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In Between Private and Public Life: An Investigation of Women's Work as Sugar Babies and The Commodification of Intimacy

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In Between Private and Public Life:
An Investigation of Women's Work as Sugar Babies and The Commodification of Intimacy

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction: Literature Review & Methodology

I watched this video and I agree with the girl, like you have to practice saying those words out loud because a lot of times what happens is that girls do not know what they are worth, and a lot of times we are insecure or we are made to feel insecure. Like I'm so worried about them liking me so I feel like I can't say no, they aren't gonna like me. And if you don't have a firm price, cause I don't, I've been like 'ohh, I don't have to think about that, we are just hanging out' so when I am asked that question I am just like ... 'um'... So when this guy asked me how much I wanted for something, I was like '..uhh...I don't know.' (Luna)

Luna, a twenty-one-year-old woman who has been sugaring for two years, revealed through our interview that she struggled to ask for what she wanted. She energetically debated through her often contradictory feelings about her time sugaring. She described wanting to ask for the money she deserved, yet also wanting to let money take the back seat. Luna went on to say that:

I would want to find the balance of, you know, talking, being present, being polite, but also it's okay for me to do this [suggest they do something sexual] because this is what they come for, this is what they want, and this is where the money really comes in.

According to Luna, it was difficult to maintain a sense of authenticity within her sugar arrangements while also setting boundaries that supported her financial interests. Sugaring relies on the unique balance between maintaining authenticity, whether it be genuine or performative, and financial exchange. In general, the women in this study found it difficult to manage these two components of sugaring; authenticity and financial exchange are often perceived as functionally oppositional in modern culture. Luna's internal conflict reflected many of the difficulties and unique circumstances that arise from sugaring.

Sugar relationships most typically involve an older man in search of a younger, often attractive woman, whom they intend to spend time with romantically in exchange for gifts, money, or experiences such as traveling. Usually, there are sexual components of this

relationship.¹ The individuals frequently find one another through online apps that function similarly to traditional dating apps. They create personality profiles outlining who they are and what they are looking for in the relationship. Seeking Arrangements (SA) is the primary site from which sugar daters find one another. SA officially defines sugar babies as: “attractive people looking for the finer things in life. They appreciate exotic trips and gifts. Sugar Babies get to experience a luxurious lifestyle, and meet wealthy people on a regular basis” (Seeking.com, 2021) and sugar parents as “successful men and women who know what they want. They’re driven, and enjoy attractive company by their side. Money isn’t an issue, thus they are generous when it comes to supporting a Sugar Baby” (Seeking.com, 2012). Seeking Arrangements allows individuals to select from an extensive list that helps members define what they are looking for in an arrangement, such as: “active lifestyle, emotional connection, shows & entertainment, no strings attached, friends with benefits, marriage minded, luxury lifestyle, investor” and so many more (Seeking.com 2021).

Sugar babying is a new social practice that is situated amongst other social practices common in the private and the public. Therefore, sugar relationships are a unique form of commercialized intimacy that can take on some aspects of both sex work and romantic relationships. Though sugaring has some resemblance to sex work, it still differs in an important respect: the parties may engage in enduring romantic companionship. In order to capture the unique experiences of sugar babies, my research attempts to answer a few emergent questions: Is sugaring distinguishable from personal romantic, non-commercial relationships? Does this relationship necessarily represent a commodification of intimacy and if so, what are the consequences for the participants? What is the relationship between personal authenticity and

¹ Although it is the case that there are some sugar mommas, and non heterosexual sugar dating, these statistics are almost inconsequential (Miller, 2011-2012).

commercial exchange relations (Bernstein, 2007)? Is sugaring a tool and strategy for women's empowerment?

To address these questions, I conducted twelve interviews with women who identified as sugar babies or as having done sugar baby work. I argue that sugaring does commodify intimacy, and in doing so taps into two spheres that subjugate women—the labor market and romantic heterosexual relations. As a result, sugaring opens an important window into looking at contemporary gender relations. This study argues that sugaring is a vehicle for relatively privileged women to deploy their social status and seek social mobility, but which also comes fraught with the risk of emotional harm and social stigma. Women find more agency and power the more they replicate an employment model in their sugaring practices. On the other hand, women who more closely replicate heterosexual romantic relationships are more vulnerable. This finding suggests that heterosexual relations are still a terrain of disempowerment and are more disempowering relative to the gender dynamics of the labor market.

This chapter will cover three main lines of sociological theory and research which I will review for their relevance and explanatory power in understanding the commercialization of intimacy embodied by sugaring. First, I review the two main camps that debate the moral dilemmas of sex work and pornography within the Feminist Sex Wars. I will then review the current literature regarding the theory of commodification and the theory of emotional labor as conceptual tools that bear on experiences of the changing work relations intrinsic to sugaring. Finally, I will outline my research methods and the chapters that follow.

The Feminists "Sex Wars" Debate

There is a long-enduring feminist discourse regarding the social place of women's sexuality in pornography and sex work dating back to the early 1970s. The traditional Feminist "Sex Wars" dialogues are often oppositional: some support sex work and some do not. Such debates are foundational to the continuously expanding literature on sex work.

The feminist critique of sex work is predominantly founded on the idea that sex has no inherent value or meaning but is instead imbued with social ideologies (Rubin 1975, Chapkis 1997, Alison 1985). Both "sex radical" feminists — those who argue sex work has the potential for empowerment — and "anti-porn" feminists — those who argue sex work is inherently oppressive — recognize the many inequalities and oppressive patterns within the sex industry and support a reorientation in the way society conceptualizes and actualizes women's commercialized sexuality (Rubin 1975, Chapkis 1997).

One of the predominant sociological frameworks used to analyze sex work is the "oppressive paradigm," argued for by anti-porn feminists (Weitzer, 2009). This framework tends to see sex work as inseparable from the patriarchy (Dworkin, 1989). Patriarchy is contingent on the domination of women through sexual violence. Sexual objectification is intrinsic to such domination (Weitzer 2007, Dworkin 1989). The perspective of the anti-porn feminists is that women are not autonomous and do not have agency in the choice to work in the sex industry (Weitzer, 2007). Anti-porn theory proposes that due to the exploitative nature of sex work, there are essentially no women who would choose this work without being coerced. This narrative victimizes the women, declaring that they have been swept up by greater social forces outside of their control (Dworkin 1989, Jefferys 2009, Rich 1976, Dines & Jensen & Russo 1998).

There is a body of more extreme theories that expand from the anti-porn narratives that suggest that not only do women have no agency in choosing to work in the sex industry, but in

general are unable to give consent when having sex (Rich 1976, Jefferys 2009, Dworkin 1989). Heterosexual sex is inextricable from male dominance and therefore, any participation in heterosexual sex is done through coercion and is consequently nonconsensual and oppressive. Additionally, Jefferys (2009), Dworkin (1989), and others who align with the anti-porn side of the Sex Wars argue that women who believe they have agency are manipulated by hegemonic patriarchy, in which they fall victim to a false narrative of choice. Even in the case that women are not explicitly being forced into sex work, their social conditions— for example, needing immediate cash — funnels them into the sex industry. Because humans live in a patriarchal society, consent may be disguised as legitimate but ultimately does not exist unconditionally (Jefferys 2009, Rich 1976, Dworkin 1989).

These feminists point towards the inevitable social stigmatization of engaging in non-emotional sex. Zimmerman (2012) highlights how religious history in the United States has ingrained standards which only permit sex within the parameters of marriage and love. These standards condemn “inauthentic” sex and therefore sex for the exchange of goods (Zimmerman 2012, Wahab 2002). This framework highlights the traditional societal belief that sex work is dangerous and inimical to authentic love (Weitzer 2007, Zimmerman 2012). The claimed sanctity of marriage and the moral weight put onto sexual activity treats the essence of sex as emotional, intimate and deeply personal and to be performed only by people who have a lifelong commitment to each other. The construction of sex as an expression of love and trust has resulted in commercialized sex being called immoral. According to this standard, commercial sex cannot involve love and trust and is therefore emblematic of sex becoming casual. These theorists highlight the inability to relieve the presence of stigma from the lived experiences of sex workers and, in this capacity, suggest that it is inevitably harmful work (Zimmerman 2012, Wahab 2002).

Anti-porn feminists argue that pornography separates sex from authentic romance and exacerbates male dominance (Donnerstein & Malamuth, 1984). The performance of patriarchy within pornography sustains women's subordinate positions and justifies or upholds gendered sexually demeaning activity. Women are perceived only as objects for male pleasure; they are used and abused by men to gain status amongst other men. In this context, sex is inherently oppressive (Dworkin 1989, Rubin 1975). Pornography normalizes and valorizes violence against women and functions to perpetuate itself (Zimmerman 2012, Wahab 2002, Donnerstein & Malamuth 1984, Dines & Jensen & Russo 1998).

The competing framework within the Feminist Sex Wars debate is the "empowerment paradigm," which is supported by sex radical feminists (Weitzer, 2009). This framework often takes on the position that sex workers exercise agency in various capacities, via emotional power, financial gains, and sexual freedom (Chapkis 1997, Deshotel & Forsyth 2006).

Sex radical feminists suggest that women experience empowerment due to the financial gains of their sex work. Because of the discrimination in the labor market, women make more money doing sex work (Hartly 2007, Deshotel & Forsyth 2006). Higher income for women has a corresponding impact on one's class position. Through such financial gains and capital, women may experience forms of empowerment (Deshotel & Forsyth, 2006). Additionally, everyone who works in a capitalist labor market is subject to exploitation. Many sex workers have observed that work in the service industry is no less exploitative or harsh than sex work, with long working hours and demanding customers, etc. (Hartly 2007, Deshotel & Forsyth 2006, Jenness 1993).

Moreover, sex radical feminists claim that female sex workers have emotional power over men. This narrative assumes that men are in an inferior position because they will go to the

“lowest” ranks to be intimate with a woman. Men are considered weak for being so desperate and, as a result, women then have the upper hand (Deshotel & Forsyth, 2006). Female strippers in a Deshotel & Forsyth (2006) study expressed being able to find satisfaction and power by adjusting their actions to suit a man's desires to receive a specific reward. Because men have to stoop so low to receive sexual favors, women are not disempowered by their sex work (Deshotel & Forsyth 2006, Hartly 2007).

The classic Feminist Sex Wars debate brings light to the many interpretations and nuances of women's commercialized sexuality. Applying the literature of the Feminist Sex Wars debate to the proliferation of sugar babying helps facilitate and understanding of standing social norms and conflicting perspectives regarding sex work. Furthermore, the Sex Wars debates help interpret and make sense of the way the women in this study experienced and engage with power dynamics in a relationship that is so firmly wrapped up in patriarchy. This discourse helps make sense of the women's complicated emotions about their work.

The Commodification of Intimacy

Theory on the “commodification of intimacy” helps to investigate and analyze shifting work relations. Theorizing the mechanism and impacts of commodification is a relevant avenue to better understand the state of intimacy via other social institutions such as marriage, child care, sexual relations, friendship, nursing and more. Marx's (1883) work was foundational in the development of commodification theory, grounded in the theory of capitalist market exchange relationships and the alienation of wage labor. Marx (1883) defines commodification as the process by which social roles and services once defined or provided by traditional institutions such as family, church, or village community are replaced by the exchange relationships of

market buyers and sellers as capitalist institutions continually expand. In general, research on commodification broadly examines the appropriate relationship between goods and service and the market.

“Hostile Worlds” provides a framework that proposes that the commodification of intimacy is inherently dehumanizing (Zelizer 2000). Theorists who take this perspective believe that there is a fundamental distinction between love relations and money exchange relations and that the two cannot coexist. Historically, society has held up emotional and physical intimacy as a spiritual, freely offered interaction. Those realms which are intimate, such as sex, love, child care, marriage, and caring for elders are relationships in which people participate out of love and therefore inimical to financial compensation. Central to the hostile worlds framework is the fusion of sex and love. Acts that are tied to love are both intimate and personal and therefore should not be tainted by the impersonal economic market (Monto & Julka 2009, Phillips 2013). Money is damaging to realms of love and removes any form of authenticity. In other words, that which is given from the heart should not require compensation and should be non-economic; this belief demands a binary choice between economic market and intimacy.

Marxist theory finds commodification to be directly harmful to both the private and the public (Marx 1883, Ertman & Williams 2005). According to this theory, prior to capitalism, people were connected to their products because they were unique and personal. This brought fulfillment and meaning to their labor. With the rise of capitalism, individuals become dissociated from and lose control over products they make. From the commodification of human labor people become alienated from their humanity, their products, other workers, and the act of production itself. The price of participation in the capitalist exchange economy is the alienation of the authentic self, which ultimately is detrimental to human dignity (Marx, 1883).

Monto and Julksa (2009) and others (Horley & Clarke, 2016) argue that the commodification of erotic intimacy causes harm to both the seller and the buyer. They (2009) argue that prostitution is inherently impersonal and thus void of authenticity. Subjects of Monto and Julksa's (2009) study expressed trying to avoid emotional intimacy in their personal, romantic relationships by purchasing the services of prostitutes. Furthermore, they (2009) found that men who bought the service of prostitutes were more likely to perceive sex as a commodity and the prostitute as an object. As a result of this perspective, the men began to engage in harmful activities and attitudes such as the desire for violent sex, using condoms less often, and accepting the 'rape myth.'² Consequently, these male clients generally partook in dehumanizing habits and attitudes as a result of their engagement in commodified sexual relations (Monto & Julka, 2009).

Phillips (2013) problematizes the commodification of bodies. She argues that bodies are reduced to products and objects to be used and sold. In this capacity, bodies become understood as property and are then subsumed in legal discussions of property rights and regulations. Therefore, her conception is in contrast to those who find commodification or marketability to be a step towards equality. Phillips (2013) takes up the perspective that commodity rights are applicable to the body which sanctions the body as something other than personal and worthy of autonomy or integrity. In addition, by using one's body through ways such as organ trafficking, surrogacy, or prostitution, to fulfill the wants or needs of another body places one above the other Phillips (2013) pushes to reframe the intimate body as removed from the economic market. The market labels and commodifies people and objects as good or bad, worthy or unworthy, which enforces an inequitable system of hierarchy.

² 'Rape myths' often serve to make excuses on the part of sexual aggressors. Furthermore, this myth takes on hostility towards the victim and often blames them for the assault.

Alternatively, a body of literature argues that there is no clear distinction between the public and the private and that intimacy cannot be commodified. Additionally, various strains of this argument suggest that intimacy within the market is not inherently harmful but is rather positive. Literature associated with “exchange theory” asserts there was never a separation of the private and public. Although marriage is deemed to be in the private and intimate sphere, Coontz (2013) argues that marriage was predicated on economic exchange. Fathers would trade their daughters for other goods and the daughters would then serve as a laborer for their new husbands. Additionally, women’s reproductive ability has always been valuable in terms of the economic importance of procreation. Therefore, this strain of theory suggests that there is no distinction between the economic market and intimate life (Coontz, 2013).

Sociologist Bernstein (2007) argues that there has been a shift of the economic market towards the service industry, the globalization of the information economy, and the rise new family formations which have led to a significant transition in the erotic sphere. The erotic sphere now exists beyond the reproductive goals of intimacy and the relational goals of marriage, in what she terms “bounded authenticity” (Bernstein 2007). This sexual ethic is predicated on the presence of emotionally bounded, as in “limited,” erotic exchange such as sex, cuddling, caressing. Importantly, bounded authenticity is not antithetical to the monetization of sexual and intimate acts. These erotic exchanges, often performed by ‘career prostitutes’ (rather than ‘crack prostitutes’), are less regimented and are free-flowing and authentic. This work is even described as selling the “girlfriend experience.” Bernstein’s (2007) research indicates that there is intimacy, whether feigned or not, romance, and care present within commercial sex (Bernstein, 2007).

Zelizer (2000) introduces the theory of “differentiated ties” which takes a nuanced approach to interpreting the commodification of intimacy. He recognizes the varieties of social relations that involve payments of distinct types. This perspective finds intimate relations can exist simultaneously with the exchange of money. This approach acknowledges a contextual perspective in which monetized intimacy gains meaning based on many circumstances that are often distinct to each specific scenario. All interactions are latent with meaning and do not take on an inherently good or bad meaning (Zelizer 2000, Ertman & Williams, 2005, Bernstein 2007).

Furthermore, this “differentiated ties” perspective refuses to take an essentialist interpretation of commodification (Zelizer, 2000). Payments, like other symbols, have the ability to demarcate the type of relationship, even the most intimate ones, to distinguish between relationships. Zelizer (2000) uses an example of women that he studies that first had a relationship and then would decide how much should be paid and in what manner based on the value they associated with the relationship. In this example it is clear that intimacy is not off the table even in a monetized relationship, but rather intimacy was established prior to the monetary exchange. These women used money as a way to indicate the personal importance of the relationship (Zelizer, 2000). Late capitalist commercial sex is not vacant of emotional intimacy. Instead the market is now a location from which one is able to secure interpersonal relations and assign meaning and value to their relations (Bernstein 2007, Zelizer 2000, Ertman & Williams 2005)

There is a body of literature that argues that the commodification of intimacy is empowering. Child care, caring for elders, sex, are all versions of intimate care that women historically did for free. As these forms of work are commodified and gain market value -

women begin to earn a wage for their work. This gendered responsibility was one that weighed heavily and disproportionately on women (Federici, 1975). Therefore, Weitzer (2012) and Bernstein (2007) argue that this shift can be understood as a significant step in gender equality. For example, women historically did not have the right to claim marital rape. But as they were able to take up ownership of their humanity they began to have rights over their own bodies and were able to claim against marital rape (Phillips, 2013). This process contributes to commodity rights and may have the ability to shift power towards the marginalized and protect individuals in a frequently unequal capitalist market (Weitzer, 2012).

Theories on the commodification of intimacy help to advance the study of gender relations. These theories help center the participants' work as embedded in the phenomenon of the commodification of intimacy that is ever more sweeping in scope and reach. The theory of the commodification of intimacy helps us evaluate a stance on sugaring as empowering or disempowering as a result of the power imbalances within labor market dynamics. Additionally, the theory on commodification of intimacy highlights some of the social stigmas associated with sugaring that the women must contend with.

Emotional Labor

Hochschild (1983) coined and popularized the term "emotional labor" through her investigation of the service industry and the work of flight attendants in her book *The Managed Heart*. Emotional labor has been central to research efforts which aim to advance an understanding of workplace dynamics in the service industry and the care industry. The economic shift towards the service industry influenced the sociological attention paid to the role of emotional labor as well as a general increase in the focus on the sociology of emotions

(Wharton, 2009). Strains of research on emotional labor highlight the presence of emotional labor within non market, uncompoensetated settings.

Arlie Hochschild's (1983) "emotional labor" refers to the labor that requires one to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 1983 pg. 7). Further, Hochschild (1983) finds that emotional labor may lead to alienation because individuals must draw on their own emotions. The necessity to draw on such emotions may cause individuals to lose touch with their authentic emotions. With the rise of the service industry individuals supply personal emotions on the job that can create dissonance between an individual's act of emotional labor and their sense of authentic self (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional labor theory is predominantly applied to the work of women. Before women entered the workforce, their contributions to the home were seen as a manifestation of their biological 'traits,' and therefore not seen as work. Women's work was construed as inferior to men's in both domestic and civic life. Because women are commonly tied down to the home and its domestic tasks their labor is devalued. When their labor was eventually brought into the market economy it commanded relatively low wages. As women entered the workforce they took their "caring traits" with them and, in the view of employers, these traits limited the type of work they were deemed eligible for. In this way, care work is an extension of women's unpaid domestic work, thus women are more likely to engage in work that requires emotional labor (Federici, 1975).

Another theorist, Sherman (2015), notes that emotional labor is performed by an extremely large variety of workers, whom she refers to as lifestyle workers. She proposes that there is an important distinction between relational work and emotional labor. Relational work

does not always imply a negative impact on the one performing it, while Hochschild (1983) finds emotional labor to have an adverse impact on the workers. Sherman (2015) asserts that the toll of one's emotional work is proportional to the professional and economic status of one's work.

Therefore, those who are working in a lower status job are more likely to experience the emotional labor of relational work (Sherman 2015, Duffy, Armenia & Stacey, 2015). Adding to Sherman's (2015) analysis Erickson and Ritter (2001) find that due to men's higher professional status, relative to women, they have more capacity to resist emotional labor.

Erickson and Ritter (2001) propose that emotional labor is present during the management of many different types of emotions. They propose that much of the current literature on emotional labor is limited to a specific range of emotions, such as care and compassion, that apply more directly to women due to their historically familial role as mothers and caretakers. Other emotions that are more often managed by men are still present but less researched (Erickson & Ritter, 2001).

Emotional labor theory is often applied to the care industry. The care industry relies on the compassion of the workers and as a result puts the workers in the position to exert intensive emotions that can cause a sense of depletion (Sawbridge 2015, and Hochschild 1983). Care workers often use emotional labor to relieve the physical and emotional pain and distress of clients. In order to do so, care workers must draw on their compassion. Compassion, more than other emotions, requires significant emotional labor which can cause significant damage that may push care workers to become emotionally detached (Sawbridge, 2015). Therefore, the use of specific emotions may have exponentially more harmful effects (Sawbridge 2015, Ritter & Erickson 2001).

The burdens of emotional labor have begun to be considered in relation to the daily negotiations of sex workers (Deshotel & Forsyth, 2006). Some sex workers assert that their work has therapeutic qualities for their clientele as they give compassion and emotional support (Emma, 2018). Many sex workers have expressed experiencing negative repercussions resulting from the emotional labor at work - such as paranoia and the over-analyzation of social interactions within their personal lives. Additionally, the emotional labor of performative arousal causes sex workers to experience difficulty in differentiating between acting and feeling. The blurring of these sensations impinges on sex workers' authentic self (Deshotel & Forsyth, 2006).

Expanding on Hochschild's work Cowen (2019) and others (Constable, 2009) argue that emotional labor does not only pertain to women's work in the labor market but also plays a role in the daily lives of marginalized populations due to structural and institutional inequalities. Often women, particularly women of color, have to do the work of acting as social lubricants in order to maintain comfort for the sake of others, in addition to not causing any escalations. Emotional labor expands beyond the labor market and exists in daily interactions (Cowen 2019, Erickson & Ritter 2001, Constable 2009).

Theories of emotional labor are used in this study to examine and demarcate the ways the sugar babies of this study perform their labor. Emotional labor is revealed to be a central defining feature of sugaring and helps to make sense of the strategies women use to emote and fulfill the social role of the sugar baby. Furthermore, the degrees to which the women perform emotional labor directly influenced the women's experiences of power or lack thereof.

Methodology

In order to appropriately understand the experiences of sugar babies, I conducted twelve confidential, semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions with women who self-identified as sugar babies or having sugared. I conducted the interviews over video calls on Zoom. I solicited interviewees through existing connections, Instagram posts, and snowball sampling. To expand from women who respond to my posts I asked the participants if they knew others who have done sugar baby work that may be interested in participating in my research. I only interviewed women who were 18 years or older. I only interviewed women who are sugar babies for men because my scope of interest is in the specific power dynamics that exist in heterosexual relationships within a patriarchal society.

I conducted my research through interviews in order to be able to generate more qualitative observations and analysis. Interviews allow for more flexibility for free-flowing conversations that allow the respondents to depart from the framing and emphasis of a static survey instrument. Additionally, through interviews I was able to discern some of the more nuanced aspects of interviewee responses, such as tone and body language. One limitation of doing interview-style research is the difficulty in establishing trust. Interacting with sugar baby interviewee's for a single interview does not lend itself to the establishment of critical mutual trust. Participants may have experienced feelings of discomfort during interviews in which they discussed their experiences as sugar babies, as they may be in a position to have experienced trauma from their work. This is not to say that the circumstance created inherent distrust but rather I want to acknowledge the potential to be discussing personal and graphic topics and that individuals may feel insufficient trust to open up in the required ways.

Another limitation of my research method is the use of the snowball method which limited my sample to my personal social network and may be the cause of the limited diversity in

the participants. Bard College is both a predominantly white institution and a private institution and may have pushed the demographic results of this study to be more heavily white and of higher socioeconomic status. Therefore, the consequence of recruiting this demographic is that they are likely to have chosen to work as sugar babies rather than having taken the work out of necessity due the typical financial security of white upper middle-class women.

Outline of Chapters

In my first chapter I paint a picture of the sugar babies. I outline who they are, their relationships styles, and how and why they become sugar babies. I explore the ways the participants adjust and learn to fulfill the role of the sugar baby. I find that the women gravitated to sugar dating for the money and the opportunity to acquire cultural capital from their sugar daddies. Furthermore, I argue that in order to become a sugar baby the women have to adjust to the sugar daddy's desires. They do this though fulfilling ideals of white, high class femininity by showing the men that they are worth investing in and are exciting. Additionally, they reveal they must dress according to their sugar daddies preferences, and they must be educated and intellectual. To do this they have to deploy their cultural capital.

In my second chapter I investigate the way the women organize and interpret their sugar arrangements in relation to dominant ethics that separate the public from the private. In this chapter I establish a two part typology that reveals the women's response to participating in the commodification of emotional intimacy. The first group, who I name the "Professionals," consists of women who maintained strict boundaries and had low emotional stakes in their relationships as a way to resist the mingling of the private and public. The second group, who I name the "Girlfriends," consists of women who had loose boundaries and high emotional stakes.

For some women in this second group the mingling of the private and public was intentional, while others wished they had maintained stricter boundaries and had a preference for the separation of the private and the public. This chapter intends to investigate and highlight the importance of the women's use of boundaries in the context of work that commodifies intimacy.

In my third chapter I speculate the ways in which the interviewees sugar practices map onto and relate to other relational models. I argue that the Professionals fit within a model of bounded authenticity. This model resembles patterns of a work environment. As the Professionals follow a model close to work they have more power. On the other hand, the Girlfriends fit into a relational package model that is best defined as the intertwining of private and public logics. They take on patterns from both dating models and bounded authenticity models and as a result are situated somewhere in between dating and work. Furthermore, because the Girlfriends have some resemblance to patterns of dating they experience less power.

1

Becoming a Sugar Baby

“I’ve started to get pleasure in getting ready. Like my music when I’m getting ready, just feeling like a bad bitch, but before I would be so nervous and so insecure that I needed the music, putting the makeup on, and dressing up. It’s funny because I also want to let myself dress up like this just for me but I don’t, so I really make that fun, like the showering and the –shaving, like I get to clean my whole body, like 100% free of hair, so that’s fun.”

Luna used the getting ready process to get into character for her sugar dates. She did her nails, her hair, her makeup and listened to the same Rihanna song each time. She had a ritual. The women in this study all had to go through the process of *becoming* a sugar baby which required first deciding to do it and later learning how to fulfill the role. This chapter draws on the sociological tradition initiated by Howard Becker that unpacks the social processes through which individuals come to occupy specific social roles, such as “Becoming a Marijuana User” (Becker, 1953), or “Becoming a Firefighter” (Desmond, 2006). Becker (1953) illuminates the physiological and socialization processes in learning to enjoy weed, while Desmond (2006) highlights how the habitus of ‘country boys’ is the basis for the men’s dispositions in acclimating and gravitating to dangerous work as wildland firefighters. This chapter will paint a picture of who the women in this study are, what their arrangements look like, and further illustrate the process of gravitating and adjusting to sugaring. The women reveal that to become a sugar baby they had to be what they believed the men wanted them to be: they had to be worth investing in and be exciting which required the indulgence of male fantasies, particularly versions of high-class, white femininity. And they had to wear the right things, and be articulate and educated which required the use of existing cultural capital.

Setting the Women's Stories: Demography, Motivation & Arrangement Style

The women in this study had many similarities, one of which was their similar backgrounds. The participants in this study were all white, cis-gender women. There was only one participant, Zoe, who explicitly mentioned being a lesbian, while the other women did not express their sexuality outright. They were all between the ages of twenty and twenty-four. Sarah, Elsa, Allana, Luna, and Hazel all mentioned being in the process of getting a bachelor's degree, or have completed some undergraduate study. Danny, Camilia, Victoria, and Ariana had all graduated from college with a bachelor's degree. Charlotte, Zoe, and Mila had all completed undergraduate with a BA and were in the process of completing a master's degree. Hence, all had participated in higher level education.

Additionally, the women participated in all types of work, often in low skill work. Some talked about having jobs through their schools, taking on internships, babysitting and more. Many worked in the service industry at one point or another. Victoria was the only participant who, for a moment, sugared full time. While most women sugared alongside doing other work or while attending college.

In response to the more introductory question of this study's interviews – How did you first get into sugar baby work? What drew you to it? – the women often responded in similar ways, suggesting they were primarily motivated by the money. Many explained wanting a little extra cash, or needing the money for daily life. Allana puts it this way: “Broke! Fat ass broke, like no money broke. Yeah, straight up. Well that's not the only thing but that was the biggest driver of course, I had no ‘fuck it’ money at all, and I needed money like now.” Allana also mentioned using the money for “car insurance, gas, weed.” The money is for both the purposes

of extra spending as well as items for necessity. Danny, who had a stronger distaste for the work than a lot of the women, noted that:

I don't think any girl really just decides, 'oh you know, I'm just gonna do this for the hell of it' most of the time. For me it was a factor of this, uh, I quickly realized that this was a way that I could make quite a bit of money without doing much.

Danny expressed that the only possible motive that seemed reasonable to her would be the desperate need for money. She talked about using the money for flying home to see her mother, for rent, food, weed, and a little extra spending money. Further she suggested that she could do it “without doing much” because, in contrast to the other women in this study, Danny did not put much time into her sugar arrangements.

Often the women framed their interest in the work in terms of money for both survival and extra spending or ‘fun money.’ Luna made clear the financial benefits of sugaring as opposed to the service work and other low paid jobs these women often had.

The financial aspects of the work definitely drew me in. I was trying to pay for college and rent and of course it was very intriguing how much you can make in such a little short time because I did read an article about this and how it keeps you in the work because if there is a wage job that is like \$20 an hour, even though that is a good job, like that is good money, but if I can make \$400/\$500 in a night, like I can make \$1,000 why would I do this this \$20 thing, like no thank you. It's like quick money but yeah it was financial for sure.

Many of the women expressed that they were drawn in by the good pay and the job's ability to better support their daily life.

While a lot of women spoke about wanting and needing the money, most of the women revealed later on throughout the interview that doing the work was not actually on a “need” basis but rather because they found joy in the work. Most of the women implied having their parents as a financial resource or safety net. Charlotte mentioned that, in reality, she is very financially stable, with parents who are always ready and willing to help.

like there is this joke that my parents are my sugar daddy and sugar mommy because they will give me anything that I want, I don't ask for stuff because I know that they will just do it because they don't have money concerns. I know that if I am like 'I need \$600 to pay for this thing' they would be like 'totally, oh you need your car fixed? it's \$400? – put it on my credit card.' They are just not worried about money.

Charlotte's comment revealed that her motives to sugar do not entirely lie in financial necessity but in the joy she gets from pretending to be someone else. Mila put her motives plainly. "The whole [reason I wanted to do this was] if I could get away making money from something I might enjoy anyway." Mila found that she could enjoy this work because she was personally emotionally invested in her sugar daddy. Sarah adds:

I was first drawn to it 2019, I believe, one of my friends had been talking about it, just about how she made an account and messaged people and was like 'there is a lot of opportunities here' and I was like oh that seems like something that I could do and would be comfortable with, so I made an account... and the next day I had like 50 new messages and I was really excited so I met with someone like two days later and it went well, and it felt so empowering, like I remember walking away from it the first time and I was like this is so cool, I'm gonna do this more and eventually it became my job.

Sarah found power in her sexual power over these men and felt empowered by reaping the financial benefits. Mila, Sarah, Charlotte and others felt that, while sugaring was still work, it seemed like an enjoyable way to make money.

Some of the women even expressed that in addition to the money, the work catered to other specific needs and desires. Allana mentioned that

I'm autistic so I don't always thrive well in traditional work environments, I get extremely overwhelmed and extremely stressed and it just is really negative on my mental health so looking for an alternative work environment is always on my radar. Like my social anxiety is way better when it's a one on one so I do really well one on one with people, that actually I enjoy and something that I am good at that drew me to that work as well besides just being broke.

Allana was motivated to sugar because she was better able to thrive in a one on one work environment. Charlotte expressed that sugaring was an outlet for certain parts of her personality, and allowed her to try on different characters.

So there is that component of it [sugaring], but I would also say that the reason I do this work is not as much money and more of just a balance to my life, and I know that is a very unique case.

Charlotte found sugaring brought her 'balance' because she was able to contrast her 'reckless' side, through sugaring, and her 'rational,' down to earth side in personal life. She went on to express that she loved to listen to others talk and to "act;" she found immense joy in pretending to be a different person. She felt powerful. Charlotte and Allana expressed character specific reasons for being drawn to sugaring that extend beyond what many of the women initially articulated.

While many women gave a pretense of doing the work for the money they revealed other motivations later on. Through the interviews the women revealed an awareness of the potential stigmatization of their work. This explained their hesitation to tell me their true motivations. Over one half of the women mentioned outright unwillingness to be transparent about their sugaring with their parents. Allana was the only participant who chose to tell her parents. This illustrates their feelings of shame and fear of stigma. Sarah expressed that the most difficult part of the work was facing stigma.

The stigma around it, just because like my friends here they are like super accepting, they all know and its great but my family back home they have no idea and I hope they never find out because especially while I'm financially reliant on them like for college and everything, I don't know what they would do if they found out, so that part has been very difficult because I have also had to lie a lot to them, and I've had to make a new bank account that I'm depositing cash.

The need for money served as justification for doing work that is socially deviant. They did not want to confess that they had a preference for this work because of the shame that is associated

with such work. By explaining their engagement as “need” based rather than desire based helped to maintain appearances and avoid stigmatization.

Types of Relationships

The women tended to engage with the men in different ways regarding how they spend time together, how they received payments and their preference for the sexual aspects of the arrangements. The women’s types of relationships primarily fit into five groups: sex only, dating with sex, dating with occasional sex, dating with no sex, and digital/online sugaring.

One-sixth of the women met for sex only. Elsa, and Victoria tended to not go on dates with the men, even though they sometimes wished they had. Both the women found their interactions to revolve around the sexual aspects. For this purpose they would both meet their sugar daddies at a hotel, or in the case of Victoria, sometimes at her or her clients personal homes. Both expected pay per meet (PPM). But Elsa accepted gifts as a form of payment while Victoria was not open to accepting gifts as a form of payment. Victoria asked for \$400 per meet, although mentioned at times getting paid more. She saw upwards of forty sugar daddies while Elsa saw closer to three. And Elsa expressed that she wished that the men would take her on more dates.

Only one-sixth of the women had sex on every date. Sarah and Allana went on dates with the men they were seeing, including fancy dinners, and evening shows. Allana noted that:

And yeah we did all sorts of stuff we would meet up and do really nerdy things like antiquing, and stuff like that - which we both love so that was great when you can find those overlapping interests. Because going out and having a date is really great and fun and it's good for building a connection if that's what you are doing - which is what I was doing with the first guy.

She enjoyed bonding activities and finding overlapping interests with her sugar daddy. They both had sex or did sexually intimate acts with their sugar daddy each meet. Similar to the other women thus far discussed, they both only accepted payment in the form of PPM.

The majority of the women sugared by dating with sex as more occasional occurrence. One-third of the women, Danny, Zoe, Ariana, Luna, went on dates with their sugar daddies, ranging from going to bars, dinners, to going on trips together. They all communicated with their sugar daddy outside of the date, such as texting, phone calls and face times. And they all engaged in sexual activities with their sugar daddies but in contrast to Sarah and Allana, they did not have sex with the men on each date. Rather, for them, sex arose in a more informal or unexpected way. Zoe, Ariana and Luna all accepted PPM with the occasional gift. In contrast, Danny was primarily paid in the form of a monthly allowance, but in the case she needed something specific she could ask for it. She noted

If you ask for something specific or you need money for something specific that can be added, at one point my computer broke, and they can get you the computer. Or you know me and my friend went on this road trip and there was kind of this emergency, and he paid for hotels and rental cars, so it really depends like if you are in need they can give you quite a bit of sum.

Only one participant sugared by dating but without sex. Charlotte sugared in a similar way to Danny in that she would go on many dates and had a preference to resist sexual activities with the men. Charlotte primarily engaged with her sugar daddies during her dates and did not have all that much communication over text, phone call etc. She primarily accepted payment in the form of PPM and often accepted and enjoyed payment in the form of gifts.

Lastly, one-fourth of the women sugar dated strictly online. Camila, had one primary sugar daddy with whom she had both a sexual and emotional relationship, and she was primarily paid in PPM. Camila provided emotional support, casual conversation, and would send nudes to

her sugar daddy. Mila also had one primary sugar daddy but they communicated infrequently and her payments seemed unreliable, and they loved to have intellectual and thoughtful conversations. Hazel saw closer to ten sugar daddies, she accepted allowed payments only in PPM and her relationships were always sexual.

Seeking Arrangements

Most, if not all of the participants used Seeking Arrangements (SA) throughout their time sugaring. Seeking Arrangements is one of the biggest “dating” sites out there, and has gained up to 20,000-30,000 new members per day, with over ten million active members (Wade 2020, Seeking.com 2021). They are even larger than Eharmony (Wade, 2020). As a result of the popularity and central role that Seeking Arrangements plays in facilitating sugar dating, members learn to derive their understanding of the ‘appropriate’ standards and norms of sugaring from this site. Although the website does not set exact boundaries for its members, it still sets explicit and implicit precedents. There is a tension between the way SA sets boundaries and the way in which sugaring negotiation actually occurs. SA explicitly deters participants from engaging in sex work, likely for their own legal protection. However, the selling of sex is clearly present. Although often unsuccessful, this framework still pushes the women to engage in sugaring through coded language. Further, it sets behavioral and beauty standard expectations. Seeking Arrangements’s rules function to censor and remove members who use language that is indicative of the selling of sex. Additionally the norms of the website suggest that members are upper-class, white, and that the sugar babies represent a kind of white femininity that is centered around the “manic pixie dream girl” trope (Sarkeesian, 2011).

Brandon Wade is the American businessman who founded Seeking Arrangements. He is the chief executive officer of the site and specializes in technology and engineering; he frames the website with the intention to make space for fostering romantic relationships that acknowledge explicitly what the individuals can give and take. This is the ‘arrangement’ that the website refers to. Seeking.com says that,

an arrangement is where people are direct with one another and stop wasting time. It allows people to immediately define what they need and want in a relationship. Our profiles allow members to effortlessly state their expectations. This is what we like to call Relationships on Your Terms (Seeking.com, 2021).

Seeking attempts to frame sugar dating as a mutually beneficial arrangement between equals that is not based on transactions. Brandon Wade further discusses the goal of sugaring in an informational video on sugar dating etiquette:

A lot of sugar daddies on the website behave like Johns, so that is a ‘no, no’ behavior. We, at Seeking.com, are trying to do our best to weed out those types of behaviors. So, think about it this way -- if a sugar daddy approaches you and asks you for a cost per meet type-situation, that is basically an escorting situation. So nobody pays you on a price per meet basis if they are truly wanting a long term, empowering relationship ... It (Seeking.com) is for long term gratification, not short term gratification (Wade, 2020)

Wade claims that sugaring is a new form of dating that does not resemble escorting or sex work, which requires a quid-pro-quo financial exchange for sexual acts.

SA presents itself as anti-sex-trafficking and anti sex work (Seeking.com, 2021). Wade and his team create boundaries of ‘appropriate’ language and courses of action for the members. The site automoderator will pick up on and flag any language that resembles escorting or sex work and ban those members. Victoria notes:

There is pay per meet or is it an allowance per meet is like, you're not supposed to say that cause it's more transactional... but that's what a lot of people do. You're just not supposed to say that because it's more like prostitution.

The website weeds out the “Johns” through policing and penalizing certain vocabulary. This is an example posted on the Reddit open forum where members discuss the ways in which they have to navigate the boundaries of the website.

Is sex / intimacy included at all in what you are looking for? Or are you 100% platonic? If the latter then just say you are a Platonic SB. Plain and simple. If sex is on the table but you want to do other things too, then say that... just say something like "I am looking for someone who can enjoy going on fun dates and outings, or just chilling and enjoying a night in!" or something like that. (Reddit Blogger: u/gutzzzj. 2020, December 1)

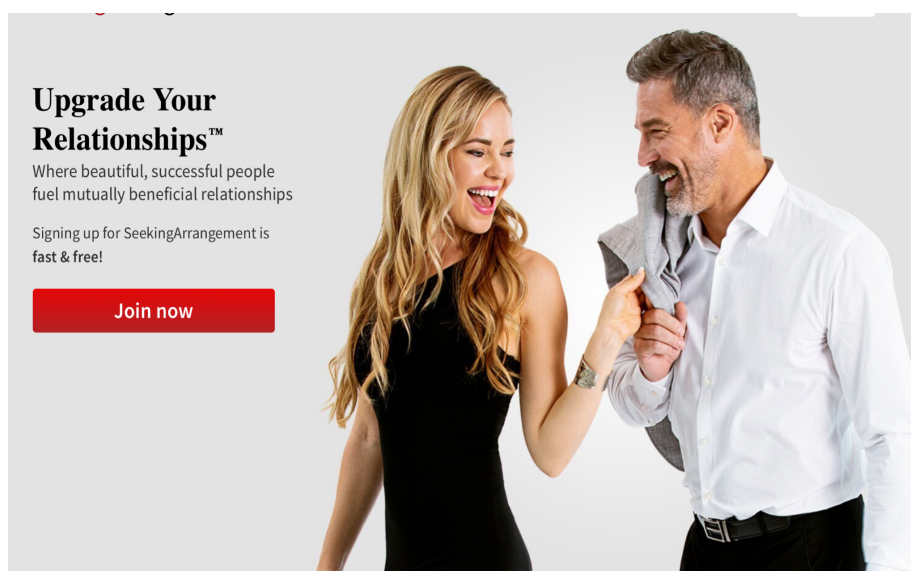
Blogger u/gutzzzj highlights the way the users have to actively work against the limits determined by the site. While Wade frames the site as non-transactional, he also frames the relationships as arrangements that are meant to make the terms clear and beneficial for both members; this language implies the relationship is founded on transactional behaviors. Therefore, it becomes clear that Seeking Arrangement’s conditions and censorship is tied to legal protections for the site owners. These seemingly pseudo-boundaries, or ‘wink, wink, nod’ boundaries, push participants not to discuss the exchange of sex for money in more explicit terms.

Seeking Arrangements has many additional features that push the women to align with the site’s idealization of high-class white femininity. When signing up, the women are meant to upload public photos and private photos. The women in this study make clear that the private photo section is meant for posting revealing or provocative photos. In their profiles, the women are expected to say their hair color, ethnicity, and describe their body type, from which they must select one of six options: slim, athletic, average, curvy, a few extra pounds, full/overweight (Seeking.com, 2021).³ The women must select the type of man they are looking for, and must choose between “success and wealth” or “looks and charm.” Further the site says: “Sugar Babies

³ Members can manually enter their ethnicity and are not required to select one from a list as they did when it came to describing their body type.

enjoy a life of luxury by being pampered with fine dinners, exotic trips and allowances. In turn, Sugar Daddies or Mommas find beautiful members to accompany them at all times.” Sugar babies are expected to be beautiful and to “accompany them [the sugar parents] at all times.” This language functions to take the sugar baby’s agency out of the discussion, by implying that the sugar babies’ desires are not relevant.

This is the first image that appears when one opens Seeking.com:



(Seeking.com, 2021)

The site is full of language and imagery that implies who is meant to sugar and how they are meant to do it. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of women's beauty. The photo above depicts a traditional bombshell – thin, white, blonde, beautiful, and a radiant smile. Further, this image supports dominant standards of beauty as white. And although this website features some women of color, this image is the center of the site. Clearly, there is a premium on beauty and white femininity. The implication is that beauty is an economic institution that is commodified, sold and bought. This premises beauty on the desire to be desired that can be enhanced through makeup, high-end clothing, straightening one's hair, getting plastic surgery,

and using social media apps to change one's eyes, skin tone, etc. Beauty is inherently stratified in its link to the capitalist market (McMillian Cottom, 2019). Therefore, a person's value is determined on a continuum of good to bad, beautiful to ugly, where good is represented by white femininity and bad is represented by Blackness (McMillian Cottom, 2019). The Seeking Arrangements' cover photo forces all nonwhite women to cohere to white standards. Therefore, this image delivers a strong racialized message to those who sugar about the value of beauty and its link to whiteness.

The woman in the Seeking Arrangements cover photo embodies not only white female standards of beauty, but a certain personality type; she is the 'manic pixie dream' girl stock character who swoops in as the man's saving grace. She is whimsical, often a fantasy woman, with little agency herself. She is usually there for the man's temporary enjoyment, and works to brighten his life (Sarkeesian, 2011). Additionally, this photo suggests that she is leading on this man with a sexual intent. Between the language and the imagery on Seeking Arrangements, it becomes clear that sugar babies are meant to be spoiled, non-autonomous, prototypical eye candy. The women aim to fulfill the gaps in the men's lives and help them 'loosen up.' The website then works to pass a clear message on to the women regarding an appropriate way to behave.

Gravitating to Sugaring & Cultural Capital

These women expressed gravitating to sugaring for various reasons ranging from the superior wages in comparison to that of other menial labor, the material objects, the enjoyability, the 'need' for money and the additional experiences it provides. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that money was not nearly the main or only motivation that drew the women to

sugar; they benefited from the cultural capital they could access. Cultural capital is a term coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) that refers to the behaviors, assets, and knowledge that function to display one's social status and cultural competence. Those behaviors, assets, and knowledge can present through dress, education, vernacular, intellect, etc. Bourdieu (1984) developed this theory to understand the enduring and resilient social and class arrangements within a stratified society. He (1984) found that one's cultural capital was something that allowed for social mobility. Cultural capital arises as a way to establish social relations that are centered on the accumulation of cultural knowledge as the avenue to obtain social status and power. Bourdieu (1984) defines three forms of cultural capital: objectified, embodied, and institutionalized. Objectified cultural capital refers to the things that an individual owns, such as books, or clothes, or having the newest forms of technology. Items carry cultural meaning and symbolically convey something about who they are. Embodied cultural capital refers to knowledge that is inherited and socialized whether consciously or passively. This pertains to how people conduct themselves, the language they use, and their level of education on certain topics. Institutionalized cultural capital refers to an official institution's recognition of an individual's cultural capital, often through educational degrees or professional qualifications (Bourdieu, 1984).

Beyond income, all of the women expressed an interest in the additional benefits and opportunities of the work. There were few participants who accepted strictly cash in exchange for their services. Most participants took compensation in many different ways. Some of the women got gifts such as scarfs or lingerie. Elsa said, "I think he was more like I'll get you gifts more than financial sums. For the other one there were gifts as well as sums. Mostly things to wear with them." Many of the women spoke of getting lingerie as gifts from the men, others got

fancy scarfs. While some women wanted and accepted gifts as their form of exchange, other women wanted to go cool places and eat nice food. Sarah explained that her and her sugar parent went to, “generally pretty nice places, they let me pick, so I usually look for the nicest restaurant because I wanna try all these anyways.” Like the other women, she enjoyed the benefits of eating a fancy meal with delicious drinks. In addition to getting paid for her companionship and enjoying a pleasurable experience, she was drawn to the experiences that allowed for the acquisition of cultural capital. Danny spoke of going to an exclusive festival that she would not be able to attend otherwise. Victoria explained the general draw of being part of high society life,

Partly the reason why I started doing this sort of like, yeah, it's like a privilege to have money, to be able to make money. I get to sort of see what it's like to be more affluent or something. And then also like, yeah, I get to go to nice hotel rooms, like nice dinners sometimes. Yeah. Just like I went in a Tesla, so I'm able to sort of like, get a taste of like this life that I've never been surrounded by. Yeah. It feels like somehow I can piggyback off these guys' success. It makes me feel sorta successful.

Charlotte put it plainly, “it's about making money, and me going on a really cool date, or me having a really cool experience or getting really cool gifts.”

The work is not simply a financial exchange for the women. The men they form arrangements with have access to resources beyond money. They are able to provide experiences that the women are eager to have. These women want the cultural capital the men possess because they want that cultural capital for themselves. Each activity that one engages in signals who one might associate with and has important implications about one's future life paths (Bourdieu, 1984). Participation in certain activities and hobbies is often limited by one's social position. The women in this study are able to engage in activities, hobbies, and general culture with these men of high social status, by creating an unconventional path for social mobility.

Adjusting to the Sugar Lifestyle

The women show that sugar babying requires calculated self-management. They fine-tune their persona to their circumstance. Hazel noted that, “you know, it's your job to make people have a crush on you and pay you for it.” The women all understood that making the sugar daddy like them was the key to their success as a sugar baby, because without the sugar parents' interest they have no “arrangement.” In doing so the women adjusted to their work by tweaking and fine-tuning their character to suit the man's preferences. For some, this looked like being their ‘real’ self, for some it was emphasizing certain traits, and for others, it was being someone else entirely. Camila expressed that, “it was just exaggerating some features. Once I got to know him and what he liked about me I just highlighted those things in conversation more than I would normally.” This was done by dressing a certain way, conversing in a certain way, showing interest in particular things, and aspiring to certain goals. Hazel mentioned the acting she did in the role of a sugar baby: “I acted in high school cause I went to a performing arts high school and it reminded me of getting into a character and it was so fun.” Sarah explained that she would shift her character to suit each client.

Usually I try to gauge what they are like at the beginning of the date, because usually they kind of fit into categories of people that I have already seen. So I know to act around them, like if they are a complete mansplainer and want to be like this mentor type of guy, which I hate that, but I know how to handle it, so I'll kind of just listen, and ...I hate to say it but I'll act like just like some young girl who doesn't know anything because that's what they want, and that's what they are there for even though I know that's not who I am that's who I need to be to earn the money that I'm getting.

Nonetheless, the work required the women to play into what the men wanted them to be. The process of becoming a sugar baby is the process of adjusting one's persona to fit the desires of the man. The ability to seamlessly adjust to the men's wants, as if it was exactly who they were, required a sharp attention to the social circumstances and the employment of the women's cultural capital. Through their interviews, the women explained the specific characteristics and

attitudes they displayed in order to fulfill the role of a sugar baby. They had to be worth investing in and to be exciting. These attributes are contingent on indulging the male fantasies of femininity, particularly versions of high-class white femininity. They also had to wear the right clothes, be intellectual and educated which required the deployment of cultural capital.

“Worth Investing In”

Allana and many of the women found that the men were drawn to women who expressed having high ambitions and goals because it meant they were women worth investing in. Allana went on to say that “they [her sugar daddies] want to hear that you want to thrive more than just survive.” Allana explained discussing money with the men in order to push the idea that she was ambitious and goal oriented.

If you say ‘I am saving up for this new expensive item and I need fuckin money for that because I want to invest in myself’ or ‘I’m a musician and I want to a new guitar because thats part of my craft.’ Like these things are appreciated by more than just yourself. So my daddy bought me a new computer because I was like ‘I’m going to have do a big project for school’

Allana made sure that her sugar daddy knew what she was spending her money on. She told him that it was for things related to self improvement. Although it may be true that she *wanted* to put the money she got from her sugar daddy towards school, she chose to actively include this in how she communicated with her sugar daddy because she knew that it would strengthen his interest in her. She, along with many other women, found that showing investment in herself continued the man's investment in her.

Mila also spoke about some of the ways she would show her sugar daddy that she was worth investing in.

Like I said I think he is very mentally interested in the relationship because one time he asked me ‘what you rather do: have \$500 for yourself or have \$500 go to a nonprofit you

support?’ and I was like ‘haha that's funny, probably a nonprofit’ and so I sent him a name of a place and he sent me a receipt but then he also sent me \$500 and left a message saying ‘you have your morals in check, good job.’ But I also sometimes feel like I want him so see me as someone worth investing in because we do have a lot in common, but sometimes it is hard for me to afford things that I like or that I want. I feel like because we are sort of similar people I feel like I want him to see where I want to go in life and be like ‘I would like to help you with that.’

In this case, Mila was able to play this circumstance out so that her sugar daddy could plainly see her ‘good morals.’ Her reaction to this question is a significant moment for their relationship because she could use her response to signal to him that she was someone worth investing in. He paid her because he believed in her. Again, Mila and Allana, like many of the other women, chose to behave in a very specific manner in order to communicate to the men that they were ambitious and therefore a good investment. They adjust to sugar dating by altering their conduct, by proving themselves “worthy.”

It is worth noting that the men's desire to sugar date women who are “worth investing in” is also suggestive of their class and racial preferences. These preferences code sugaring as best suited for white, high-class women. Additionally, this concept of the sugar baby reveals the sugar daddy’s desire to sugar date women who are well-resourced enough and therefore of the class and race which would best enable them to reach success. These men want to date women who are going to be like them. Further, the desire for the women to be able to eventually partake in elite business culture is suggestive of their preference for white, high-class femininity. Thus, race and class underlie many apparently innocent preferences in sugar dating.

Sugar daters work within the expectations laid out on the Seeking Arrangements website wherein sugar daddies act as mentors who are investing in their sugar baby’s success. This creates a power dynamic in which the sugar baby needs the sugar daddy. Most of the women found that their sugar daddies were involved in business jobs or in high paying elite positions.

The men's investments in the women's success fits in line with the “businessman ethic.” Further, being “worth investing in” suggests “girl boss” tropes that valorize women's success while often failing to acknowledge the difficult and elitist path to achieving “boss” status. Additionally, this mentality towards the women positions the men as providers of success. Without the assistance or control of a superiorly positioned man, the woman would be in no place to succeed. This logic helps the sugar daddies justify their sexual and romantic engagements with younger women because it shields them from the potential stigma of being a ‘John;’ they are partaking in an arrangement which functions under the terms of investment between a benefactor and recipient, a mentor and mentee.

Being Exciting

Another way that the women adjust their persona to suit the men's interests was by becoming exciting, positive and carefree. The women often received positive reinforcement when they were upbeat, smiling, energetic etc. Luna indicated the importance of displaying this energy in her Seeking Arrangements profile.

I would try to make myself fun and lively, like ‘hey, I would really be down to go on runs, try new food.’ I was trying to make myself the most compatible, nice, awesome, cool person instead of just like being me.

By adding a carefree persona into her interactions with the men, she gave them what she believed they most wanted: the illusion of fun, even if it went against her own idea of herself. She wanted it to look as though she was down for anything and had a passion for life.

It was clear that this wasn’t always easy for the women. Luna expressed the difficulty and significance of manufacturing this persona.

I think for me it's weird, I get nervous so the habit of mine is to just drink a lot to loosen up so that when I'm loosened up ... these guys tell me ‘you are literally so fun.’ So when

I am sober they are like 'you are so fun, I want the drunk version of you.' I just be like 'okay.' You know what I think, I think it's been very much like the sun coming up, like you open the curtain just so slightly. But no, I think I mostly have my guard up, like smiley, actually I'm like smiling the whole time, like 'hey, what's up??' and they are like 'you are so smiley, you are so positive, you are so happy, you are always smiling.

Luna felt she was not enough until she mustered up this exciting, positive person within. In the need to become this person for the men, she would drink to loosen up.

Another woman expressed not wanting to discuss her depression with her sugar daddy in order to maintain this positive and exciting persona.

I try to be an exciting figure in their life more than anything, someone who has a lot of passion about life in general. So yeah, I guess also in terms of being yourself and things you do and don't talk about, I draw a general boundary around talking about my depression with my daddies, one of the reasons being that I want to be a bright and positive force in their life.

If Allana showed this part of herself to her sugar daddies, she would not be fulfilling the essential "carefree" part of sugar dating scripts. Allana used alcohol as an intermediary to signal to the men that there were "no strings attached." Alcohol lowers one's inhibitions. Therefore, the responsibility of one's actions can be displaced onto one's state of drunkenness. Thus this eases the impact of one's actions by establishing meaninglessness (Wade, 2017). Allana drank in order to fulfill the expectations of sugar arrangements as causal and light hearted. The women become an exciting figure for the men in various ways by hiding parts of themselves, drinking, and, at times, by simply faking it.

Sugar daddys' interest in exciting and carefree women is another way sugar babying becomes a role exclusively for white, high-class women. Being exciting requires comfort, confidence, and ease. This ideal fails to consider responsibilities and struggles placed onto marginalized populations. For example, the ability to be exciting turns a blind eye to the

difficulties associated with economic insecurity, nor does it consider the stress of living with racial trauma and oppression.

This kind of behavior is more accessible to white women. Being “exciting” suggests that women should be youthful, innocent and bubbly. Black women become excluded from the opportunity to fulfill this role because they are constrained by societies controlling images of the Black matriarch (Collins, 2000). Black women are often burdened by responsibility and play a dominant role in sustaining family and community life. The concept of the Black matriarch conceives of Black women as aggressive and controlling. This image contributes to Black women not being seen as fun and easygoing (Collins, 2000). This militates against white sugar daddies viewing black women as good sugar baby prospects. Additionally, Black girls are seen as women from a very young age and are hyper sexualized, stripping them of innocence and youthfulness (Cottom, 2019) Hence, these tropes exclude Black women from being seen as innocent, easygoing, and fun. This does not prevent Black women and women of color from choosing to sugar. Instead this suggests that the sugar daddies preferences pertain to a select version of femininity that is exclusionary.

Adjusting to Sugaring & Cultural Capital

The women continued to adjust to sugaring by dressing up to meet the sugar daddies’ preferences and by emphasizing their intelligence and education; these performances required the women’s deployment of cultural capital. Charlotte was highly attuned to the games that sugar daddies and sugar babies played with their cultural capital. The more she could use her existing cultural capital and perform cultural capital for her sugar daddy, the more she was perceived as legitimate and able to benefit more from the relationship. By keeping up with the men’s

professional and cultural worlds, she was better prepared to make a good impression on the date and thus more equipped to play the social role necessary to sugar.

To get a good sugar daddy you have to be educated, you have to know the language of academia, you have to be updated in politics and what's going on in the world because that's their world. So like you need to be updated with everything because how else are you gonna talk to them. This is my own experience like if you are putting forward an image where you're well rounded, well read, kind of the classic, its gonna attract a different kind of person, a person that who is interested in that and those people tend to be more wealthy individuals and in order to keep that individual you have to know what's going on in their world which usually involved like the stock market, politics, you know, international events, domestic events, like medicine and pharmaceutical, so you have to be very well read to keep up. But that also allows you to negotiate higher prices. Like there was this one guy, ... It was like a \$700 PPM and, I read up, I studied for this I was like 'fuck, okay, mans on Wall Street, okay – stockmarket' so I taught myself about the stock market. And was just like 'I've been learning about this and would love for you to talk to me more about it.' This not only shows that you are aware of their interests but that you look up to them, and you want them to mentor you, and it puts less pressure on them about the money component even though that's what you're thinking about.

The participants of my study shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds. This allowed them to gravitate to and adjust to the sugaring lifestyle. The participants of my study were all upper middle-class, (or higher) white, and had all completed or were in the process of completing their bachelor's degree. Although I did not randomly select my participant pool, there is research to support the pattern that a woman of high socioeconomic status has a disposition that naturally lends itself to attaining cultural capital which is conducive to becoming a sugar baby (Miller, 2011-2012). These women are able to better adjust to the work because of their existing cultural capital.

Sugar dating is often geared towards high-end activities that makes some women more adept at the work than others. Sugar daters and Seeking Arrangements members display their taste for high society through intellectual conversations, fancy dinners and wine, joyrides in Teslas, trips to the tropics, exclusive festivals and so on. Seeking Arrangements frames potential arrangements by describing the 'type' of women best suited for the work:

an attractive, ambitious and goal-oriented individual who has a lot to offer. He or she is generally younger and is looking to meet wealthy, successful and generous people who are willing to pamper and offer financial assistance or gifts in return for their friendship or companionship (Miller, 2011-2012).

As Charlotte has already pointed out, having had a college education and other resources enabled her to successfully engage in high society activities. Regardless of whether she already had the cultural capital or was an adept performer of cultural capital, she adequately persuaded her sugar daddy that she was equipped to engage in high society.

Additionally, Seeking Arrangements has other features that cater to women with high socioeconomic status and cultural capital.

Seeking Arrangement goes as far as offering incentives to college students for joining their site. If a sugar baby joins SeekingArrangement using an .edu email, they will have access to a premium account for free, as opposed to paying upwards of \$1000/month that a premium account would cost normally (O'Donnell)

Seeking Arrangements draws members that have a college education in order to represent sugar dating as an arrangement between individuals with cultural capital. Miller (2011-2012) — who is a sociologist of gender relations and sugar dating — classifies sugar babies as prostitutes.

Despite this claim, he is still aware of the cultural capital which allows the women to become sugar babies. He writes:

High-class prostitutes do not share the same statistics as most streetwalkers and lower end sex workers that post on Craigslist and similar forums, as they are rarely discovered. In contrast to streetwalkers and other prostitutes controlled by a ring of pimps, high-class sex workers are most often not forced into the business as children or teens. Rather, high-class prostitutes are often educated women from intact families that enter the business while in college or graduate school for extra money to supplement a degree they are pursuing. In order to work at the high end of the industry women must be "educated, informed, and articulate"(Miller, 2011-2012).

The interactions that the participants partake in are characterized by engaging with high society men. Therefore, the women should be able to keep up with and engage with the men in such

environments. This is to say, women who have the disposition to participate in these contexts easily adjust and adhere to the expected social role. Through these performances of cultural capital, sugaring is revealed, once again, to be more easily performed by white, high-class women because they have easier access to cultural capital. The women in this participant pool were best suited for this work because they have existing cultural capital that facilitated their adjustment. Their calculated behavior is evidenced by how they catered their attire and emphasized their intellect and education.

Clothing

The women in this study use their clothes as a symbolic way to signal their taste, which has implications about their class, race, gender, and general social groups. Bourdieu (1984) employs the relevant discussion of taste and ‘tastes function’ as a social classifier. He highlights how humans judge one another based on differing taste, such as what music one listens to, what one wears, what food one likes. Aligning or misaligning with another's taste is central to the way humans relate to each other. Therefore, our tastes inform our social dispositions because they are developed by our upbringings, education, and socioeconomic origins (Bourdieu, 1984).

The way the women dress was a very explicit form of adjustment that the women discussed throughout their interviews. They found that their attire was one way to engage in and embody the men's desires. Charlotte described changing her clothes based upon who she was meeting up with, indicating that had the disposition to “read the room” appropriately.

I'll look at their profile and figure out who they are and try to tailor my personality and style to that. If im meeting with someone who is a bit more wealthy but like a city slicker I might wear like really sexy jeans and a low cut shirt and high heels, but If I am going to the city on a date like I'm wearing a skin tight black dress with like boots and my really nice jacket and lash extensions, so it really depends, it's just reading the room.

In doing so, Charlotte simultaneously considered what the male fantasy expected of her and understanding the difference in taste that exists across class groups.

Luna explains her mental process for buying clothes to wear on dates,

Like my wardrobe is completely different when I do these things, like completely different. I would go out and buy so much clothes - literally shit that I would look at and think would the guys like it? Would it look hot to them? Would this be good, is it sexy? Is it trendy? And I would just buy this random shit, and I wouldn't wear half of it because I'm like I don't like it, this doesn't look good on me... But it's so funny because if these guys saw how I dress in my normal life it's just like baggy clothes. There's this guy, he even said, like I met him without my fake nails or even any nailpolish and he was like 'babe, you need to get your nails done' and I was like 'what do you mean?' he was like 'I know, do your own thing, but like just do it, it'll just make you feel better.' It's very old school and sexist - like girls should have their nails done. It was just interesting because at first I was like 'ugh' but like I get what he means.... I would go to her (her nail tech), change it up, even though that's not a part of who I am. You know, it would ruin my nails, but I still did it, I did it for this client - for him.

Their ability to “read the room” required a certain attention to cultural norms and expectations.

Further, it became apparent during the interview that Luna actually disliked the clothing she was wearing on these dates and was playing into the cultural class preferences of her sugar daddy.

Other women discussed doing this by expressing interest in certain music and showing the men videos that they thought would be appealing. For Charlotte and Luna, the clothing they chose to wear on the sugar dates is not what they would naturally choose to wear; they use clothes as a way to relate to the men and imply a cultural thread that fits into the mold of these men's cultural preferences. In doing so they are exploiting “objectified” cultural capital.⁴

Ariana noted a moment in which she failed to embody objectified cultural capital. This resulted in her sugar daddy breaking off the arrangement.

I tended to dress more provocatively then I would typically in life, but I also felt like I didn't have the wardrobe to be a sugar baby, that was a thought I absolutely had. Like I own blundstones, (a chunky worker boot) like I need cute heels...and it made me feel

⁴ Objectified cultural capital refers specifically to social status and cultural competence that is tied to having and using specific objects, like wearing a Gucci handbag.

like I was failing at doing this thing I was trying to do... or that I didn't quite have the resources yet to embody the personality that I was trying to embody.

Ariana, later noted that she wasn't "classy enough" for this man, and although this rejection did not bother her, she still was attuned to her failed performance of objectified cultural capital.

In order to adjust to sugar dating, the women have to learn and align with these men's culture to be seen as attractive and legitimate in occupying the social role of a high class person. To do this, they must have a base level of cultural capital that allows them to be attuned to the cultural standards and preferences of these men.

Intellectual and Educated

Another way the women adjusted to the sugaring lifestyle was by shifting their persona to emphasize their education and intellectual ambitions. Many of the women found the men had a particular interest in this. The women worked hard to present themselves as ambitious students.

Hazel explains,

My profile was a very studious educated college girl, who is also kinky. I was literally aiming for the rich guys who wanted to like mentor you fake mentor you. That's what it's all about. Cause it's like when you, when you make, when it gives somebody a false sense of superiority, when you're actually the one in control, that's when you actually start to make money, um, like making somebody feel like they're taking care of you because a lot of people just want to feel like they're taking care of you when they have that much income. They want to take care of other people or they want to feel like they're doing a service to others to take advantage of that is kind of empowering. Um, so that was the main thing I would focus on just like I am smart, but I need your help.

She strategically shifted her character in order to produce a certain feeling within her sugar daddy. She wanted him to have a false sense of superiority, but she also wanted to present herself as highly educated and ambitious.

Camila also noted that her sugar daddy had a particular interest in her role as a student and she emphasized this trait by bringing it up often in conversation and engaging with him intellectually.

He was really into the fact that I was in school so just talking about school and how I was studying really hard really just made snap. He just really liked that so obviously I would tell him I was way more passionate about my schooling and that I loved it so much because he was so interested in it. I would just talk about it more... I think that's why he was drawn in by the fact that I was in college, he was like 'I can have a somewhat intellectual conversation with this girl, she has a level of emotional intelligence that maybe could help me cope with the situation.'... He really wanted to know what I wanted to do with my life and all this shit so when I was talking about me I was honest I was like 'this is what I do in school, this is what I want to do when I get out of school, this is what I am passionate about, I am into all these different things.'

Camila intentionally emphasized her skills and intellect in order to be perceived as someone who was college educated and intellectual. She believed her sugar daddy was particularly interested in her education because it signalled her social status and her cultural competence. Moreover, she had the background and ability to successfully emphasize and utilize the skills and knowledge she acquired from her education. The cultural capital she obtained from school was a resource in maintaining an arrangement with her sugar daddy because he recognized her capabilities based off of her institutionally recognized degree. The women often adjusted to sugaring by emphasising their intelligence and education to the men to appeal to the sugar daddies interests.

Conclusion

The women fulfilled the sugar baby role by tweaking and shifting their persona to best align with their sugar daddies preferences. To become a sugar baby, they had to be a good investment, be exciting, dress well, be educated and intellectual. In order to show that they were a good investment and that they were exciting, the women had to emphasize a white, high-class performance of femininity. Furthermore, they had to wear the right things, and be intellectual and

educated. In order to do so they had to use their cultural capital. The women in this study often relied on their cultural competence and social status to cater to the man's preferences. Having a higher level of cultural capital enabled a more seamless and successful adjustment to the work of sugar babying. Additionally, it is evident that the women gravitated towards the work not simply for the income but for the experiences and access to social mobility. Therefore, they simultaneously needed cultural capital to thrive in this social role and desired the acquisition of additional cultural capital.

2

The Commodification of Intimacy & The Role of Boundaries

“It’s funny because I have had those discussions [setting boundaries before meeting], maybe I wasn’t firm enough, but I don’t have to be like ‘no!’... Well actually those boundaries have been broken...this girl who I work with would ask me to go to these events and what is expected physically is never clear... which is so frustrating like if it was just outlined like how much for each thing. And I get annoyed, even Daniel [one of her sugar daddies] comes over to these parties and he never outlines it either, like how much is each? But slowly the prices would be made. I don’t know, I think it’s something that I need to work on, like this one time I was [emotionally] hurt a lot, and this was the first time I ever had sex with a client was when he actually invited me to dinner and I was being very happy and polite, and we went to a hotel room and he was like ‘\$300 for everything that is not sex and \$500 for sex,’ and I remember in that moment feeling like I had no choice like I had this whole dinner I just had to commute [across the city], like I did all this shit, getting ready and \$300? I was not expecting that I was expecting much more and like that’s it? I don’t want to leave tonight with just \$300. That is definitely not what I want to be worth for that like at all.” (Luna)

“And I personally enjoyed it because it’s very structure and boundary oriented and there’s no surprises, and we were in a public place.... and that like the most typical instance I would say, I never ever felt pressure (to have sex) because I never would go home with them within the first few dates.” (Charlotte)

Luna’s and Charlotte’s interviews revealed a stark contrast in their approaches to setting boundaries within their sugar arrangements. Luna was hesitant to set boundaries, and disappointed because she did not experience the results she had wanted after she left the terms of her arrangement unsettled. Charlotte, alternatively, found sugaring to be easy to navigate because she formed boundaries that allowed for no surprises. She made clear that she would not go home with her sugar daddies so that sex was off the table.

In general, the women in this study sugared in two different ways: one set of women, who I will refer to as the “Professionals,” set narrower and stricter boundaries on money, sex, time, emotions etc, and remained emotionally unattached to their sugar daddies. The second set

of women, who I will refer to as the “Girlfriends,” had fewer and looser boundaries and had emotional stakes baked into their arrangements. The two main approaches to sugaring in this participant pool revealed the women’s vastly different experiences of the commodification of intimacy.

The different strategies the women have reflect cultural tensions over the meaning of work, the self, and intimacy. Intimate relations have long been commodified and are being commodified at ever-increasing rates. For example, Hochschild (2004) highlights the commodification of migrant women's parental care through nannying. Nannying necessitates a global care chain because other individuals must then provide the care for the nanny’s distant family. Another example comes from Claassen (2011) who elucidates the expectation that nurses be able to provide emotional labor that may be at odds with market values. As these new terrains of work life proliferate, care workers face uncharted territories.

Interpretations of love as oppositional to money are bound up with traditional ideologies that frame the world in distinct binaries. For example, nature vs. culture, authentic vs. impersonal, private vs. public, emotional vs. rational. The industry of intimate relations is situated within grander societal practices and morals that expect a distinct separation between intimate life and work life. At the heart of debates around the separation of intimate and work life are questions regarding where these boundaries lie, and why they are defined as such. Did they even exist in the first place? Because of these societal practices and morals, sugar babies are up against traditional models of work that color their work as “deviant” in the eyes of individuals, greater society, and the law. As a result, there is little precedent for sugaring practices. This leaves the women to draw on what they already know and have already seen to

form their arrangements. These women navigate unpaved paths that are often at odds with an ethic that condemns the market exchange of love and romance.

Throughout the interviews, the women kept returning to the process of setting boundaries. Sugaring is a job that takes on different forms at any given time and for which there is no clear set of predetermined boundaries, norms, or rules; therefore, the women came up against new circumstances and had to react on the fly. In the interviews, they discussed both the process by which they negotiated their boundaries and their terms for the arrangements. Boundaries arose by setting rules and norms in their arrangements and engaging in negotiation or discussion regarding preferences. The boundaries that the women set ranged from sexual intimacy, money/compensation, emotional intimacy, time, and more. These boundaries did not always explicitly include emotional intimacy— for example, a boundary might include pay-per-play rules or contact constraints— but often had the effect of putting constraints on emotional intimacy regardless. Whether the women were explicitly or implicitly setting boundaries, the process of maneuvering, negotiations and setting expectations played a prominent role in all their sugar relationships.

As the women draw boundaries regarding a plethora of topics, the choice to engage in emotional intimacy and the choice to create – or to not create – strict boundaries implied two things. First, the presence of emotional intimacy suggested a mingling of the private and public. Inserting emotional intimacy into what they considered “work,” blurred the line between intimacy and conventional market-based interactions (such as employer/employee). Second, maintaining a relationship that generally had few explicit boundaries ended up resembling another type of social relations: traditional romantic relationships. Because highly structured and boundary oriented interactions often demarcate work and professionalism, low-boundary sugar

dating could not resemble this construct. While the women negotiated the terms and boundaries of their arrangements, they always did so in relation to the dominant ideologies which separate work and intimate life.

This chapter focuses on emotional intimacy as the primary form of intimacy that is being commodified within the sugaring context.⁵ The definition and defense of relationship boundaries is pivotal for sugar babies as they navigate the risky social terrain of commodified intimacy. These relations are new, evolving and contested. Sugar babies are continually interpreting and choosing their arrangements in relation to the dominant ideology that separates the private and public. The Professionals created strict boundaries, and remained emotionally detached from men. In doing so, they adhered to prevailing scripts that support the separation between the private and the public; they relinquished emotional intimacy from their engagements. They formed boundaries that were strict and formulaic to follow standards of the workplace. In contrast, the Girlfriends had fewer or looser boundaries, and allowed for more emotional stakes. As a result, the line between romance/intimacy and public life became blurred. Some of the women in the Girlfriends group did this intentionally, as a way to fulfill the expectation that they play into the male fantasy of the “girlfriend experience.” The other set of women in the Girlfriends grouping did not necessarily intend for that experience.

While this way of classifying the participants’ style of sugaring covered most cases of sugar baby behavior, there were cases and moments that the women departed from these groups. Nonetheless, this typology best represents the patterns that arose amongst the women. It became apparent throughout the interviews that those in the Professionals differed greatly from the

⁵ I chose to address emotional intimacy rather than sexual intimacy because not all the women in this study engaged in sexual acts with their sugar daddies. Additionally, emotional intimacy played a central role in each and every relationship that was important to unpack.

Girlfriends.⁶ As the women experience the commodification of intimacy they employ boundaries as a way to maneuver through changing work relations. The table below is a visual representation of this typology to help make clear how they are organized.

	Strict boundaries	Loose boundaries
High emotional stakes	Allana	The Girlfriends
Low emotional stakes	The Professionals	Zoe

Table 1. Two way typology of the Professionals and the Girlfriends.

The Professionals: Strict Boundaries & Low Emotional Stakes

The four women who approached their work with more boundaries and structure simultaneously remained emotionally distant from the men. These women sought to protect themselves psychologically. In order to produce this result, the women in this group most often set boundaries via, what I name as “outright” communication, which is characterized by direct, professional, and straightforward language. This type of communication often resembled the language used in the traditional workplace.

When the women were producing boundaries through outright communication, they often stated their expectations and standards prior to meeting up with any of the men. By stating their expectations beforehand, they left little room for negotiation and set a strict behavioral precedent. Sometimes the Professionals negotiated boundaries on the spot, but they were

⁶ These study results did not lend themselves to making a claim as to the reason that some women arranged their sugar relationships one way as opposed to the other. Answering this emergent question potentially requires understanding of psychological components to the women's approaches. Additionally, I speculate that this is driven by the variation in the sugar daddies, and the variation in demographic characteristics of both parties and their relative power/wealth which I did not obtain enough data on.

nonetheless firm on their expectations and had a strong sense of what they wanted. Sarah discussed how and when she communicated her sexual boundaries with her clients.

When I first started I had a list of rules that I would send each person. There were things like always using protection. There were certain things I wasn't comfortable with like sexually that I don't want to do. But now I don't really send that anymore when I'm seeing someone because I feel confident enough in myself to make it very clear anyways when I'm with them. I think at the beginning I wasn't very sure how to handle that but now I'm confident enough.

Sarah did not hesitate to express her boundaries either beforehand or as they arose. Even if she did not send her list beforehand, she was, nonetheless, very upfront and unwavering and expressed having the confidence to make her boundaries firm.

When discussing the possibility of negotiation and compromise, Camila also expressed unwavering boundaries.

We both said what we wanted out of the relationship and then because he liked me I think he compromised on what I wanted so it wasn't like I was compromising for what he wanted. I think the only thing I compromised on was the face thing [including her face in nudes that were for him], I didn't really want to do that in the beginning. I don't think there was a lot of compromise on my part when he would tell me what he wanted.

Camila is another clear example of the way the Professionals set boundaries because she expressed being stringent regarding anything from sharing personal information to restricting access to her time. She expressed both her lack of attraction to the men and lack of the desire to become emotionally intimate or personal with them. She maintained high levels of what she sees as "professionalism," in that she preferred to keep the conversation and relationships non-personal. She was not open to discussing intimate feelings or information about herself. For Camila, becoming emotionally intimate was a breach of boundaries because it undermined her standards of work-appropriate behavior. In setting these boundaries, she made a significant distinction between her personal life and work life.

Charlotte also drew very strict boundaries and also remained strictly emotionally detached from the men she saw. She expressed that, “it's not a big deal to me if I have to cut someone off if I feel like they are cute, or cute as in ‘oh, like they are growing on me.’” “Cuteness,” in this context, implies a level of physical and emotional attraction or attachment. Charlotte made very clear her unwillingness to become emotionally involved with the men. She would take any measure necessary to remain emotionally removed. This suggests that she saw sugaring as practice which precluded genuine attraction to her sugar daddy. Hence, she chose to resist the commodification of emotional intimacy.

The Professionals engage in the commodification of sex, time, entertainment but they are not partaking in the commodification of emotional intimacy because they resist emotional stakes. They do not engage in the deeper level of the relationship that one sees in the Girlfriends group. Furthermore, they are transparent about their lack of emotional commitment to the men and do not “perform” emotional intimacy for the sake of appearance. The interviewees in this group found that emotional intimacy was a specifically important boundary for them because they believed that being emotionally vulnerable with the clients violated what they deemed professional. The Professionals experienced fewer blurred boundaries. It was often the case that when the Professionals set their terms or held their ground on a term they had set, they justified this action by reminding the men that ‘this is work.’ This helped them communicate to the men that their terms were non negotiable.

The Professionals resisted the blurring of boundaries between emotional intimacy and work life. They found that emotional stakes created a less regimented and consistent dynamic, which caused both participants to lose sight of conventional interpretations of a “working professional world.” This image of a professional’s working world is based on predetermined

boundaries and protocol. Hence, the implementation of stricter boundaries on their time, sexual relations, emotional intimacy was a way to enforce a separation between work life and intimate life. In the following chapter, it will become clear that this allowed the Professionals to maintain greater control over their arrangements.

The Girlfriends: Loose Boundaries & High Emotional Stakes

Alternatively, six women had looser boundaries and had higher levels of emotional stakes in their arrangements. Emotional stakes for the women appeared in various ways: from feelings of romance, to feelings of admiration and mentorship, to feelings of fatherly attachment. Within the Girlfriends group, there were two smaller subsets. The first subset intentionally set loose boundaries which developed alongside their growing emotional attachments. These women embraced an intermingling of private and public life as a feature of their work to provide their sugar daddies with the illusion of “the girlfriend experience.” In the second subset, emotional stakes caused the decrease in boundaries. These women wanted to resist the mingling of private and public by having stricter boundaries but were unable to maintain them. All of the women in the Girlfriends group were less assertive when they negotiated and often had less firm boundaries. They used “emergent,” and “implicit” styles of communication to form boundaries. Emergent communication was done via spontaneous, naturally occurring dialogue. Implicit boundary making arose through non-verbal or non-outright forms of communication – such as suggesting, avoiding, ignoring, or “brushing off.” The Girlfriends went about forming and pushing for boundaries in different ways, yet all experienced a less definite separation between work life and intimate life than the professionals. In the following section I will outline the ways in which the Girlfriends experienced emotional stakes.

Forms of Emotional Stakes

The first way that women experienced emotional stakes was through becoming romantically invested in their sugar daddy. Allana, among other women, expressed developing romantic feelings in response to the interview question: have you ever felt genuine affection for any of your sugar daddies?

Yeah, I mean I am such a mushy lovebug. Yeah my first daddy was definitely like a good friend to me and I didn't feel romantic affection from him. But my third daddy who was doing structured and communicated DS (dom, sub) stuff with me I had *such* a big crush on. But also I am polyam so I tend to have more than one crush at a time or just feel really strong affection for more than one person at a time.

Allana expressed that she had a crush on her sugar daddy and later admitted finding herself thinking about him often.⁷ As she began to feel genuine interest in this man, she also began experiencing emotional stakes. Allana, as well as other women, experienced emotional stakes in their sugar arrangements through romance.

Emotional stakes also appeared through a mentor-style relationship. Danny mentioned the way she preferred to relate to her sugar daddies:

I'm looking for someone who can in some way be a mentor for me and um, you know, that I am not taking this (sex) out of the equation but that it is something that I'd have to build a certain level of trust with. I was always quite open with them, especially about my life or experiences because I think that some girls go on there and they want to play the young dumb girl. And I think that it always made them more emotionally willing to help me... so I think that was kind of important and adds a level of affection to the relationships. I'd say I had more like intellectual connection and yes some emotion in there but not too much I guess, they would never get jealous of me doing something with somebody else like a guy my age or something like that."

⁷ Allana deviates from this group more generally as she partakes in a more structured relationship than the others in this group. Nonetheless, she serves as a good example of the ways in which many of the women in this group experienced the development of emotional stakes in their arrangements.

Danny was interested in being guided and having intellectual conversations. Later she mentioned taking business advice from her sugar daddy. She also says that she is interested in fostering trust and affection between herself and her sugar daddy. The “mentor” format for the sugar arrangements was common and fostered emotional stakes in the women.

Thirdly, the women developed emotional stakes through a father-daughter format. Luna discussed deep emotional investment in her sugar daddy’s role in her life as father figure. She says,

I definitely could have feelings for him, every other time he would message me I would just ignore it and it didn’t mean anything but now he does it lights me up, I’m like ‘omg, he messaged me,’ I respond right away. It’s so crazy because he has two kids who are like eight and ten, maybe not like nine and eleven and I would feel, like not at this moment, but I do get jealous of his kids, and it’s such a weird thing because this is so ‘daddy issues’ or whatever but like I want him to love me as much as he loves his kids. I’m like I want to be your kid, I want to be one of your kids so you can love me as much, because I know his kids are the people that mean the most to him. I am always thinking about his relationship with his kids, like what do they do? How do they hang out? Because he does not seem like the type to hang out with his kids, he seems like he just does drugs, parties all the time, goes to the strip club, you know like that kind of shit, like always with his friends. But he does tell me ‘we played basketball today, we did this,’ but in my mind before that I was like he is probably the worst dad, he probably never sees his kids, but then I also know he spends every friday with them, so it’s so cute. So yeah that’s my feelings about him...

Luna’s complicated emotions about her sugar daddy’s relationship with his children clearly show that she is invested in him, not as a boyfriend or as a mentor, but as a father to herself. This caused her to emotionally invest in this man far beyond what would be expected for a workplace relationship.

Mila revealed working through her deeper feelings for her sugar daddy in response to the interview question: What was the most challenging part of this work?

I would normally say that it is not challenging but I feel like maybe trying to consider what it reflects emotionally about me because like I said it’s like this dad thing and my

father died when I was a teenager so sometimes I think like is there a dad-shaped hole that I am trying to fill with this person.

Mila grappled with her sugar daddy's potential to fulfil the sentimental role of a father. This father-figure format was common amongst the Girlfriends and lent itself to the formation of emotional stakes.

Wanting More Boundaries

Some of the women in this group were troubled by their difficulty in maintaining some of their boundaries. This was particularly true of boundaries regarding sex, money, or emotional attachment. Luna expressed that although she felt she should remain emotionally removed, she could not resist her feelings for her sugar daddy.

I think a part of me during my time doing this stays a little bit closed because I don't want to share myself fully because I don't want to become emotionally attached. I also remind myself that besides this night this guy does not owe you anything, and he can leave at any time and it could be for any reason like his kids or his wife, he's just not interested, he found another girl. And that's the thing, like he found another girl and that's okay, I have to accept that. With the guys he'd be like 'you miss me? You miss me?' and that time it was like... not that it was a lie, but I was like 'yeah...' and slowly those feelings developed and it was like, who am I kidding? I'm like 'oh my god, I miss you sooo much.'

Luna experiences intense internal conflict about how she should act toward this man in order to protect herself. Ultimately, she finds that she is unable to maintain the emotional boundary she believes she should have. She is too attached to him. She agreed with the Professionals that maintaining boundaries, especially regarding emotional investment, was essential to being a professional working woman. However, was unable to stay emotionally detached and maintain boundaries that would legitimize her arrangements as professional. Becoming emotionally vulnerable to this man also made her more susceptible to being hurt. She found herself torn

between the boundaries she thought she should keep and the desire to allow herself to shift her boundaries as she became emotionally invested in her sugar daddy.

A number of women, like Luna, wished they had set and maintained more boundaries. Many felt that by allowing their boundaries to be weak, especially regarding emotional stakes, that they were participating in a deviant act — that is, in the melding of work and intimate relations. The Professionals group, as discussed above, demarcated their work as having distinct and consistent boundaries, and found that becoming romantically interested in the client inherently meant that they were breaking some rule that qualified their activity as work. Because she found genuine appeal in her relationships, Luna believed that she mixed work and intimate life when she shifted her boundaries due to personal interest. Despite allowing their boundaries to be flexible, Luna and others in this group felt opposed to the blurring of intimate life and work life that occurred as a result. This revealed an internalized sentiment that once they become emotionally involved and weakened their boundaries, they were somehow failing at their job.

Some of the women who wished they had maintained stricter boundaries often approached setting boundaries through an implicit style of communication. These women opted not to discuss their preferred boundaries outright, and usually did so through manipulation, suggestion, and avoidance. These women often avoided verbal communication and would send signals through their actions or lack of actions. Zoe discussed having visited her sugar daddy and spent the whole trip avoiding sex with him. Avoidance was a mechanism for attempting to reveal her boundaries. This implicit approach can be seen in the way in which the women would try to suggest their desires without directly asking for their wants for the relationship, such as on the topics of sex and money. Mila talked about how she would never bring up money with her sugar daddy because she found it uncomfortable. Instead she said she would “complain about a parking

ticket and then he'll send me money, it's nothing agreed upon." Additionally, Ariana mentioned her approach to avoiding sexual intimacy with her sugar daddy.

I was pretty open to people and I realized I was maybe too open at first, and then got a little more selective, like one of the first guys I went on dates with was so nice. We went on a bunch of dates and nothing physical ever happened. He definitely expressed that he wanted something physical to happen, and I was like 'I just can't, I am just not attracted to you'... [Interviewer: Did you tell him that?]. I kind of just brushed it off, I was like 'I am too new to this, I just was sure what I wanted, I'm really sorry, I really enjoy spending time with you.'

Again, this form of sugar baby communication and boundary creation often arose in a more implicit and unspoken style that avoided expressing their wants for the relationship hoping that their acts would imply or signal to the sugar daddies what they had wanted. This style of boundary making often coincided with the women wishing they did not have loose boundaries and emotional stakes.

Embracing the Mingling of Private and Public Spheres

Alternatively, some of the Girlfriends expressed that they had a preference for more spontaneous and unbounded relationships that were open to emotional investment. This group was less resistant to the blurring of intimate relations and work life. The women primarily went about producing boundaries through an emergent approach. This more often entailed letting topics of negotiation arise as the women saw them to be relevant. This approach seemed related to a desire for 'naturalness' in their interactions with their sugar daddies - a quality which is lost when communication becomes professionalized. This emergent communication strategy did not come from a dislike for boundaries or structure, but was intended to allow for more flexible and situational negotiation.

Victoria brought up wanting the terms to arise in a less formal way. “Just communication... the weird question that I always get is ‘what are your limits?’ Like, I don't know. Like let's just hang out and see what's up.” Victoria did not start the interaction with predetermined boundaries but intended to negotiate and discuss her feelings as they arose. Some of the other women used the emergent approach in similar ways that produced a more ‘natural’ spirit to the relationship, one that seemed less transactional and formal. By attempting to negotiate in a more ‘natural’ manner, the women aimed to simulate the illusion of a typical, non-commercial romantic relationship. Because they produced boundaries in a way that mirrors traditional dating, they willingly embraced the blurring between work and intimate life.

The emergent approach is predicated on acknowledging cultural resistance to the commodification of intimate life. There were other moments where the women feared bringing up money – they found it awkward or found that it resulted in resistance from the man. Sometimes he wanted to believe their intimate acts were non-commercial. Luna expressed acting as if ‘oh, money, I don’t care about money, I don’t even see it.’ The women implicitly suggest to the men that their participation in the arrangement is not contingent on money and instead is primarily centered on their interest in the men. Therefore, this approach resembles traditional dating in both the ‘natural’ communication, and the ‘irrelevance’ or secondary importance of money.

Through avoiding discussing money the women intend to play into an illusion that they believe the men want to engage in – the illusion that their interaction is driven by genuine attraction and interest in the man which, to the men, implies there is no need for compensation. Allana expressed having to reorient her relationship.

But different daddies have felt different ways about the money, like my second daddy was for a while thought he had to end our relationship because he was feeling very

guilty on a personal level about the money exchange, he said ‘this has nothing to do with you, I just don’t know if this is good for me’ and I said ‘that I completely understand.’... So we had a conversation about how we could incorporate the money into a SD dynamic more like a reward system so it felt less like him paying for sex and that’s what he was more uncomfortable about and I was like ‘you are not paying for sex, you are paying for all of it, the company and the sex and everything, but more than anything you want to be my benefactor, you want to support me.’

The women shift the dynamic of their relationships in order to avoid the discomfort the men felt about trading sex and intimacy for money. While this adjustment, at times, was intended to satisfy the men's desires, it also had the effect of decreasing the women’s explicit boundaries by engaging them emotionally.

Outliers

There were two participants who did not fit as smoothly into either approach discussed above. Allana had arrangements that often had very few boundaries. However, in cases where she set boundaries, she was firm and highly communicative. Ultimately, she had very few lines that were non-negotiable. She maintained emotional stakes in her relationships and expressed a capacity to have affection for the men. While Allana had fewer boundaries, she did not resemble the Girlfriends because she was not hesitant to communicate boundaries when she wanted to. She says, “I think if you just set these things out you can have areas that are negotiable, like soft limits but it's good to know your hard limits in terms of emotional and physical.” Structurally, her relationships appear similar to the Girlfriends’. On the other hand, when she had to set a boundary, she was very strict with her sugar daddy. She is an outlier and difficult to put squarely into one group or another.

Additionally, Zoe was an outlier to the pattern I describe because she had loose boundaries, yet maintained low emotional stake in her relationships. She did not often express

making choices about the terms of the relationship. Yet, she often mentioned feeling incapable of being emotionally intimate with her sugar daddies. This is possibly related to the fact that she is a lesbian participating in heterosexual arrangements and therefore was not in a position to become romantically or emotionally attracted to the men.

Conclusion

The Professionals had strict boundaries and low emotional stakes in their sugar arrangements. They used this construction as a way to maintain a sense of professionalism that supported division of private and public life. The Girlfriends had loose boundaries and high emotional stakes. As a result, they experienced an intensified blurring of the private and public. Some women in the Girlfriends wished they could resist the blurring of the private and public because they had wanted stricter boundaries, but felt they were unable to maintain them. The other women in the Girlfriends adjusted their boundaries to be looser in order to play along with the men's desire for a 'girlfriend experience.'

These women had to constantly battle their own perceptions of their work, as well as the views of their clients. The only predetermined expectation of these relationships is that the sugar daddy will provide the financial reward and the sugar baby will provide the emotional/sexual one. Are they now employer/employee or contractors? And where is the contract? Sugar babies struggle with determining, defining, communicating and enforcing boundaries because their work is within uncharted territory — unlike other work/jobs where there are recognized and longstanding (if not always observed and understood) rules and protocols for who can say or do what, how and when. For example, while nannies and caretakers are emotional laborers (like sugar babies), they are also explicitly employees with certain rights guaranteed in a court. In the

event of maltreatment or exploitation, these workers would be protected. This is not the case for sugar babies. Hence, setting boundaries and the negotiating boundaries is essential to these women given the cultural conditions of commodified intimacy. The ways these women deployed boundaries directly impacted how they experienced their work. These boundaries must always respond to the societal expectation that work and intimate life remain separate.

3

What is Sugaring? Sex Work? Dating? Something in Between?

“I don't want it to have to feel like work but I do want it to function in the same way as work that I do something and then get paid for it. I do find that there is something appealing and I wish I could do it without feeling like work... and that is when you come up against the fact that, yeah, okay, it is work. So what does that mean? Does work mean it is unpleasant? Does it mean that it is tiring? Does it mean that it is violating?”(Mila)

Mila was not quite sure how to label her arrangement. She was not sure that sugaring always felt like work for her. She often thought her genuine interest in her sugar daddy undermined her inclination to see her sugar arrangement as work. Mila's experience provokes these questions: How can we contextualize the work these women do? How do we compare what they do to other relationship models? Does sugaring fit into commonly understood romantic relationship models? Does sugaring fit within the model of sex work? Is it closer to a traditional heterosexual relationship? Prostitution? Is it like dating? Is it its own thing entirely? How do we make sense of this social phenomenon?

Sugar arrangements are organized differently from one another according to how the women set boundaries, how they engage emotionally, and how they structure their sexual and financial transactions. Therefore, it is an oversimplification to label sugaring as merely a form of dating or work. Regardless of the difficulties in pinpointing the social configuration of sugar dating, it is useful to try to make sense of how it relates to other established social arrangements in order to better understand its role as a commodified form of emotional intimacy.

This chapter will review and apply three different concepts as a touchstone for grappling with the varied experiences among these women: “bounded authenticity” (Bernstein, 2007), heterosexual dating, and “relational packages” (Scull 2019). As defined in the previous chapter,

the Professionals group fit into the framework of Bernstein's (2007) "bounded authenticity" and her understanding of the shifting relationship between work and intimacy. Bounded authenticity emerges from debates around work relations and intimacy which suggest that the demand to satisfy the need for authentic intimacy increasingly via the market. Hence, bounded authenticity is situated within the market sphere because the authenticity is constructed around and defined by its ties to money and exchange. This type of authenticity is "bounded" because it is not autonomous, i.e., it does not exist for its own sake as in romantic relationships.

In contrast to the Professionals, the Girlfriends group is more difficult to capture and will be discussed in relation to each of the three social concepts. Ultimately, the Girlfriends cannot be understood as a form of bounded authenticity or dating. Instead, their relationships operate on a continuum between "more bound by work," and "more bound by traditional romantic connection." The Girlfriends are best understood as partaking in "relational packages," (Scully's 2019, Zelizer 2000) in which there exists a complex and deeply intertwined link between money and intimacy. Therefore, in the case of the Girlfriends, it is not sufficient to look at sugaring as "either or" but as determinately both.

The proximity of the Professionals' and the Girlfriends' arrangements to work and to traditional dating directly impact the SB's subjective and objective power in their arrangements. In the realms of both romance and work, women are and have always been disempowered relative to men. Sugaring, as an emerging nexus of work and intimacy, has caught the women in the fabric of patriarchal relations. Therefore, these women are forced to contend with the dynamics of unequal power and control. For the purposes of this study, I use the term "power" as the ability to realize one's wants when in opposition to another's wants (Weber, 1978). Furthermore, I will define subjective power as being the power the women feel or perceive

themselves to have, and objective power being actual power. In other words, we can think of these two types of power as taking two different perspectives: one from the women subjects, the other from a bird's-eye view, so to speak.

The Professionals function within the framework of bounded authenticity that is contingent on its tie to the economic market. Their use of boundaries and emotional detachment facilitate the 'boundedness' of their arrangements and therefore defines their relationships as real and actual work. As such, Professionals' proximity and resemblance to traditional notions of work facilitates their objective *and* subjective power. Conversely, the Girlfriends have looser boundaries and more emotional stakes. Their behavioral patterns still resemble behavioral patterns that arise in traditional heterosexual dating. While their arrangements are not best defined by relational packages rather than dating their relative proximity (compared to the Professionals) to traditional heterosexual relationships contributes to their the lack of objective and subjective power. They often felt more pushed around and vulnerable to being hurt. Therefore the proximity of the Professionals to traditional work models resulted in more power and control, while the proximity of the Girlfriends to patterns of traditional dating resulted in less power and control.

The Professionals - Bounded Authenticity

Sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein's (2007) work in *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* constructs a complex argument that situates the rise and dominance of "bounded authenticity" within sexual commerce as a result of the juncture of economic, technological, and cultural shifts. Bounded authenticity is defined as "the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection" (Bernstein, 2007). Bernstein (2007) claims that bounded authenticity occupies the space between sexual commerce that is solely for

the sake of the clients sexual release (i.e. prostitution) and the “unbounded, private sphere romantic entanglement.” This framework establishes an interlinked relationship between the private sphere, referring to emotional and sexual intimacy, and the public sphere, referring to commodification and the labor market. Bernstein (2007) ultimately suggests that the market is an appropriate location from which to secure intimacy and does not believe the process of commodification damages intimacy.

Bernstein's (2007) works help make sense of how and why the industry of commercial sex has shifted as a result of grander macro shifts. The rise of bounded authenticity and the selling of authenticity within sex work is a result of the destigmatization of sex work. This comes from broader cultural, economic and technological shifts. Because of the push for gentrification within cities, such as San Francisco, the policing of streetwalking prostitutes increased in order to ‘clean up the streets.’ This push primarily targeted non-white, lower-class women. Hence, sex work was pushed off the street and indoors to private homes. Thus, the sex worker required more resources to maintain this position. This process, in turn, resulted in the whitening of sex work.

From the male perspective, there was a crackdown on ‘johns’ and a simultaneous shift in middle class ethic. Middle-class men were encouraged to push against traditions of asceticism and embrace recreational ‘fun.’ This trend provided moral support for men engaging in commercial sex as long as it was outside of streetwalking prostitution.

Furthermore, shifts within the economy altered societal standards for marriage and the nuclear family. As the occupational sector became more stratified and the cost of living increased, it became extremely difficult to find work and live. These difficulties increased attractiveness for young women to take alternative routes from the traditional path to work and

family. t path to work and family. Instead, young, middle-class people restructured their intimate lives in the effort to delay marriage and childrearing, and even to abandon monogamy.

Additionally, Bernstein (2007) highlights the rise in technology as a central facilitator in the destigmatization of sex work. With the increasing sophistication of technology (electronic media in particular), the consumption of porn became easier and this normalized both porn and sex work. Technology brought an unprecedented visibility to sex work that decreased the associated shame and helped to open up discussion. These specific cultural, economic, and technological shifts increased the commodification of intimacy and the selling of authentic intimacy (Bernstein, 2007).

Bernstein (2007) contrasts high class sex workers who engage in bounded authenticity to with “streetwalkers.” Streetwalkers engage in a routinized, “pay-per-play,” mechanical style of sex work, that is often less authentic and free from a complex, deeper level of acting or emotional labor. High-class sex workers, on the other hand, engage in conversation, participate in a diverse range of sexual activities beyond the standardized penetrative sex and oral sex, commit significant amounts of time to their clients, and are highly attentive to the men’s desires. Bernstein (2007) looks to the women in the group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) as her central example for understanding authenticity within their work. This group is made up of primarily white, middle-class, educated, sex radicals who advocate for the empowerment of sex workers. The women of COYOTE work in personal, private spheres (for example, private homes). Their work is more likely to involve the “emotions and eroticism that had formerly been relegated to the private sphere” (Berstein, 2007). The women labor to create a feeling of genuine and authentic emotional connections with their clients, but one that is clearly bounded.

The place of money exchange in these relations is crucial to their qualifying as bounded authenticity. Money helps locate the emotional boundary within the limits of the paid interaction. Yet, as the interaction occurs, the boundary can be temporarily subordinated in light of the client's desires for such "authentic interpersonal connections." Bernstein (2007) highlights that often the women will call upon their own emotions in order to have and display authenticity. In this understanding of bounded authenticity, the economic market is an avenue through which individuals obtain authentic sexual relations.

Despite the integration of authenticity into the market, bounded authenticity is still contingent on a distinction between private and public, the market and domestic life. This becomes clear in the way that the increased authenticity is bounded by market ties. Those who participate in this relation limit their emotional experience just to the moments of the interaction. Once the paid interaction is over, the women are released from their duty to authenticity. Hence, they strive to avoid the messiness and uncertainty of romantic relationships. The emotional intimacy does not extend into the participants' personal lives. Therefore, this style of sex work resembles traditional work parameters that keep work life and personal life separate (Bernstein, 2007).

In many ways, the Professionals fit into Bernstein's depictions of bounded authenticity. They only deviate slightly in their levels of emotional labor from those of Bernstein's (2007) study. They engaged in bounded arrangements that had varying levels of authenticity present. Every woman in this group spoke of creating a genuine connection with the men. All the sugar babies wanted to make the sugar daddies feel comfortable and give off a warm and friendly energy. Additionally, they all wanted to come off as if they were being "themselves," and in doing so, engaged in emotional labor.

However, Bernstein (2007) identifies an authenticity reaching so deeply into the women's psyches that they begin to have a "single self." In this "single self," there is no distinction between one's "front stage" and "back stage" self (Goffman, 1959). The Professionals do not have a "single self." They expressed putting on a performance to suit the men's interests. This performance did not always align with who they believed themselves to be. That being said, the similarities between the Professionals and COYOTE still justify my use of this category.

Bernstein (2007) states:

in my own research, evidence of middle-class workers' efforts to manufacture authenticity resided in their description of trying to simulate - or even produce- genuine desire, pleasure, and erotic interest for their clients. Whereas in some cases this involved mere "surface acting," it could also involve the emotional and physical labor of manufacturing authentic (if fleeting) libidinal and emotional ties with clients, endowing them with a sense of desirability, esteem, or even love (Bernstein, 2007 pg. 103).

Bernstein (2007) suggests there are varying levels in which COYOTE women performed emotional labor. This ranged from "deep acting" to "surface acting." The Professionals do not do the same level of "deep acting" that refers to the genuine creation of feeling within oneself. Yet, the women in the Professionals still perform some level of emotional labor because they work to produce the appropriate emotion to sustain the sense of authenticity. Sometimes this went beyond "surface acting." The Professionals still engage in genuine connection, and work to create catered interactions that feel authentic and personal for the men.

This group participated more consistently in performative behaviors, or "surface level acting" as a result of their resistance to doing deeper emotional acting. Charlotte talked about how she would act on dates:

treating it like you're a girlfriend, like you are really interested in this person almost in this movie-esque where it's not necessarily real but we see it all the time where you are like 'wow' you just leaning in and taking in every word that they are saying and you're literally just being interested in them in a way that just seems like to them that they completely have your attention.

Charlotte highlighted often feeling as though she was putting on a character that these men wanted. This felt distinct from their “real” self. These relationships were primarily one-directional emotional support. That is, the women offered support to the men rather than seeking help in their own lives. These women avoid the use of their own deeper emotion.

The women in this group, in line with those in Bernstein's study, maintained the “boundedness” of their interactions by limiting the emotional labor to the specific moment of interaction. The arrangement remained “no (emotional) strings attached.” When the men left the interaction, the women swiftly released the men from their thoughts. In her interview, Camila discussed her feelings about her sugar daddy by relaying a conversation she had with a friend who also sugars.

She [her sugar baby friend] was telling me that while she was doing it she had to be in that caring role and now that she is not in that situation it's not like she thinks about him or has an emotional tie to him, it's not like an ex-boyfriend who you thinking about maybe every so often and it's not like a romantic thing but it's like they [her boyfriend] were a big part of your life so you think about them. I feel like I resonate with that. I don't think about them [sugar daddies] on any random day.

Camila mentally removes herself from her arrangement when it is not immediately relevant. While she cared for her sugar daddy, she still contained her relationship to commercialized interactions. Money was (1) agreed upon, (2) consistent, and (3) explicitly discussed; this functioned to bound the relationship to a one-dimensional context. The financial foundation of their interactions made a clear and mutually understood boundary that held the emotional authenticity and the sexual intimacy in place.

Power For The Professionals

Bernstein (2007) found that the women of COYOTE who engaged in bounded authenticity experienced high levels of power in their work. Bernstein (2007) importantly emphasizes that these women have various forms of privilege via their education, race, class, which enable enhanced agency compared to other women doing sex work. Such privileges influence their approach to controlling the power relations in their work. She also notes that macro-level shifts – the shifting standards for women’s role in the family, the increasing normalization of sex work, and other factors – situated them in privileged rather than stigmatized sex work. Such circumstances allowed the women to feel that sex work “was about taking pleasure in sex, unleashing repressed energies, and exploring the dangerous border zones of eroticism” (Bernstein, 2007 pg. 80) This example emphasizes a subjective sense of power the women experienced which was centered on sexual freedom and personal enjoyment. Bernstein (2007) helps explain that the women's experiences of power was linked to their relatively privileged socioeconomic positions.

Similar to the COYOTE women (Bernstein, 2007), the Professionals felt empowered in their arrangements because they closely resembled professional work. The women had objective power because they had the ability to make choices and set boundaries. Therefore, women’s negotiation of boundaries and their ability to successfully maintain those boundaries had a direct impact on their power. Some of the women explicitly discussed feelings of empowerment or confidence while others merely implied that their ability to control the relationships yielded power. Sarah discussed feeling in charge.

I usually feel, even with those, they (sugar daddies) think they are in charge but really I’m the one who’s calling the shots because usually they are just so horny that they will really just accept what I like. And I’ll just say ‘look I don’t have time for more than a couple hours’ or ‘I have to leave by this time’ and they are like ‘ugh okay’ and it’s fine, I’ve already had that established so that I can leave by that time so they know. It’s harder when I haven’t established that beforehand.

Sarah expresses that setting her boundaries beforehand worked as a tool to maintain control. If, for example, the client pushed her to stay longer, she was able to remind him that she had already set the non-negotiable boundaries. Sarah, like other women in this study, showed that emotional remoteness and the implementation of boundaries coincided with objective power.

Similarly, Hazel discussed finding her body and her conduct empowering. These were tools that allowed for her to have control over the relationship.

I recommend that all women identifying people try it because it's very empowering to see how far you can make somebody go with just your body. And then with your mind too, you're using your skills to do that. Yeah. Using so many different skills to do that. And it's really fun because you are being pragmatic. You're being structured, you're being professional, but also giving the illusion of vulnerability.

Hazel highlighted many ways in which she was able to have control within her sugar relationships. She described a plethora of skills she used to “make” them men want her. Extensive knowledge of and command over these skills gave her a sense of subjective power.

Hazel, as well as other women in this group, described the men as “weak,” as if they had no control over their hornyness and were desperate for attention of any kind. This description of physical and sexual power over the men reveals another layer of subjective power. This version of subjective power is one that the women have a better ability to engage with and experience because they already have objective power.

The Professionals’ resistance to emotional attachment bore a greater resemblance to work relations – thus facilitating an increase in their objective power. Their objective power aided and supported other subjective experiences of power. Therefore, their power did not stem from their desirability, but the power that arose as a result of their desirability was premised on objective power.

This group experienced both objective and subjective power; they were able to firmly say ‘no’ to things they did not want to engage in and felt sexually empowered from their desirability. Because these women framed their terms as non-negotiable and had fewer emotional stakes in the arrangement, they experienced higher levels of power. Consequently, this type of arrangement keeps the private and the public separate – the way a traditional work environment might. Part of the reason that this translates to greater power is because gender dynamics within the workplace are shifting. That is, the gap between the perceived competency in men and women is closing (Lamont, 2014). Hence, recreating an employment framework for sugar relationships naturally lends itself to increased power. Increased objective power allowed for feelings of subjective power.

The Girlfriends

For the purposes of unpacking the complicated dynamics of The Girlfriends arrangements, I will specify the various possibilities for their classification. First, I will discuss them in the framework of bounded authenticity, then in the framework of dating. Because neither of these frameworks prove sufficient, I will argue that they best fit within the framework of Zelizers (2000) “relational packages.” Bounded authenticity does not fully acknowledge the free flowing boundaries in these women’s relationships. Nor does it account for the role of emotional stakes in these relationships which do not conform to the norms of work and of bounded authenticity. Furthermore, dating and heterosexual relationships fail to recognize the financial underpinnings of the relationships as a critical component - thus clearing the way for emotional growth and attachment. Instead, “relational packages” places the Girlfriends as somewhere in between dating and work.

Is it an Expansion of Bounded Authenticity?

Bounded authenticity may function as a relevant framework to interpret the patterns that arise within the Girlfriends arrangements. The Girlfriends may be understood as experiencing an intensified intermingling of the private and public, in which it is hard to tell if there is any form of separation between the two. The women in this group are practicing an expanded version of bounded authenticity, as their arrangements become less bounded and take on an amplified version of authenticity in the form of emotional stakes.

Insofar as Bernstein's (2007) framework describes the shifting values within work and the increased authenticity (compared to streetwalker prostitution) the women experience within their relationships, "bounded authenticity," initially appears to be promising. Bernstein (2007) highlights the emergence of new labor market relations that place increasing importance on work as an authentic representation of one's self. Work begins to take up more time and emotional energy; it becomes an expression of one's identity. Therefore, according to this ethic, one must do authentic work. These shifting values suggest that the sugar babies may engage in entrepreneurship that embodies their "true self." As opposed to the Professionals, the Girlfriends engaged with real feelings. They express emotional vulnerability, genuine interest, desire in the men and even share intimate details about themselves. This account suggests that the Girlfriends engage in a version of bounded authenticity which is emotionally heightened compared to the Professionals. In other words, they get closer to expressing a "single self."

Some of the women in this group found that "being themselves" in their arrangements provided benefits that enabled a secured economic relationship. Danny discussed the benefits of emotional investment.

I think that's one of the things is to get them to kind of be emotionally attached to you first so that even though you are not having sex with them, stuff like that, that they still want to take care of you in some way. That's for me how I kind of did it because it wouldn't be comfortable doing something like this [sex] with a guy on there for a good while, so um, yeah I think, at that time you are still standing to get to know each other and have gotten to know each other to a point where you feel more comfortable with it [having sex], but that they also know that it's not something that will necessarily ever be a relationship where that is a big part of it.

Danny suggested that emotional investment fosters a sense of care between herself and her sugar daddy. Because this care was authentic, it was longer and more durable. The man wanted to take care of her and see her succeed. Emotional vulnerability and authentic engagement allowed for an enhanced financial underpinning. In this way, the blurring of public and private spheres did not cause the women to divorce the relationship from the realm of work relations. Instead, blurring private and public domains grounded and secured the financial portion of the relationship.

Although the framework of bounded authenticity seems convincing, it is ultimately insufficient in framing the position that the Girlfriends take up as sugar babies. Some women in the Girlfriends group *wanted* more emotional boundaries. Others explained that their emotional boundaries (or lack thereof) were not primarily determined by financial expectations, as was the case for Danny. In other words, the money was simply not the most important thing for some of the Girlfriends. Because bounded authenticity is premised on work boundaries and the market value of the Girlfriend's emotional investment, this framework does not sufficiently capture their experience.

Is it Traditional Dating?

Alternatively, it is possible to see the Girlfriends' arrangements as traditional romantic dating. This group of women would engage in various activities with the men such as go on

dinner dates, attend events, go to bars, go to sports games, travel etc. This style relationship included sexual activity, dating activities, and did not feature a quid per quo financial arrangement that is often associated with more transactional sex work such as “streetwalking.” Luna describes some of the various dates she had been on:

We would have dinner together on a rooftop bar and so it would kind of be that thing. I’ve been flown out to places, so I was flown out to Florida so we went out on dates in the morning like brunch and then dinner on the yacht like a full weekend kind of thing.

This group expressed passing time with the men in lots of different ways. Some women spoke about just hanging out over facetime, talking or even playing phone games together. Hence, the ways the Girlfriends conducted their time often resembled heterosexual dating. Moreover, their loose boundaries and emotional stakes made the relationships look more like typical heterosexual relationships.

Additionally, there is a significant body of work that compares the transactional qualities of romantic relationships to the transactional qualities of sugaring (Nayar, 2017). Romantic relationships have always included financial transactions and quid pro quos. Sugaring and other forms of sex work have made these financial expectations more explicit. Hence, the financial aspect of the Girlfriends’ arrangements is not sufficient to claim that they don’t resemble dating.

Because their low boundaries and high emotional stakes mirror traditional relationships, these women’s arrangements challenge the traditional assumption that romance and money are completely separate. Danny expressed that, inherent in her relationships with all men, was the presence of objectification. Hence, she was open about her financial expectation as a way to get something in return. This exchange was not a belittlement of the romantic relationship, but an acceptance of its financial realities. She argued, “I am already objectified by men so why not get paid for it.” Danny maintained this sentiment while she simultaneously grew emotionally close

to her sugar daddy. Despite her desire for financial compensation, Danny's feelings were not intrinsically inauthentic.

Some of the Girlfriends mentioned that, as they developed stronger feelings for the men, they began to be less concerned about maintaining the boundaries they had set prior. Ariana explained how she thought of her work as a sugar baby:

I thought of it as fun work, like interesting, exciting, challenging work. I didn't think of it like all of the part time jobs I was also managing at the time, it felt very different than that. It also felt like I wasn't doing it entirely for fun either, I am doing this because it seems like an interesting challenge and it seems like good money. And I think that line definitely got blurred if it was people that I was genuinely enjoying more. Because I would be like 'yeah, I definitely wanna hang out this week for sure. Im happy we can do that.'

Ariana, along with other women in the Girlfriends, found that as they developed feelings for the men and had authentic emotional stakes in the relationship, their sugaring began to more closely resemble prototypes of dating rather than that of work even while there was the presence of "good money." Regardless of the monetary situation, having fewer boundaries and higher emotional stakes consistently caused the arrangements to resemble traditional heterosexual dating.

Although the dating framework is convincing and although it appears that monetary concerns take a back seat as the emotional stakes become elevated, heterosexual dating classification is ultimately not sufficient to encompass the reality of the financial motives for the women. Additionally this model for traditional dating is not necessarily always a normative feature of romantic relationships. The money exchange is a defining feature of the relationships. The explicit arrangement of monetary compensation makes these sugar relationships notably different from traditional heterosexual relationships, where discussion of money take on coded

terms. The women still valued the role of money in their arrangements and were unwilling and uninterested in participating in these relationships if the financial elements were not present.

Relational Packages - Something in between Dating and Work

Framing sugaring as either an expansion of bounded authenticity or traditional dating does not fully capture the experiences of the Girlfriends. Ultimately, they fell somewhere in between. Scull (2019) uses a “relational package” framework to understand the sugar dating relationships as distinct from mere prostitution or traditional dating. Hence the title of her work: “It’s Its Own Thing.” Instead, she frames the arrangements as relational packages, a term coined by the sociologist Zelizer (2000), who refers to the way that intimacy and money are synergistically intertwined in complex ways that do not inherently inhibit or corrupt one another. Such relational packages can help individuals ascribe meaning to their relationships. The Girlfriends exist on a continuum – those who lean towards “work” versus those who lean towards “dating” – but the two cannot be separated from one another in this context. Scull (2019) writes:

through the process of relational work, individuals create unique relational configurations – or what Zelizer (2000) calls “relational packages” – each relational package involves specific, yet continually negotiated, norms regarding intimate and economic aspects of the relationship.

This view suggests that the relationships may lean more heavily in one direction or another, but that authenticity/emotional stakes and their financial motivations will always be relevant. This appears to be the case for the Girlfriends.

Victoria discussed how it was important to her to have non-negotiable financial terms, while she also expressed the role of affection as important to her in her work. She says:

Oh yeah. I'm a very affectionate person. Like I think that's like the misunderstanding is that it's [sugaring] all about like, a troubled man, who has no one and has no one to love him. And then we're [sugar babies] all like, supposed to be all lovey dovey, but it also goes both ways. For it to be natural and meaningful I feel like it [the affection] has to go both ways like them showing affection for you as well.

Victoria highlighted the essential role of affection and care within her work. She continued to suggest that she wanted her experiences to be natural and meaningful, and through this value, she centers authentic and intimate interaction. Later, she mentioned that her financial terms are equally central to her arrangements. She said,

it really pushes my buttons when people try and like under pay or like try to negotiate. Like that's my number one problem. That is so tacky. Like you wouldn't go into a store and try to negotiate first or something.

Here, Victoria revealed that both the intimate and the financial ties are essential to sugaring. The financial ties do not inhibit the authenticity and emotions she has for the men, nor does her affection for the men inhibit her expectation for financial rewards. Therefore, sugaring suggests that the labor market and the private sphere cannot be separated in this case and have, in many ways, become indistinguishable.

Zelizer (2000) cites these examples: a parent giving a child money to help buy a house, the gift of an engagement ring to an intended spouse, or payment for taking in foster children.⁸ These are clear examples, in addition to the Girlfriends, which suggest the intertwining of financial reward and emotional intimacy. Mila further highlights the coexistence of emotional connection and financial ties. She says,

I feel like it makes me want to go out of my way more to connect with him, and the fact that we actually have a connection and because there is also a financial component it

⁸ Although it seems that these examples are less explicitly financial or that they are not *premised* on financial exchange in the same way that sugar arrangements are, this observation likely comes from the ethical distaste for conflating intimacy and money. Take parenthood, for example. Regardless of class, financial planning is a huge part of child rearing. Parents must plan for hospital fees, school, time off of work, extra food, clothes, etc. In this case, providing financial resources is integral to adequately caring for the child.

keeps me tied into that because I have a feeling that it will be more financially beneficial to me if we have more positive interactions in the relationship.

To Mila, the market and the private sphere are clearly not antithetical or mutually exclusive. In fact, to her, the two actually support one another. This is important because in many other instances, they appear to be at odds. The Girlfriends create unique relational packages that differ from one another, but universally involve a motivation for authentic connection and for financial exchange.

Power for The Girlfriends

Additionally, an examination of the role of agency and choice is essential to understanding their arrangements. The Girlfriends did not always choose to have low boundaries and high emotional stakes. Some attempted to conduct their arrangements with more boundaries, but found they were difficult or unsustainable. Furthermore, the women whose arrangements fell closer in line with dating traditions found they were more apt to be pushed around. The increased authenticity in the Girlfriends' arrangements did not make their experience more fulfilling or enjoyable. In fact, the majority of the Girlfriends found that being more authentic made them more vulnerable to being hurt. Because the presence of authentic feelings brought these relationships closer to heterosexual dating relationships, the women experienced consequences that mirror those in heterosexual dating.

The women's lack of power was apparent in a number of ways. Some abandoned their boundaries in order to gain approval, some because they feared the men's physical and financial power over them, and others felt emotionally vulnerable and feared rejection. Victoria described her expectations unravelling because of the power the men had over her sense of self worth. She

often spoke of the demeaning ways that men referred to her body. They objectified her and based their willingness to pay on how she measured up to their standards of beauty.

I'm not fully open, like with my physical appearance until someone meets me. Cause I think it's pretty screwed up to like judge me based on pictures. Yeah. And that's definitely gotten to my head. The things that people will say to you like 'oh, well, like you don't deserve this (the \$400 she requested from a sugar daddy)' or like this one guy was like 'you have a little junk in the trunk'... or something like that.

This type of commentary affected her self confidence. She derived a lot of validation from the men's attention. She found it degrading to be physically objectified. Hence, her experience of commodification was disempowering.

Contrary to the men, Victoria believed that her "monetary value" should be based on quality time and her attentiveness, not her body. "I consider myself a good person and nice person to spend time with, I am attentive and stuff, I actually put effort into relationships and I want that certain standard." Later she noted that when it came to boundaries, she was very lenient and preferred to not set many predetermined rules.

I would just let them come over to my apartment which is pretty suspicious and even my therapist was like 'you are pretty lucky you have never been raped' and I was like 'you know what therapist, you are right because I am pretty risky.'

Victoria let her clients come to her private home and described 'not being very picky' and being very 'open' to seeing whomever. She understood that this lack of boundary was very risky. Nonetheless, she compromised her potential safety for work that she felt was degrading and emotionally painful. She wanted approval from the men. In order to gain such approval, she ceded power over matters she had previously not wished to negotiate. The men called the shots—they had the ability to make practical decisions. They also determined how she saw herself. In Victoria's case, the men had the power and resources sufficient to challenge her sense of self worth. Rather than disengage from sugar babying or from these specific sugar daddies, Victoria

gave up safety boundaries, her willingness to negotiate a price, and her willingness to send photos. The men took advantage of her and pushed back against her boundaries because they had psychological and financial power over her. She met with men she did not respect, and sent photos of her body she did not want to send in order to feel worthy and beautiful. The lack of boundaries and the emotional validation Victoria sought through her arrangements placed Victoria in a vulnerable position where she often felt hurt and disempowered.

Additionally, the women experienced a power imbalance because their relationships closely resembled dating. Ellen Lamont (2014) conducted a study that postulated the ways in which traditional scripts of heterosexual courtship persist. According to her, heterosexual courtship is founded on the man's dictation of the interaction and the women passively following along. Men make the choices about where they go, what they do, and the terms of the relationship. Men are the economic providers. Women usually are unable to openly articulate their desires. Additionally, this study found that when women transgressed the prototypical framework, they experienced negative reactions. When they were seen as "too forward," they were punished with sanctions and rejection. Women relied on "reactive behavior, such as accepting physical contact and being walked to the door" (Lamont, 2014 pg.191). These scripts circumscribed patriarchy and male domination (Lamont, 2014). The women in my study whose sugar relationships fell in line with "sugar dating" scripts (Scull, 2019), had inequitable arrangements that were wrapped up in traditional heterosexual courtship.

Zoe highlighted the consequences of one of her sugar relationships that had loose boundaries and higher emotional stakes. This arrangement exhibited the patterns of traditional heterosexual courtship. Her sugar daddy saw her boundaries as less legitimate because they had first initiated their relationship on non-transactional terms.

The military guy he kind of felt like he could get away with a little bit more because we already knew each other [before the 'sugar' relationship] and we had already done some of this stuff [sex and going on dates] and it wasn't the same kind of relationship then so then that was hard to set up those boundaries and ask for those things cause he felt like he could get away with a little more.

Zoe's sugar daddy assumed that their romantic history legitimized pushing her boundaries. This same phenomenon arose for other women whose approach to sugaring aligned closely to patterns that occur in dating relationships. They often experienced resistance to their boundaries. Flexible boundaries and emotional stakes were often misconstrued by the sugar daddies as indicating that their relationship was unbounded. This resulted in a delegitimization of any boundaries and caused the women to experience other forms of disempowerment.

In other words, the women in the Girlfriends whose arrangements entailed emotional stakes and looser boundaries often did not organize their arrangements this way intentionally. They became this way as a result of the influence and pressure from their sugar daddies. The vulnerability associated with emotional stakes caused the arrangements to resemble traditional dating. Because traditional dating is inherently patriarchal, the men took control. Ariana notes that:

Now a couple years out of it, I am feeling the after effects, I am struggling way more now with boundaries. Now things come up all the time that are classic PTSD, I am constantly flinching away from my partner and that feels horrible, and I have to assume that it's from when I was sugaring. But at the time I didn't feel scared, I didn't feel like it was having this negative impact on my life. I was just feeling chaotic and hot, like I could make money off men.... When I look back I think about how I let so many people mistreat me. *They* mistreated me...but I let them do it, and I think that is something that I am really struggling with.

She found that the ways the men controlled her sugar arrangements were destructive and harmful to her later in life. Because the women have a sense that they need to please the sugar daddies, they find themselves at a power disadvantage. Therefore, they are apt to be exploited or degraded. This suggests that the involvement of emotional stakes was not often advantageous for

the women, as it had been for many of the women in Bernstein's (2007) work. Such authenticity did not bring power, meaning, and self-fulfillment to this group of women. Often they wished they had had more boundaries and felt they did not have the control to structure the relationships. While they may have acted authentically or had authentic emotions towards the men, it was not always in controlled and ideal ways.

The lack of control that was so prevalent in the Girlfriends must be situated in the unequal basis of patriarchal, market-based, relationships. Danny comments on the inherent power imbalances of sugaring:

I find stress in it [sugaring], that gets less once you get to know them, but it is always a bit stressful. I think that's largely because you are putting yourself into a situation where, again, you are letting someone have a certain amount of power over you. That's never really comfortable. They have money, and that's something you are looking for. And that dynamic of an older man and a young girl, there is already this feeling of, you know, maybe a lot of it comes from how it is viewed in society, but you feel like you are doing something wrong.

Once in this type of relationship, a sugar baby is at a power disadvantage in the following ways:

1. the age/experience differential
2. the reliance on the SD for money or rewards
3. the cultural expectations about the obligations and advantages of pleasing the man.

It is essential to recognize that this is not a negotiation and exchange between individuals with approximately equal positions of strength and independence. Within conventional dating relationships, men tend to dominate women and ignore what women ask for. Hence, women who approached their work in the mode of intimate relationships were subject to the same male domination which characterizes heterosexual romantic relationships.

The women in the Girlfriends often expressed a fear of the inherent power imbalances that were entwined with heterosexual relations, especially ones outside of the market. This is an objective form of disempowerment associated with these gendered arrangements. This fear was

more prevalent for the Girlfriends than the Professionals. This greater and more constant sense of fear made the women feel less empowered or entitled to make firm decisions. In contrast to the Professionals' approach, the Girlfriends' openness to emotional stakes and looser boundaries signalled to the men that they were engaging in something other than a market exchange and closer to dating. The internalized fear of male domination influenced the women to fear establishing stricter boundaries. The men often took advantage of this dynamic to further their dominant position in the SB/SD relationship. This resulted in objectively less SB control and power in the decision-making.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three, I argued that the Professionals fit within Bernstein's (2007) framework of bounded authenticity. This functionally ties their arrangements more closely to traditional work. They had more boundaries and fewer emotional stakes. Therefore, they closely resembled patterns within work that keep elements of the private and public separate. The mimicking of work enabled an increased objective and subjective power within their arrangements. In contrast, the Girlfriends fit within a relational packages framework. This framework intermingles expectations that originate in both public and private spheres. Their proximity to traditional heterosexual relationships led to a decrease in both objective and subjective power within their relationships.

Final Remarks

This study investigated the proliferating practice of sugar dating as it is situated within changing work and gender relations within the sphere of intimacy. Furthermore, this study examines sugaring as a potential tool and strategy for women's empowerment. Through the completion of twelve interviews with women who have practiced sugaring it became apparent that sugaring has the capacity to be empowering or disempowering, depending on the women's approach to structuring boundaries and participating emotionally.

The women in this study revealed the various ways they adjusted their behavior in order to successfully accomplish the role of the sugar baby. They fell in line with the men's various desires, including being worth investing in and being exciting. Both of these ideals are based on narrow expectations of white, high-class femininity. Additionally, they adjusted to sugaring by dressing to the taste of their sugar daddies and developing an image that marked them as intellectual and educated. Performing high-class status through their clothing and their display of education required the deployment of cultural capital. Moreover, they gravitated to sugaring not only for the money but for the cultural capital they were able to access through opportunities available to men of a higher class and status. Therefore, the women's relationships to cultural capital was twofold: On the one hand, they were able to adjust to sugaring because of existing cultural capital. On the other, their gravitation to sugaring was often because they wanted to gain more.

Furthermore, this study developed a typology that separated the women into two groups: the Professionals and the Girlfriends. The Professionals had strict boundaries and low emotional stakes in their arrangements, while the Girlfriends had loose boundaries and high levels of emotional stakes in their arrangements. These women navigated their sugaring practices in

relation to dominant scripts that morally separate the public from the private and therefore condemn the commodification of intimacy. The women in the Professionals closely adhered to prevailing scripts that separate the public and private. Therefore, they resist the commodification of emotional intimacy and form boundaries that are strict and formulaic to follow standards of the workplace. Conversely, the Girlfriends experienced a more intensified blurring of private and public relations due to their decreased boundaries and increased emotional stakes. Some women in this group were pushed into this position, while other women intentionally chose to do this as a way of selling the “girlfriend experience” to the sugar daddy.

Additionally, this study put the sugar babies within the context of other relational frameworks. The Professionals fit within the framework of bounded authenticity. This included the women’s authentic engagement with their clients, whether performative or genuine. However, their arrangements remained bounded because their interactions were tied to and limited by the labor market. Using the framework of bounded authenticity reveals that the Professionals partook in sugar arrangements that aligned with traditional work conditions and norms. As a result, the Professionals experienced more power. The Girlfriends more closely resembled frameworks of relational packages that intertwine the financial and emotional motivations of their arrangements. While their relationships were not directly in line with the framework of traditional dating (because they were still deeply motivated by the financial ties), the structure of their relationships more closely resembled patterns of dating because of their decreased boundaries and high emotional stakes. This, in turn, resulted in a lack of power.

This study revealed that the Professionals and Girlfriends had deeply different experiences in sugaring. Sugar babying engaged in the dynamics of traditional labor markets as well as the dynamics of heterosexual romantic relationships. As a result, sugaring is a unique

window into gender relations. Sugaring is an avenue through which relatively privileged women use their social status to acquire capital, both economic and cultural. Nonetheless, sugaring comes with stigmatization, and is steeped with emotional risk. Ultimately, the Girlfriends' experience illustrates that heterosexual romantic relationships are still fraught with gender inequity which causes women to experience disempowerment. It is potentially a stronger locus of disempowerment the labor market is.

The sugar babies in this study revealed both disturbing realities of heterosexual relationships and real and powerful joy. Women have long been fighting for ways to engage with their sexuality and intimate relations in ways that are seen as legitimate and that feel empowering. Moreover, they have long been looking to reach financial independence and security through the labor market. This study touched on some of the sad realities of gender domination that function to repress and subjugate women. At some moments during this project, I listened to women express feeling okay or good about their work, while at other moments, they expressed feelings of complete disgust. Nonetheless, this study revealed the difficult, sometimes painful circumstances that these women must contend with in order to work, love, and live.

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