

Sugar, yes please

An investigative look into how one UW student used sugar daddies to pay off their debt

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Editor's note: The name of the participants have been changed to respect anonymity.

You'll never remember where you two went for dinner. To be honest, you'll probably never have to. Tonight, the restaurant was chic, sophisticated, and lavish — much more than you could afford on your own. The only reason you fit in was your Armani suit, which he bought for you as a gift. You had seen each other a few times, but he wasn't the only one you had met. Since signing up on Seeking Arrangements at the beginning of the summer, there had been a few. Yet this time was different than the last. No sex. He just wanted dinner and then maybe a walk around downtown. He wanted companionship.

You are Adam, a member of the queer-youth community at UW, and he is your sugar daddy.

This summer's gonna earn like a motherker**

Adam joined Seeking Arrangements for many reasons.

"I guess it was a combination of, it's sort of accessible, and I needed money, and I like nice things," he said

in an interview with *Imprint*.

Seeking Arrangements is a dating site that enables young men and women to connect with wealthier and older professionals, who are colloquially called a "sugar daddy" or a "sugar momma." The "sugar baby" will often receive compensation for companionship and sex. Like other dating sites, users can set up profiles and add photos at their own discretion.

Previously, Adam had used other dating sites such as Grindr and What'syourprice. In fact, he even worked as an escort before. But Adam found that meeting with sugar daddies significantly varied from his experience in sex work. Escorting, in Adam's experience, usually involved taking men or women to events, and getting paid to engage in sexual activity. His contact information would be shared with clients through word of mouth or by private escorting companies that acted as "pimps." It was a business arrangement. However, on Seeking Arrangements, he was getting paid for his company.

"A lot of people are doing these things because they want companionship in life," Adam explained. "[They're] earning so much money [and] having no one to really spend it on. Lifestyles that are just so busy

they can't really keep up with whatever society says is a proper relationship. They really like to just unload their problems and apparently buying you things helps."

One of Adam's sugar daddies worked in L.A. He would fly to Toronto for business trips and take Adam on dates. Sometimes, they would go to the mall. Sometimes, they would go to dinner. Sometimes, the night would end with sex. Regardless of what they did, Adam would receive compensation.

"A lot of people will buy you gifts," he said. "It is not as much of an allowance as the site sort of sells, or whatever they are trying to promote. It is more gifts and money for things. So like to help me pay for my tuition and stuff like that. They would just send me money."

Adam estimates that he received approximately \$20,000 in gifts over the six months he used the website. He received several pairs of Gucci shoes and even an Armani suit. For Adam, the expensive clothing was his favorite thing to receive. Other compensation came in the form of dinner and textbooks.

Adam explained that he didn't like meeting up with local sugar daddies. "They only want sex and they're very scary. Also a lot of them are mar-

ried," said Adam. "It is really weird. In general ... they are really creepy." Thus, after the six months ended and he returned to UW for school, he stopped using the site.

Never gonna leave your bed

With the opportunity to make significant money, is it possible to become too dependent on a sugar daddy or sugar momma?

Today's youth are growing up in a "hook-up" culture. Apps like Tinder and Grindr potentially allow users to meet for sex on a whim. Sometimes, this can be very risky. However, Adam expressed that he never felt he was in significant danger while using Seeking Arrangements.

"Meeting strangers is not as intimidating as it probably sounds to different generations. You sort of have an intuition when you talk to people, to see if they are actually sort of crazy-murderers or someone who actually just needs a companion in life, and this is just one of the ways they are looking for it," he said.

Seeking Arrangements representative Brook Urick explained in an email to *Imprint* that the website attempts to make young users feel more comfortable about meeting their sugar parents.

"Before having your profile live, all

content and pictures are approved in house to make sure they are not spam or using the site inappropriately," she said. "We also have a third party background check, so members have the option of submitting their social insurance numbers and verifying they are who they say they are and they're not an offender. Internally, members can also report other members and those are all taken seriously."

However, students under financial constraints might become consumed by the prospect of financial benefits provided by their sugar daddy or sugar momma benefactor. If a student is entering this industry and hoping to be both financially and emotionally lucrative, having the proper mindset is imperative. Adam believes that sites like Seeking Arrangements are a more conventional option compared to typical sex work because it is easier to build relationships with the users; but it could also be easy to become attached.

"You have to keep in mind and understand where you are mentally," Adam explained. "Because we have always compartmentalized relationships that we have in our lives as either romantic or non-romantic, and we never allow relationships to be what they truly are which is an amalgamate of sexual attraction,

aesthetic attraction, romantic attraction, and emotional attraction ... Those all sort of coalesce into an enigmatic relationship that is what I think relationships are supposed to be in general."

The age gap between sugar parents and sugar babies in this case presents a point of concern. With both parties at different points in their lives, understanding the emotional versus the aesthetic attraction could be easy to misinterpret, according to Adam. "That sort of dichotomy, it creates anxiety in people because they don't understand what is going on. They only really understand what they have been told and what they have been told to understand and condition."

In particular, Adam pondered the inattention queer-youth have faced and how that might impact their dependency on the sugar daddies and sugar mommas.

"If you're familiar with queer-youth culture, the emotional neglect that many youth receive in terms of relationships is everywhere. It can be very hard and, at times, you do see older people as more respectable figures and people who you would look up to," Adam said. "This is not a romantic relationship, or you don't think it is a romantic relationship ... but you don't have any other options

in your closed-off binary mind. So you [think it] must be a romantic relationship and then infatuations and obsessions and stuff like that can occur quite quickly."

Underexposed

According to Urick, the average allowance that a student on the website receives is \$2,600. However, that doesn't come easy. For some students, battling stigmas can be an emotionally taxing experience, and can hinder their ability to get a sugar parent. According to Adam, privilege is quintessentially tied to the accessibility of getting a sugar daddy or sugar momma.

"A lot of things come down to aesthetic attraction. That is usually what, unfortunately, will weed people out, or deter people from accessing this sort of thing ... It is a privilege for people who are seen as conventionally attractive; Eurocentric beauty ideals that we have all had ingrained into us through media and condition. Those are usually the people who are successful on sites like this."

Of the Canadian students who use the site, 62 per cent are Caucasian, nine per cent are Black, eight per cent are Asian, two per cent are Hispanic/Latin, two per cent are Indian, two per

cent are Middle Eastern, and 15 per cent are deemed as "other."

Ninety per cent of young users are female, while only 10 per cent are male. When asked how he thought the experience meeting sugar daddies would differ for young men compared to young women, Adam quickly described the significant difference in prejudice they would experience. Finance, safety, dependency — for young women it is much riskier. The emotional risks and stigmas are significantly less taxing for younger males. Adam described how much more volatile the financial income in sex work can be for young women.

"There are women who have to do sexual acts just to be able to get fast food, so very little money in return, versus women who can get hundreds of thousands of dollars ... That's sort of the reality there; they face much more extremes in terms of financial income and financial stability."

Adam also indicated that he noticed a difference between sugar daddies and sugar mommas on an emotional level.

"The difference between men in our society and women in our society is that females are brought up with a much more emotional perspective on everything they do," he said. "So

emotions are much more heavily based and, a lot of the time, they are unfortunately seen as a weakness for some reason. But that stems from the hyper-masculine ideologies that males have imposed. So males are much more inhibited or hesitant to open up emotionally, and you can see it when you meet with them as opposed to women."

Ultimately, he explained that the women he has met in sex work are often very assertive and have a good understanding of who they are. That mentality is what keeps them from getting lost in the industry.

In your pocket

Overall, with 22 users, UW placed 20 among all Canadian universities with the highest number of users. At a count of 133 users, the University of Toronto has the most users. Other top placers were the University of Guelph with 122 users and McGill University with 110 users.

Adam explained that after the summer ended, one sugar daddy paid for his entire tuition. Urick believes that the site is an opportunity for this to happen more often.

"Many students cannot afford tuition, and the cost of living while in university," she said. "This is an opportunity for them to meet some-

one who can help them with costs of higher education, and can also mentor them and help them get jobs upon graduation."

Seeking Arrangements specifically reaches out to university and college students to assist with their student debt. Tuition hikes are advertised as causes for students to seek financial assistance from sugar daddies and mommas.

According to the site, 32 per cent of all allowances received go towards tuition, 23 per cent go towards rent and 20 per cent go towards books. As well, the site claims that over 150,000 students across the country use it.

Adam believes that meeting sugar parents and doing sex work is easier than pursuing a part-time job.

"Instead of working eight hours and making \$88, you can work for a few hours and make thousands. Logistically, it is much more lucrative and efficient than part-time work," he said.

However, Adam stressed again the importance of having the right mindset. The tolls of working a part-time job are less impactful on your personal life, and thus less emotionally-demanding.

"It is other human beings that you are working with in a way that is seen as a deviation from societal norms. It is taxing in that sort of sense."

