particular arrangements where sex was not a part. Among “daddy” survey respondents, 22 percent did not select “sex” as one of the things they got out of sugar dating (see Table 2). The sugar dating experience of one “baby” interviewee, Stella (23, white, Sweden-born), exclusively entailed meeting decisively older men for walks, shopping, and dinner dates. To her, this sort of arrangement was what sugar dating was really about, an opinion she stated was supported by the BDSM community of which she was a part and through which she had found her “daddies.” It is interesting to note, though, that Stella had not yet managed to find a “daddy” living up to her expectations through her current sugar dating site.

While Stella’s experience of non-sexual sugar dating follows a clear script embraced by her subculture, other interviewees spoke about more idiosyncratic arrangements born of individual circumstances, supporting Chu and Laidler’s (2016) claim about sugar dating’s flexibility. Fredrik (38, white, Sweden-born), for instance, was stuck in an emotionally poor relationship and had used a sugar dating site to find a woman who gave him emotional validation through online interaction, in exchange for gift cards: “I want someone who can fill this emotional hole in my life, someone who can send kind messages, give me some attention and be curious about me.” Hanna, who talked about the “true daddy” who stayed despite her sexual unwillingness, also spoke about another “daddy” with whom she had a long-term non-sexual online relationship. She explained that they were like friends and that he would sometimes take on what she herself termed a father’s role, and, for instance, guide her through practical challenges related to her house.

2. How Are “Sugar Babies” Compensated? Payment vs. Pampering

The second dimension decisively differentiating sugar dating arrangements concerns the involvement of money and/or other material goods: How are “babies” compensated? We use the term “compensate” in a broad sense, including practices not seen by participants themselves as compensation but as gifts, support, pampering, etc. Participants report about a broad spectrum of economic practices, ranging from formal, explicit, and business-like deals, to more unregulated forms of economic transfer, to arrangements where there is no economic compensation apart from the “daddy’s” taking care of the expenses connected to the dating.

Payment

All but four of the 24 interviewees had experience of sugar dating arrangements involving monetary compensation. Among the survey respondents, 76 percent of “babies” had received money or gift cards, while 89 percent of “daddies” had given money or gift cards to “babies.” Here we divide arrangements involving monetary transfers into two categories: payment, addressed in this section, and unregulated monetary support, discussed in the next section.

With paid sugar dating we mean arrangements where monetary compensation is organized as a regulated payment based on specified and explicit deals about how much money the “baby” is to receive in exchange for having sex with and/or dating a “daddy.” When it comes to arrangements
involving only sex, such explicit deals were normative; sugar dating here simply means selling/buying sex. Paid sugar dating tends to be less clearly regulated than exchanges facilitated by explicit prostitution forums. For example, “babies” are normally not paid per time unit, but per meeting/night or on a weekly or monthly basis. As some of the “daddy” interviewees revealed, this is one attractive facet of seeking out sex at sugar dating sites rather than at explicit prostitution forums: one tends to get more sexual interaction for the money. As Martin, who had extensive experience of purchasing sex in non-sugar dating settings, said about one of his sugar dates:

If you compare with what happens at *Rosa sidan* [Swedish forum for sexual commerce] it was a really good price per hour. We were together the whole evening, perhaps five, six hours, for 2000 kronor and had quite a lot of sex during that time. So that was priceworthy for me of course.

Other “daddy” interviewees highlighted that with “sugar babies” they would often, without cost, engage in sexually tinged interaction online before meeting, something that professional sex workers normally do not do for free. Patrik (45, white, Sweden-born) spoke about using this tactically: “Making conversations [with “babies”] personal is a way to get more value for the money. . . . Then you can get those kinds of real sex conversations for free or for a good value.” As far as we have seen, this aspect of sugar dating as a more priceworthy alternative to more professionalized sexual services has not been addressed in previous research.

In arrangements going beyond sex, a specified sum of money is also often negotiated in advance. Oftentimes, even in long-term arrangements, “babies” are paid per date, but weekly or monthly “allowances” are also common. In line with previous research, the payment is often discrete, to obscure the commercial exchange (Miller 2011; Nayar 2017). To this end the vocabulary may be adapted: “It’s called economic gift, it’s never called money,” as Leila stated. While Swader and Vorobera (2015) buy into this “gift” lingo, at least in Leila’s case it is clear that it is a rhetorical device rather than a reflection of the ontological status of the compensation. Later in the interview Leila indeed, with some discomfort, concede that she was paid for sex. Leila had long-term arrangements with two “daddies,” where one included only sex paid per meeting, while the other was a more comprehensive dating relationship which had gradually come to involve strong feelings but was still compensated per date. Leila started out her negotiations with “daddies” with a pre-set price for dating without sex, and a higher price for dating including sex. One difference from other forms of sex work is that it was never decided in advance whether there would be sex; this depended on whether Leila desired it when the date took place.

In arrangements where the “baby” is paid a sum for a longer period of time, participants spoke about negotiating what is expected from the “baby” during that period of time, for example, how often meetings would occur. Here, tensions may emerge due to sugar dating’s location in a gray-area between relationship and “business”: on the one hand, there is the crude fact of the arrangement’s economic underpinnings, and, on the other, a wish to avoid a strict pay-for-play logic. Robert (44, white, Sweden-born) had experiences of tensions regarding how often he and a “baby” would meet: “I sometimes feel that before we met so and so often and now we don’t meet as often although it’s the same money.” He stated that it is easier to solve conflicts than in regular relationships, though, due to the contractual feature of the arrangement: “It feels kind of cold, but it’s more like a business discussion. You just need to solve it in some way, that’s it.”

Unregulated Monetary Support
In other arrangements, monetary compensation is much less regulated and resembles economic transactions in traditional patriarchal relationships where the male higher earner supports the female lower earner, as well as courts her through gifts. Some participants in arrangements with a marked
age difference made allusions to a relationship between a father and his “spoilt teenage daughter.” In these more unregulated arrangements, the “daddy” normally pays for dinners, hotel nights, shopping, etc., along with spontaneously transferring money to the “baby” now and then, at the request of the “baby” or initiative of the “daddy.” Anastasia (31, Sweden-born, Middle Eastern roots) spoke about a form of arrangement in which she would now and then ask to “borrow” money from her “daddy,” but where it was implicitly understood that she would not pay it back.

Covering Expenses and Non-Monetary Gifts and Support
That the “daddy” covers dating expenses is almost always part of the deal in sugar dating arrangements, even when monetary compensation is also offered. In some arrangements such covering of expenses is the only form of compensation, sometimes along with non-monetary gifts from the “daddy” to the “baby,” such as clothes or beauty treatments. Other forms of non-monetary support include career support/mentorship, practical help with everyday issues, and support of a “baby” in her migration process. Among the survey respondents, 11 percent of the “daddy” sub-sample had not given money or gift cards to “babies,” and 24 percent of “baby” subsample had not received money or gift cards. Among the interviewees, sugar dating without monetary compensation was less frequent; three (2 “babies,” 1 “daddy”) had experience of only this form of sugar dating, while two interviewees (1 “baby,” 1 “daddy”) spoke about this as one among many different sugar dating experiences.

When the “daddy” buys things for the “baby” which contribute to her physical appearance, this is experienced as a value for the “baby” herself, but it may also become part of the sexual interaction between “daddy” and “baby,” thereby enhancing the “daddy’s experience. In this form of sugar dating arrangement, the resemblance to ordinary dating relationships of a gender conservative kind is marked.

3. What Drives “Sugar Babies”? Instrumental vs. Intrinsic Gain
Whereas the two previous dimensions address objective aspects of the sugar dating practice, this third dimension concerns “babies’ motivational grounds for sugar dating: Are they involved in the arrangement solely as a means to an end – material gain – or also because they appreciate the experience in and of itself? “Daddies” all seek out sugar dating because they find it rewarding in and of itself – both the sex and the broader dating experience – and there is no room for exploring further motivational differences among “daddies” in this paper. By contrast, the experiences of “babies” differ starkly, depending on whether or not they find sugar dating to be rewarding independently of the compensation.

Only for the Money
Four of the 15 “baby” interviewees can be classified as taking on an exclusively instrumental approach to sugar dating, doing it only for the money or other material benefits. Among “baby” survey respondents, 15 percent selected non-intrinsic factors only (gifts, money, accommodation, career possibilities, drugs) when asked what they got out of sugar dating. In their response to the open-ended question about the advantages of sugar dating compared to other forms of dating, 13 percent mentioned money or other benefits as the singular advantage.

Only “babies” who “simply” sold sex, rather than being involved in more comprehensive arrangements, took a wholly instrumental approach. These women were drawn into sugar dating because they needed money and/or found that selling sex was an easy and quick way to get money. Lisa (23,

7 Supporting a “baby’s" migration process is rare in our data, but Karl experienced such an arrangement in the form of marriage plans to secure a “baby’s” residence permit.

8 A key theme regarding daddies’ motivations is the tension between their desire for arrangements to be based on mutual enjoyment and their use of economic compensation to bypass the requirement of mutuality (Gunnarsson and Strid 2021).
white, Sweden-born) had sold sex to around 300 men, many of whom held high social positions, through sugar dating sites in Sweden and the United States. She detested it from the start and did it only for the money, which came in large amounts. The more men she met, she felt that she might as well continue to be able to accumulate so much money in order to feel it all had been worth it: "I felt that now I have already done it so many times so I might as well do it a couple of more times . . . and get more money, and I can buy this and do that and travel and save money for this and that.”

Only one of the “baby” interviewees started sugar dating due to an acute economic problem. Six had used sugar dating as their sole or main source of income, but in most cases sugar dating was a way of boosting an existing limited income, allowing participants to lead a more luxurious life. Two “baby” interviewees explicitly mentioned that the experience of getting paid for things they might as well have done for free had made them greedy for more.

Four “baby” interviewees were or had been active as professional sex workers. Their professional approach made them engage in sugar dating in a business-like manner, which fit badly with the ideal that “babies” should be motivated by the intrinsic rewards of being with “daddies.” All of them highlighted the intense emotional labor implied by the taboo on instrumentality (cf. Bernstein 2007; Milrod and Monto 2012) that they experienced in the sugar dating setting (Gunnarsson and Strid 2021). Sofie (28, white, Sweden-born) talked critically about “daddies” “demanding personal chemistry” and Anastasia made clear why a business-oriented approach fits badly with the demands of the more comprehensive kind of sugar dating:

It’s more of a hassle than just fucking. I remember I sat in a café a whole fucking hour with a person. I mean so fucking boring. So then I decided I might as well sell sex, you know I get more money for 30 minutes when the person comes after four minutes anyway.

**Gains from the Interaction in Itself**

Nine of the 15 “baby” interviewees enjoyed sugar dating beyond the economic rewards, five of whom strongly emphasized the intrinsic gains of interacting with “daddies.” Among “baby” survey respondents, 85 percent included intrinsic factors (e.g., adventure, tenderness) when responding to what they got out of sugar dating. Experiencing intrinsic rewards is more common in more holistic and long-term arrangements. “Babies” are often selective when deciding whom to meet, and many require some form of “chemistry” or mutual attraction between them and the “daddy” (cf. Nayar 2017). Indeed, Jimmy (37, white, Sweden-born), who had problems attracting women in regular dating forums, complained that even though he offered money to women on sugar dating sites he found it hard to catch their interest.

The emotional ties of the “babies” to “daddies” vary, but the predominant pattern in our data is that “daddies” are described as friends. A third (5 of 15) of the “baby” interviewees said it was easier to find men who would treat women with style in the sugar dating context than it was in “regular” dating. The activities themselves, such as fancy dinners, spa treatments or trips, were also a source of enjoyment and excitement for some of the “babies,” as was the traditional setting where the “baby” is expected to dress up in a traditionally feminine way, oftentimes in clothes paid for by the man. One factor that made sugar dating attractive for several “babies” was the validation they felt they got as women, since their youth and beauty were more valued by these older men than by men they would meet in conventional dating.
A pattern in the data is also that the contractual, no-strings-attached character of sugar dating arrangements were attractive not only for “daddies” but also for many “babies” (cf. Scull 2020). For example, Mui had negative experiences of the emotional demands in a previous regular relationship and sought a “daddy” with whom she could have a stable but more business-like relationship. She also addressed the vulnerability associated with conventional dating as one reason why she was drawn to the clearly delimited roles of sugar dating. When survey respondents were asked about the advantages of sugar dating compared to other forms of dating, 17 percent of “babies” mentioned its ordered structure and lack of emotional demands: “You don’t have to commit and there are not as many demands” (“baby,” 22); “Clear ‘contracts,’ no drama” (“baby,” 28); “You don’t have to worry that something unexpected will happen because you have agreed on a set-up” (“baby,” 27); “You know what you get and what you need to give. All is very mutual and there are no musts” (“baby,” 28).

If there is some personal connection between a “baby” and a “daddy” and the dating occurs over a long time, strong emotional attachments may sometimes emerge, however. Reporting “love” as one thing they got out of sugar dating was much more common among “daddy” survey respondents (14 percent, n=5) than “baby” survey respondents (2 percent, n=1) (see Table 2). However, Leila said she would be happy to marry one of her “daddies” if circumstances allowed (cf. Chu and Laidler 2016; Scull 2020). Martin and Patrik described sugar dating relationships which had evolved into regular relationships (cf. Chu and Laidler 2016), where their economic support of a less economically resourceful “baby” was incorporated into the relationship in a way regarded as appropriate for a non-commercial relationship. Patrik, who developed a regular relationship with a significantly younger “baby” (23 at the time), said that although this woman was in economic need, he experienced that she was equally driven by a need for a “protective man, someone who cared about her.” This indeed reflects the “ideal” of sugar dating, where the older party, as indicated by the labels “daddy” and “mama,” is supposed to be a parental figure. This parent/child dynamic sometimes has a sexual charge, which is most visible in “babies” reports about “daddies” who wanted to be called “daddy” as part of the sexual dynamic. One “baby” survey respondent (age 19) also expressed a sexual appreciation of the daddy/daughter dynamic, writing that sugar dating for her is about “daddy sex caressing cuddling.”

While Hanna stated she was not invested in such incest-tinged allusions, she was drawn to sugar dating since she enjoyed taking on a sexually submissive role and found this easier with older men:

I like it when the man is dominant, and I like to feel small. And I’m quite big, and to find a guy in my age who can make me feel small is a bit difficult. But with a grown-up man, since he’s mentally bigger you somehow get a bit of that adult/child relationship – when there’s an age difference of 20–30 years. That contributes to the sexual part.

Hence, the age difference common in sugar dating may prove attractive for both the younger and the older party. It should be noted, though, that not all participants were invested in the age differences commonly associated with sugar dating (cf. Kaufman and Stavrou 2004; Scull 2020; Swader and Vorobeva 2015).

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, two of the younger “baby” interviewees, who spoke about selling sex to older men as a part of self-destructive behavior fueled by mental health problems, may also be analyzed as finding intrinsic rewards in sugar dating. These women were not primarily interested in the money in and of itself, but were drawn to selling sex because it gave them the short-term validation they felt they urgently needed due to their low self-esteem. Being paid contributed to their momentary sense of validation (although in the longer run, it reinforced their self-hate). As Vendela (18, white, Sweden-born) said, “It’s a validation in itself to get the sex, but that they also pay for it means that ‘you’re worth this’ . . . that ‘you’re like really worth paying for.’”
For some “baby” interviewees, intrinsic and instrumental motivations blended in a way that made them experience sugar dating in a very positive way, as a way of “having it all.” Leila expressed a kind of exhilaration about having found out that she could earn money on something she truly enjoyed: “When I met him it was no different from a normal date, except I got paid for it. And something happened inside me when I got the money, I felt ‘God, was it that easy?’” She declared that she wished she had started sugar dating earlier so that she could have reaped the harvest of her more youthful beauty and sex appeal. The experiences of Leila and several other “babies” in this last category align well with Nayar’s (2017) observation that “babies” are able to combine instrumentality with a sense of genuine “chemistry.” However, a significant group of “babies” find no intrinsic rewards in sugar dating and/or see the expectations of authenticity held by the “daddies” as onerous, making this far from a general experience.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Much of the academic debate on sugar dating is concerned with how to classify the phenomenon. The debate hinges, first, on the empirical question of what actually goes on in sugar dating, and, second, on how to conceptualize these practices. The emphasis of this article has been on the empirical question of what practices sugar daters in Sweden engage in. The most striking result is the variety of practices; sugar dating can mean very different things. These variations are found within and along the dimensions of content, compensation, and motivations. The multiplicity seems in part to be due to the ambiguity built into the framing of sugar dating: it is ostensibly demarcated from the selling and buying of sexual services, while simultaneously bearing many resemblances to the latter. This opens it up to different interpretations, where some sugar daters see the glossy surface of sugar dating as a mere cover for the selling and buying of sex, whereas others take the image of sugar dating, as provided by the online dating corporations, seriously and seek to carve out practices that they see as differing from prostitution by being based on some form of personal connection and on more unregulated and implicit contracts about the exchange. When debating and working out policy that addresses sugar dating, this variety, confirmed by previous research (Chu and Laidler 2016; Scull 2020), needs to be taken into account. What makes our study stand out as compared to the most extensive interview study on sugar dating in the West, Scull’s (2020, 2021) study with U.S. “sugar babies,” is the high frequency of participants who equate sugar dating with the “simple” selling and buying of neatly delimited sexual encounters. It remains to be answered to what extent this contrast derives from arbitrary differences in the composition of the participant groups, or whether it represents actual differences in the way sugar dating is practiced in Sweden and the United States.

Despite the significant presence in our data of straightforward sexual commerce, many sugar dating arrangements differ from commercial sex as practiced in explicit prostitution settings: activities oftentimes go beyond sex, a straightforward pay-for-play logic is often eschewed, and many “babies” enjoy being with “daddies” beyond the material rewards. How is this to be conceptualized? Scull (2020) argues that the fact that many “babies” like their “daddies” and value sugar dating beyond its crude economic gains differentiates sugar dating from prostitution. Although research on sex work does show that sex workers sometimes develop genuine feelings of some sort for their clients if they meet them on a regular basis (Bernstein 2007; Carbonero and Gómez Garrido 2018; Milrod and Monto 2012), Scull is right to highlight that “the script that typically guides [professional sex workers’] interactions does not dictate that they develop and maintain authentic emotions for customers” (p. 152). Unlike her, however, we do not think these features serve as good grounds for sharply delimiting sugar dating from the sex industry. While sugar dating should be addressed as a phenomenon that to a significant extent differs from more explicit forms of prostitution, it also seems clear that the sugar dating industry draws on and deepens pre-existing tendencies in the sex industry, where men’s demands for access to girls and women’s bodies and souls are increasingly diversified and comprehensive (Bernstein 2007; Carbonero and Gómez Garrido 2018; Milrod and Monto 2012;
The proliferation of sugar dating sites is arguably a response to the increased demand for “authentic intimate connection for sale” (Bernstein 2007:7), identified by previous prostitution research, and should be seen as part of the expansion and “mainstreaming” (Brents and Sanders 2010) of the sex and intimacy industry.

In Sweden and other countries where buying sex is illegal and broadly morally condemned (Jonsson and Jakobsson 2017), and where selling sex is strongly stigmatized, sugar dating may also be seen as a way to appeal to people who are reluctant to identify as buyers or sellers of sex. Some participants in this study had previous experience of selling or buying sex through escort sites or explicit forums for sexual services, but the majority would not have entered the world of commercial sex if it were not for sugar dating sites with their comparatively respectable image. Although our study shows that sugar dating draws new segments of the population into the selling or buying of sex in a quite straightforward sense, the long-term quality of many arrangements, the strategies for distancing from the “pay-for-play” logic and, indeed, the absence of sex in some arrangements mean that not all sugar dating can be unambiguously classified as illegal within the Swedish legislative framework. Attempts to distance sugar dating from prostitution (cf. Nayar 2017) generally encourage a vagueness as regards expectations both of compensation and of sex. While some “babies” are able to navigate and enjoy the complexity this vagueness entails, it also places “babies” in a vulnerable position. The lack of explicit expectations of sex makes an initial contact with a “daddy” seem like a small step, but with the development of the interaction, limits are often gradually pushed.

Previous research on “bounded authenticity” (Bernstein 2007) in prostitution has focused on its allure for male buyers of sexual services. This study shows that the contained, contractual intimacy found in some sugar dating arrangements proved attractive for many “babies” too, even if far from all of them. There is a need to address the economic reasons for engaging in sugar dating in light of increased economic inequalities. However, the complex non-financial motivations must also be addressed, and related to the precariousness that some of our participants experienced in the non-commercial “market” of intimacy, and to what other scholars have referred to as the extension of an instrumentalizing market mentality into ever greater numbers of spheres (Brown 2005; Nayar 2017). Sugar dating should be further studied in order to provide a much-needed basis for policy; it also serves as a fruitful lens through which to address broader sociological questions centering on the fact that “[t]he public–private boundaries between intimacy and commerce are being reworked in new and challenging ways” (Plummer 2010:398).

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