SUGAR CULTURE AND SEEKINGARRANGEMENT.COM PARTICIPANTS:

WHAT IT MEANS TO NEGOTIATE POWER AND AGENCY IN SUGAR DATING

A Thesis

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ii

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Abstract

of

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Since 2000, the Internet has quadrupled in size and Computer-Mediated Dating
(CMD) websites have become multibillion-dollar businesses (Wysocki & Childers,
2011). The Internet has been able to accommodate increasingly smaller niches,
speaking to a variety of individual needs, wants and desires. One such niche website is
Seeking Arrangement (SA). Launched in 2006 and with over 3.6 million users,
"SeekingArrangement.com" is a site that pairs "Sugar Daddies or Mommies" (older,
wealthy men/women) with "Sugar Babies" (younger and poorer women or men) who
seek financial assistance in exchange for "companionship" in what has been termed a
"mutually beneficial relationship" ("Press & Media," 2014). This kind of relationship is
also known as "Sugar Dating" or "Sugar Culture." Critics such as Miller (2012),
Abigail (2014), and Motz (2014) argue that Sugar Dating is a euphemism for
prostitution, while others such as Motyl (2013) argue that it is a combination of
prostitution and dating. Regardless of how Sugar Dating is framed, questions about its
nature remain, particularly with regard to its juxtaposition to current feminist theory.
Specifically, what are the reasons women and men become Sugar Babies and Sugar

Daddies? How do women and men characterize an "arrangement"? And how is power

and agency exercised and practiced within the lived experiences of female Sugar

Babies and Sugar Daddies? Therefore, this thesis seeks to critically examine the Sugar

Dating site Seeking Arrangement (SA) in various aspects. Critical and feminist theory

will be used to analyze the data, which will be collected through in-depth interviews of

SA participants. The results will address compelling topics such as agency and what it

means for the modern individual to possess agency, as well as Foucault's explanation

of power and how it affects the actions of individuals. Specifically, the study will

explore the balance of power in Sugar Dating arrangements and how female Sugar

Babies negotiate power within arrangements with their older wealthier Sugar Daddies.

Ultimately, however, it examines Sugar Dating within the larger context of

heterosexual relationships and determines where it lies on the spectrum of patriarchal

discourse.

_____, Committee Chair
Dr. Michele Foss-Snowden

_____
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PREFACE

This paper was an outgrowth of my interest in human interaction and how it evolves over time. The way we express our thoughts, feelings and desires to one another through verbal and nonverbal language is the cornerstone of our society; it shapes the way we disseminate information and, ultimately, how we define behavioral norms. Communication has always been affected by technology and industry – from the printing press to the telephone to the fax machine; however, nothing has changed human communication as much as the Internet. Now, instead of having to wait for a letter to cross the Atlantic or even for someone to return a phone call, we can communicate our thoughts instantaneously via phones and computer messaging. This change has caused us to alter (and often abbreviate) the way we package our thoughts, thereby affecting human communication on every level, including the way we make friends and seek romantic partners. Given the growing popularity of Internet dating in recent years, I began to wonder how technology, specifically computer-mediated dating, affects traditional courting rituals and the gender politics underpinning them. This exploration led to the highly controversial topic of Sugar Dating – a type of dating whereby Sugar Daddies or Sugar Mommies (older men and women of means) support Sugar Babies (younger, poorer women and men) in exchange for "companionship." For purposes of this study, I narrowed my research to male Sugar Daddies and female Sugar Babies.

In preparation for this project, I studied feminist and poststructuralist theory as applied to traditional heterosexual relationships; for example, I examined how men and

women experience and exercise power within the confines of our patriarchal society. I asked myself how these "rules" applied to Sugar Culture, and it soon became apparent that the best way to study this culture was from the perspective of those involved in it. After identifying Seeking Arrangement.com (a website that facilitates Sugar Dating) as a source of participants, I then began the process of finding male and female Sugar Daters to interview about their experiences. Questions for these interviews ranged from initial communications when seeking an arrangement, to negotiations around the terms of the arrangement, to the exercise of agency and power within an ongoing arrangement. What emerged was a fascinating picture of how Sugar Culture functions within the larger context of romantic relationships in our changing society.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this master thesis first and foremost to my family, especially my loving parents, Sandy and Scott Cordero. Mom, Dad, your love and support have been a guiding force throughout my life and I will be forever grateful, both for your words of encouragement and your example of tenacity. And to Savannah, who has never left my side; thank you for being a friend as well as a sister. I also dedicate this master thesis to the many friends and colleagues who have supported me throughout the process, especially Cassandra Sohn for helping me develop my writing skills and for the long talks about Michel Foucault and arguments on agency. Thanks to Dana Micheli for the many hours of proofreading and late night jokes. Last but not least, I dedicate this work to my best friends, Sandy Cordero and Amanda Sanders. The both of you have been my cheerleaders throughout the entire masters program, and I don't know what I would have done without you.

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I wish to thank my committee members, all of whom have been incredibly generous with their time throughout this process. A special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Michele Foss-Snowden, for her countless hours of reflecting, reading, encouraging, and most of all patience. Thank you, Dr. Gerri Smith, for always being supportive and offering sound advice, and Dr. Sujatha Moni, for the many hours you put into helping me understand Michel Foucault and Feminism. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my school division for allowing me to conduct my research and providing me with invaluable assistance. Special thanks goes to the Human Resources department for their continual support. Finally, I would like to thank Steve Buss, Chair of the Communications Department, for his consistent support and mentorship throughout this project as well as the mentor-teachers in our school division who assisted me in developing my thesis. Their excitement and willingness to provide feedback made this project an enjoyable and enlightening journey that I will never forget.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As technology continues to permeate our society in deeper and more far-reaching ways, the modes and methods of communication and interaction have evolved accordingly. The Internet has become the world's largest social playground and has significantly transformed the way people date, form intimate relationships, meet potential spouses and fulfill sexual fantasies (Lawson & Leck, 2006; Wysocki & Childers, 2011). In 1995, there were more than 200 websites on the Internet selling sexual products and services, and by 1998, adult content marketed online was responsible for 69 percent of the total profit made on the Internet (Miller, 2012).

Online dating, also known as Computer-Mediated Dating (CMD), has arguably revolutionized the way romantic relationships are formed. A 2013 Pew study stated, 38% of people "single and looking" have used an online dating site (Smith & Duggan, 2013). CMD is described as any website allowing users to meet one another, publish and update personal profiles, search through the profiles of other users for potential mates, and send and receive messages to and from other users (Best & Delmege, 2011). CMD differs from cyberdating, which refers to the social interactions one can find in chatrooms and on MSN messenger; it is also different from the romantic interactions occurring on social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram, and from websites that allocate a specific part of their platform for dating purposes, like Yahoo Personals and Craigslist (p. 239). The first CMD site, Match.com, was created in 1995, and in the 20 years since, numerous other online dating sites have appeared on the Internet.

Review of the Internet & Computer Mediated Dating

Social interactions associated with online dating have garnered significant attention by the academic community. One example is Lawson and Leck's (2006) study, which attempted to understand the behavior of online daters by observing their motivations, styles of courtship, and strategies for negotiating around issues of trust and deception. Similarly, Best and Delmege (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the online dating process, emphasizing the importance of concepts like the filtering process and specific characteristics of the site, such as the surveillance feature that allows members to see each other's site activity. Recent studies on sex-seeking sites, such as Sevicokova and Daneback's (2011) study, found that most participants did not know what they wanted upon first joining a site but eventually narrowed their search once they learned the rules, mores, and vernacular of the particular online community. However, while there is a great deal of research devoted to understanding the motivations, strategies, and behaviors of those involved in CMD, very little academic attention has been paid to the unique online community of Sugar Dating, which is characterized typically by an older, wealthy person and a younger person in need of financial assistance arranging a mutually beneficial companionship with pre-negotiated levels of intimacy (Miller, 2011, Motyl, 2013).

Since 2000, the size of the Internet has quadrupled in terms of overall content and dating websites in particular have burgeoned into complex multibillion-dollar businesses (Wysocki & Childers, 2011). Americans alone have spent over $500 million on CMD, making online dating the second highest paid content industry on the web,

behind pornography (2011). The Internet also succeeds in accommodating increasingly

smaller niches of the online dating industry, speaking to the multitude of individual

desires, wants and needs of women and men alike. For example, "The Big and

Beautiful" website is for plus-size dating; "Ashley Madison" caters to individuals

seeking to have an extramarital affair; and the site "Beautiful People" is made for

individuals who find themselves attractive and only want to date other attractive people.

Other examples of niche sites include: "Christian Mingle," "Geek 2 Geek," "Arab

Lounge," "Tattooed Singles," "Democrat Singles," and "Farmers Only" (Ali &

Wilbowo, 2011; Rogers, 2012). Within such niche websites, people are given the

opportunity to indulge and explore sexual desires and find companionship in all forms,

and while several of these sites have well known reputations, one in particular, Seeking

Arrangement (SA), has gained considerable public attention and media scrutiny

(Rogers, 2012; Motyl, 2013).

Review of Literature on Seeking Arrangement

Launched in 2006 and currently boasting over 3.6 million users,

SeekingArrangement.com is a site that pairs "Sugar Daddies or Mommies" (wealthy

men/women) with "Sugar Babies" (young and in-need females or males seeking

financial assistance) in a "mutually beneficial relationship" ("Press & Media," 2014).

This kind of relationship is known as "Sugar Dating" or "Sugar Culture" (Motyl, 2013;

Abigail, 2014) and there are currently more than 20 sites that assist young women and

men in creating personal profiles—including a declaration of the amount of money that

they (the Sugar Baby) would expect from their Sugar Daddy or Mommy—"in exchange for their companionship" (Motyl, 2013). This increasingly popular business continues to evolve and expand; for example, by 2013 there were more than 1,000 online resources related to Sugar Dating, including Sugar Dating website reviews, "how-to" guides for navigating the Sugar Culture, reports on the growth of Sugar Dating sites, and even coverage of sugar relationships on the popular television shows *Dr. Phil*, the *Anderson Cooper Show* and MTV's *True Life* ("Sugar Daddy Dating Trend," 2014).

Not surprisingly, the increase in Sugar Dating websites and attention to Sugar Culture has created controversy in recent years. Scholars who remain critical of these websites, namely Miller (2012), Abigail (2014), and Motz (2014) for example, argue that Sugar Dating can be boiled down to satisfying the superficial desires young people have for instant gratification, financial gain, high-end clothing, lavish trips and fancy dinners. However, others argue that in addition to providing a means of attaining material items and affluent lifestyle, Sugar Dating has also become an increasingly popular option for the growing number of young people who lack the necessary skills and experience to get a well-paying job after graduation, are burdened with student loan debt, or are temporarily incapable of supporting themselves due to their participation in an unpaid internship (Abigail, 2014). Although Seeking Arrangement consists primarily of female Sugar Babies and male Sugar Daddies, the website depicts the ideal SA community member as a young person of either gender who is seeking someone capable of providing mentorship and support, as well as financial stability;

likewise, the ideal provider of these services is typically an older man or woman who desires companionship and stimulating conversation, as well as emotional and physical attention ("Sugar Daddy Dating Trend," 2014; "How It Works," 2014).

There are those who characterize Sugar Dating as simply a euphemism for prostitution, due to the transactional elements that arguably imply monetary gain in exchange for sex, rather than companionship (Braunstein, 2014). Motz (2014) and Abigail (2014), for example, argue that SA targets the vulnerable college-age demographic, even offering free premium memberships to those who register with a university email address. Furthermore, the site's persuasive language in describing Sugar Dating as an opportunity for financial and emotional stability with the help of a caring, older gentleman serves to attract struggling young women (and men) in need of assistance. Despite the fact that these are consensually agreed-upon arrangements between two willing adults, there are still elements of Sugar Dating that in all likelihood will always be associated with sexually deviant behavior. For example, The Daily Beast reports that 40 percent of men on the site are married, further perpetuating the notion that those they engage with are participating in amoral and even illegal behavior (Stern, 2012). Again, these terms allude to the transactional element as the standpoint for the arrangement. These interactions, however, have been provided immunity under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. The Act, which was created in 1996 to regulate pornographic content online, was deemed inapplicable to Sugar Dating arrangements due to the proviso that Sugar Dating promotes long-term relationships and companionship (Motyl, 2013). Nor does Sugar Dating fit under The

Model Penal Code's definition of prostitution: "engag[ing] in sexual activity as a business" (p. 935), despite the fact that the code does not define what exactly constitutes such a business. Essentially, as long as the sexual act is accompanied by a social factor, such as a trip or dinner, it falls outside the realm of prostitution (2013).

While United States law has not criminalized Sugar Dating sites, some academics have not been so forgiving. Motyl (2013) has broken down Sugar Dating into three different types of arrangements (based on Sugar Daters' blogging content), both in terms of time spent on each arrangement and the degree to which social companionship was actually present, with the intent of determining if Sugar Dating relationships are, in fact, criminal at any level. A "Category One" arrangement is a paid per-visit arrangement (as opposed to a monthly allowance) and lacks any form of social companionship; a "Category Two" arrangement mimics traditional dating and has high levels of companionship; and, a "Category Three" arrangement is a combination of "Category One" and "Category Two", offering long-term sex arrangements coupled with little companionship (p. 947). Motyl thus concludes that Sugar Dating is difficult for law enforcement to criminalize because the relationship itself is essentially an elaborate and convoluted mix of prostitution and dating. Motyl's (2013) study will be discussed and explored further in this thesis.

Miller (2012), on the other hand, argues that authorities unfairly target people engaging in "sex work" (i.e., prostitution and/or Sugar Dating), and that the current response of law enforcement to this industry is indicative of classism. Thus, Miller found it necessary to help distinguish between Sugar Dating and prostitution by

categorizing their differences into four groups: the monetary aspect, the language used to characterize the relationship and what they want in a partner, the length of the relationship and, perhaps most importantly, whether the arrangement involves sex.

Miller (2012) ultimately concludes that while not all Sugar Dating relationships have a sexual contract, "Sugar babies still fulfill each required element of prostitution" (p. 12). Moreover, she contends that the differences between prostitution and Sugar Dating can largely be explained by the institutionalized responses to the two industries. For example, Miller argues that there are three main reasons why Sugar Dating is the more difficult of the two to criminalize: a lack of funding for law enforcement agencies, the use of coded language and euphemisms on Sugar Dating sites, and finally, the clientele associated with Sugar Culture are not as easily identifiable as the average "streetwalker" and "pimp" (2012).

<div style="text-align:center">Problems Found & Purpose of Study</div>

While Motyl (2013) has characterized the different types of arrangements found in the Sugar Culture and Miller (2012) has distinguished the differences and similarities between prostitution and Sugar Dating, the ways in which Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies/Mommies negotiate their wants and desires in an arrangement have yet to be academically considered. Consequently, this thesis seeks to critically examine the computer-mediated Sugar Dating site Seeking Arrangement in various aspects.

The first step is to define what Sugar Dating is, as well as describe the SA website. The second is to consider why academic institutions and media outlets remain

skeptical when it comes to the value of the relationships cultivated on such sites, even going so far as to deem them prostitution, and thus, criminal behavior. Philosopher Michel Foucault (1980a) would ask one to question the advantage of labeling something as prostitution and the benefits of such a debate. Foucault (1978) examined how discourses took form and evolved around the concept of sex, primarily beginning in the 17th century. He explored the phenomena of sexuality, as well as the sexualization of power that became significant in Europe at this time and continued for the next three centuries. Interestingly, Foucault argues that this political and economic incitement to talk about sex was derived from morality as well as rationality. More importantly, a policing of sex took effect as the necessity to regulate it came to the forefront, for example, with regard to population growth and the promotion of a bourgeois society (1980a). Instead of repressing sex, however, the conversation had the opposite effect; "we demand[ed] that sex speak the truth […] and we demand[ed] that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). Discourses on sex became something humans identified with and became a vehicle through which one could know oneself. However, Foucault warns that sex does not speak the truth about individuals and that this is simply one of the ways in which power functions over human beings. The need to control and regulate sex created discourses that served to solidify this control and allowed it to flourish into an obsession over what human beings do sexually. For example, discussions about what constitutes prostitution and the morality behind such sex acts become yet another way

to shape our feelings about sex and regulate the acts themselves by classifying them as "normal" or "abnormal," "natural" or "deviant."

The SA site does bear a resemblance to prostitution in that a financial agreement is made between the two parties, the Sugar Baby and the Sugar Daddy, and in that this agreement is closely tied to intimate matters. However, in line with Foucault's reasoning, the debate on whether or not Sugar Dating is prostitution is aimed at establishing behavioral norms, even to the extent of criminalizing behavior deemed abnormal, so as to perpetuate the social construct and limits of sexuality. According to Foucault (1980a), one of the main ways that power is established and maintained is through defining social norms, with the individuals that are deemed normal having the power over the abnormal. For this reason, while I contend that it is important to review the debate on Sugar Dating to understand this subculture more thoroughly, I refrain from concluding whether Sugar Dating is a form of prostitution. Therefore, the second step will only be a presentation of the arguments for and against Sugar Dating and its alleged connection to prostitution.

The third step in this study will be an establishment of the theoretical and methodological foundation upon which this examination of Sugar Dating will be built. In particular, critical and feminist theory will be used to analyze the data, which will be collected through in-depth interviews with SA participants. In critical theory, theory and practice are intertwined so that the individual can understand her/his culture as well as take informed action and an informed response to it. The purpose of critical research is not just to describe and explain social action, but also to expose its

oppressive structures and its political agenda (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Theory helps

one describe and analyze society and social norms with the goal of enhancing freedom

for the individual (Bryson, 2003). Thus, I will use critical theory as a way to

understand and explain how SA participants make sense of and assign meaning to their

experiences and negotiate their power and agency within their arrangements. Feminist

theory will also be used in the analysis because it "offers both a diagnosis of women's

status across cultures as well as a prescription for changing the situation of women who

are understood to be marginal, subordinate, and oppressed" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 206-

207). Scholars use feminist theory in an attempt to understand society in order to

challenge the patriarchal power structures that reside within the culture. The goal of

feminist theory is to create informed knowledge and praxis that can be used to create

change with regard to the oppression of women.

Foucault's conjecture of power and subjectivity and post-structuralist theory of

agency will also be applied. Foucault contends that power is everywhere, embedded in

discourse, knowledge and the "regimes of truth" (general politics) (Foucault, 1980a).

These general politics are the types of discourse that accept and make concepts and

ideas function as true; the mechanism that enables one to distinguish between true and

false statements; the means by which they are sanctioned, for example, the legal

benefits afforded to married people; and the techniques used to acquire truth (Rabinow,

1984, p. 73). Foucault argues that this regime is a condition of capitalism (1984).

The concept of power is important to understand because it makes us what we

are, both individually and as a society. According to Foucault (1980a), sexuality is a

great conduit of power. As knowledge about sex became more hidden inside ourselves, we began to see sex as something we are, when in fact, sex is a social construct that makes it easier to control one another and ourselves. Our sexual desires and behaviors do not express profound truths about ourselves; rather, it is the discourses we have built up around those desires and behaviors that suggest the profound truth. Essentially, Foucault believes that in order to truly gain understanding of our desires and behaviors we must "discover the point at which these practices became coherent reflective techniques with definite goals, the point at which a particular discourse emerged from these techniques and came to be seen as true, the point at which they are linked with the obligation of the search for the truth and telling the truth" (as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 7). Foucault analyzes how through discourses and practices a human being turns herself or himself into a subject, and finds what sources of power are in the discourses that we find as truths about ourselves and the world we live in. Foucault describes power as being circulated everywhere, rather than in one concentrated measure; it is embodied in us and enacted rather than being possessed by individuals. Furthermore, Foucault argues that power is more discursive than coercive and constitutes agency rather than being deployed by one's agency (Fillingham, 1993). In relating Foucault's theory of power to the context of the Sugar Dating, if there is agency to be found in the interviews with the women and men, it has to come with the ability to control the discourse. Understanding how people talk about their arrangements and what sense of control and power they feel they have within them is at

the core of this study. Furthermore, this research will explore how women and men are willingly surrendering to the hegemony of the Sugar Culture.

Subjectivity is important when talking about power because it allows the subject to be seen as a site of regulation, where daily activities are performed either in compliance with social norms or in resistance of them (i.e., in the 1950s, a woman who continued to work after marrying and having children would have been resisting social norms) (Weedon, 1997, p. 101). According to Foucault, an individual occupies a specific position in three ways: her class position, the conditions of her life and work and the political and economic demands she either submits to or rails against and how this relates to the regimes of truth in our society (as cited in Rabinow, 1984). Another example is the idea of subjectivity, as written by Mansfield (2000) in discussing Foucault, and Althusser, who uses the example of a calling out to a policeman in uniform:

> By calling out to him, the policeman creates from the solitary walker in the street a certain type of subject – one answerable to the law and to the state and system behind it. This subject does not develop according to its own wants, talents, and desires, but exists for the system that needs it. Its only public reality is determined for it by the social apparatus that calls it into a certain kind of being. Subjectivity, therefore, is the type of being we become as we fit into the needs of the larger political imperatives of the capitalist state. It requires us not only to behave in certain ways, but also to be certain types of people (p. 53).

The modern regimes of power operate to produce us as subjects who are both the objects and vehicles of power. Subjects are not separate from power; in fact, power operates within the subject, in one's agency and in the ideas of self, and it transcends to every activity performed. Similarly, the subjection of women is addressed by feminists by asking questions about the self, a topic that has long been salient in feminist literature for its critical questions about the body, identity, personhood and agency (Bryson, 2003). In some respects, while discussions of the self date back to Hegel, Marx and Sartre, the importance of the self can be summed up when Simone de Beauvoir recognized that women are characterized as the Other and assume the role of passivity; she states, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other" ("Feminist Perspectives On The Self," 2010). To be the Other is to be the non-subject, non-agentic and not male.

Twentieth century philosophy conceptualized the self as a rational and moral masculinized individual, dismissing women and those in (un)chosen circumstances and interpersonal relationships (Bryson, 2003). This characterization ignored multiple other sources that modern audiences think of as constituting the self, such as femaleness, sexual orientation, race, class, age and ethnicity. Feminists find these early conceptions of the self to be incomplete, as well as fundamentally misleading and harmful to women because they do not recognize women as fully human and they discount important fundamental components of one's identity (Bartky, 1988). Feminists account for the misunderstanding of the Other by explaining that women internalize patriarchal norms and this internalization conditions their desires. To fulfill these desires, women

must then collaborate in their own oppression ("Feminist Perspectives On The Self," 2010).

An analysis of power relations and subjection is central to the feminist project of understanding the nature and causes of women's subordination. Foucault's work on power has been used by feminists to develop an analysis of the relationship between gender and power, avoiding the assumption that oppression is caused simply by men's possession of power (Bryson, 2003). Ideas of domination and victimization have been challenged by feminists and move towards a more textured and thorough understanding of the role of power in the lives of women (Mahmood, 2007, Brown, 2002, Bryson, 2003). Foucault's analysis of power allows feminists to explore the complex and complicated ways that women experience their lives, represent and exercise their agency and seek to transform their oppressive conditions.

Demonstrating agency in feminist literature is usually simplified to the resistance of the patriarchal status quo (Lamb, 2010). Agency is also defined as "intention" by Davidson (1980), a "presence of self" by Segal (1991) and "motivation, responsibility, and expectations of recognition or reward" by Mann (1994). However, as Ahearn (2010) argues, these definitions define agency as simply free will, a choice that is unencumbered by any social constructions. However, agency should not be construed as synonymous with free will or resistance. In regards to how this discussion of agency relates to power, power is defined as a set of relations to the subject, not just in the form of domination but in the form of possibility as well. Judith Butler (1997) calls this the "paradox of subjectivities," which means that the conditions under which

one is oppressed are the same conditions that allow one to become self-conscious of these conditions and an agent of resistance. Understanding this concept encourages us to move beyond equating agency with free will and instead view it as the capacity for action. Such a way of thinking about agency draws our attention to the practical ways in which individuals work on themselves to become the willing subjects of a particular discourse (as cited in Bryson, 2003, p. 210).

Foucault (1980b) argues that civilization's shift in focus to the individual in the late 18th century led to the discourses around what is normal for a human being. The person became an individual, an individual with agency, which in Foucault's view is one's worst enemy. After all, to think one has free will when history and language have had such a presence and immense power over one's life is to be deceived by power itself. It is not that one cannot change or resist power, Foucault (1980b) states, but that it is very difficult to do so and no one will be fully exempt from social conditioning. The concept of free will discounts environmental factors and the concept of resistance requires an individual to be conscious of dominating situations (Bryson, 2003). Resistance, as noted before, is more complex than just opposing domination. Foucault emphasizes how resistance is part of power and tends to isolate and further individuate the person from society. Moreover, the fact that resistance takes place does not mean that others take note of it; in fact, Foucault (1980a) states that we resist all the time, at every point in the power network, but that these efforts often go unnoticed. Hence, there is no single locus of "Great Refusal", no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a

special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, and improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; and still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial. All of these, by definition, can only exist in the strategic field of power relations (Foucault, 1980a).

This thesis will examine the connection between Foucault's discussion of power and subjectivity and post-structuralist / feminist theory on agency, specifically, how a particular notion of human agency is discussed and analyzed in feminist literature, and how agency is practiced and exercised for the women and men on Seeking Arrangement. Agency, which is best defined as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2010, p. 112), shows the cultural and historical legacy ingrained in the actions of individuals and speaks to the dominating structures and powers that influence each other. Thus, how an individual chooses to act defines the environment in which she/he lives and illuminates the social constraints of her or his agency.

To Foucault (1980a), power is neither just agency nor structure but both of them coinciding together because power precedes agency and structure. It is enforced by individuals, the education systems, the media, political systems, and economic ideologies. That said, power is not solely negative; it also has many positive aspects that are seen in every day society (Foucault, 1980a). Foucault also noted that power and agency are in constant flux, and therefore always generating possibilities for action and resistance. It is not about seeking absolute truth, which is seen as a socially

produced power as well, but about detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony operating at any present moment.

Foucault contends that modern power operates in a capillary fashion throughout the social body, and is best grasped in the everyday practices in which power relations are reproduced (Fillingham, 1993). The ways in which power is reproduced converge with feminist theory of analyzing the politics of personal relations and the gendered power relations that occur even at the most intimate levels of experience (dating, marriage, motherhood). These private relations between the sexes and in the everyday rituals and regimens govern the relationship between the individuals and their bodies (Sawicki, 1998, p. 93). In the context of Sugar Dating, these rituals and regimens include the negotiation practices of female Sugar Babies and male Sugar Daddies, both online and offline; therefore, in-depth interviewing about the ways in which these women and men make sense of and assign meaning to their agency and power within this structure will be examined. Several research questions will be addressed, including the following: What are the reasons for women and men to become Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies? How do women and men characterize an arrangement? How is power perceived and exercised in these arrangements? And, how is agency practiced within SA arrangements?

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Brandon Wey, known as Brandon Wade in the public forum, is the creator and owner of SeekingArrangement.com. In personal communication with Mr. Wade, he stated that in 2000 he noticed the demand on Craigslist for online dating, which he found interesting because the site was not set up for facilitating such connections. Wade watched as Craigslist quickly became a place where people could easily and openly solicit sex, even though the original goal of Craigslist was to be an online version of the local classifieds, and sex solicitation was not so overt in most newspapers. Wade also noticed that people were becoming increasingly overworked, leaving little time for the intricate and often time-consuming dance that leads to companionship. The rise in online relationships created through Craigslist showed Wade that people still cared about connecting, but they wanted that connection to be created quickly. It also occurred to Wade that while the online dating environment could make connections happen almost instantaneously, there were also increased chances of deception in the online sphere. Wade firmly believes that instead of hiding one's true intentions for being online or his/her true reasons for being attracted to someone, individuals should be honest about their needs and desires, as this honesty cultivates a deep understanding between them.

As an MIT graduate, Brandon Wade characterizes himself as a former nerd who was often overlooked by beautiful women. He aspired to be the type of man they desired, and over time, he figured out how he could stand apart from other men on

dating sites: his money. Hence, the idea for Seeking Arrangement was born. On SA, an "arrangement" is created; within this arrangement, both participants are honest about what they are seeking in the relationship and what they are willing to give in return. What SA participants' give and take varies tremendously (from sex to companionship, mentorship or friendship, from dinners and outings to trips and expensive gifts), and the result may be short-term, long-term, or life-long relationships (B. Wade, personal communication, October 10, 2012).

The average age of Sugar Babies is 26, while the average Sugar Daddy is 45 years old. The ratio of Sugar Babies to Sugar Daddies used to be ten to one (Miller, 2012); however, now the site currently claims eight to one ("SeekingArrangement.com", 2015). The website charges Sugar Daddies and Mommies $60 per month to maintain access to the site, while Sugar Baby profiles are free of charge. Sugar Babies that have verifiable college email addresses instantly gain access as a "Premium Member," which allows them to search with more refined parameters and causes their profiles to pop up in search results more often. Sugar Daddies or Mommies have the option of paying $5 extra to have Seeking Arrangement unrecognizable on their credit history; Sugar Babies do not have this option. To ensure that Sugar Daddies/Mommies are financially stable, the verification of their net worth through their tax return data is necessary (Berliet, 2010). In addition, the Sugar Daddies/Mommies are required to pay a rather costly membership fee. For instance, in order to become a "Premium Member" or "Diamond Member," Sugar

Daddies/Mommies may be required to part with $49.95 and $1,200, respectively, a month in exchange for certification (Berliet, 2010).

Review of Seeking Arrangement Website

The Seeking Arrangement website is aesthetically appealing, with a luminous white background and the simple cleans lines of Lato Light Black Font. On the right side is a photo of a woman with porcelain skin, welcoming eyes, long thick hair reaching the curve of her back, and a tight red dress. Pressed against her, their torsos touching, is a white male with dark brown, slicked-back hair and wearing a white collared shirt and black tie. His right arm wraps around to rest on her right shoulder; his left hand is holding her right hip. He is looking at her as if he is going to kiss her, while she is looking directly at the viewer with lips slightly parted and no smile. To the left of this photo, the words "Relationships on Your Terms" are highlighted by a light grey background; underneath are the words, "Where beautiful, successful people fuel mutually beneficial relationships." Below this script sits a hard-lined, bright red box with words in white that state, "Join Free Today" ("SeekingArrangement.com", 2015). At the top left hand side of the page is the word "Seeking" in red and "Arrangement" in dark grey, followed by dark grey hyperlinks: "How it Works," "About Us," and "What's An Arrangement." To the far right of the page are buttons to "Login" or "Join," both colored a vibrant red ("SeekingArrangement.com", 2015).

Scrolling down the page, one sees eight colorful photos of women with the caption "FIND YOUR SUGAR BABY" just above them. The first photo is a woman in

a bikini leaning back on a boat, her hand up by her head. The second photo is a bit blurry, but shows a young blonde female wearing a low-cut tank top that displays her large breasts. On the right is a photo of a woman in a pastel purple blazer and light purple top, sitting and smiling in a warmly lit room. At the end of this row is a photo of a woman lying on a beach towel; she is facing away from the camera to highlight her figure ("SeekingArrangement.com", 2015).

The second row of four photos includes a close-up of a woman with dark brown hair, dark red lipstick and a professional looking black shirt. In the photo next to her is a middle-aged blonde woman with big breasts, wearing a snug black dress. This image is followed by a close-up of a redhead, her head titled back from the camera so that she can look down at the viewer. Finishing out the row is a photo of a dark-haired woman wearing a simple black lace bra. Below the photos are the words "Browse Sugar Babies." All photos are cropped from the waist up. They will change each time a member logs in, so she/he will see new prospective Sugar Babies ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015).

To the left of these images are the words, "Sugar Daddy Perks," followed by "8 SUGAR BABIES PER SUGAR DADDY: The odds are in your favor with thousands of attractive women looking to meet now; Mobile FRIENDLY; Find an arrangement anywhere, anytime on any device" ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015). Beside this information are the phrases "NO STRINGS ATTACHED" and "Redefine the expectations of a perfect relationship," followed by the words, "IDEAL

RELATIONSHIPS: Upfront and honest arrangements with someone who will cater to your needs" (2015).

For the Sugar Baby, the Grey Lato font indicates the "Sugar Baby Perks" and below the heading, the site explains, "FINANCIAL STABILITY: Unpaid bills no longer have to be a concern; DATE EXPERIENCED MEN; Start dating gentlemen who leave the dating games alone" ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015). Beside this description are the words "FIND A MENTOR: Established Sugar Daddies offer valuable guidance for long-term stability" and "BE PAMPERED: Indulge in shopping sprees, expensive dinners, and exotic travels" (2015).

To the right of the "Sugar Baby Perks" are eight colorful photos of men with the caption "FIND YOUR SUGAR DADDY" and below the images are the words, "Browse Sugar Daddies" ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015). The first image shows a close-up of a man with short brown hair and a broad smile; he is dressed in a black suit and tie. In the next photo, a man is sitting outside, his eyes looking down at a book; he is wearing a casual black t-shirt. This image is followed by a close-up of an older-looking man with grey hair wearing a light brown suit; he too is smiling at the camera. The last photo on this row is a close-up shot of a younger-looking man with dark short hair. He looks serious in nature, with his straight face and the dim lighting (2015).

The second row of photos begins with a black and white close-up of a man gazing off to the right. Next to him is a young-looking male in a casual brown t-shirt; his head is tilted to the left and he is smiling. The third photo depicts a man, dressed in a pink shirt and black pants, taking a picture of himself in the mirror at the gym. It is

the only full-length photo in this grouping. The last photo is a broad-shouldered man in a brown and off-white suit; he too is smiling at the camera ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015).

At the bottom of the site, Seeking Arrangement highlights some of their media coverage in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNN*, *The Huffington Post* and *Vanity Fair*. Site visitors are invited to read more information in the hyperlinks at the very bottom, which feature the usual "About Us," "Support," and "Contact Us" links found on most business sites, along with the "SA Blog," "Background Check," and "Press & Media." To the right are links to the site's social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, You Tube, and Tumblr ("SeekingArrangement.com," 2015).

One seeking to join the site must enter an email address and create a password; new members are also asked to provide their gender and choose an "Account Type," which is used to identify them as either a "Sugar Baby" (someone who "provides companionship in exchange for being pampered") or as a "Sugar Daddy/Sugar Momma" (someone who "pampers Sugar Babies in return for companionship") ("Join," 2015). Once the account is created, the user must enter her/his name (there is a prompt here allowing for the use of fake names), a title for the profile, and birthdate ("Member," 2015). This is followed by requests for the user's country, state, and city, as well as a physical description, including height, body type, ethnicity, and eye and hair color. The profile then moves on to more substantive information regarding occupation, education, relationship status, number of children, tobacco and alcohol use, and languages spoken.

Finally, there is place to upload a photo (which is not required) and an "About Me" section, where the user can add a "bio" and fill in "What I am looking for" in terms of the desired arrangement. For Sugar Babies, this section includes a space to enter the amount of money they desire; Sugar Mommies or Daddies include the amount they are willing to give (2015).

When seeking an arrangement, a member has a plethora of ways to search, including by "Country," "State," "City," "Distance from You," "Body Type," "Age," "Ethnicity," "Height," "Eye Color," "Hair Color," "Smoking," "Drinking," "Relationship," "Education," "Children," "Language," "Income," and, for Sugar Babies, "Net Worth and Budget" ("Search," 2015). One can also search for only profiles that have photos up, for those that paid for a background check, for those who have "Diamond Member" status, for those that have had the most "Unviewed Profile[s]" or most "Viewed Profile[s]", or for those that have "Viewed You", "Favorited" you, or those you have favorited. Lastly, users can sort profiles by those most recently active, as well as by those that have been active the longest or the shortest amount of time (2015).

Once a SA member is logged onto the message page, the site will notify him/her of any messages and what level of membership the sender of the message may have (she or he could be a "Premium" or "Diamond" member) as well as when the member was verified with an income and credit check. To view the profile, the member can click on a hyperlink and photos of the person, if he or she has posted any, will appear. Members choose what information will be disclosed and what information will

be omitted (with the exception of annual income and net worth for Sugar Daddies and Sugar Mommies). Usually, available information includes username, city/state, country, age, height, body type, eye color, hair color, ethnicity, language, education, occupation, marital status, smoking habits, drinking habits, and summary of the arrangement the member is seeking ("I'm Seeking" is where the member/user describes the type of relationship desired). Members can also view the other's "Description" (a short biography of what the member is about), and "My Budget" (the section in which the member describes what she or he is willing to give or wants to receive). There is also a range of allowance amounts for both Sugar Daddies/Mommies and Sugar Babies, namely, Less than US 1,000 monthly; US 1,000-3,000 monthly; US 3,000-5,000 monthly; US 5,000-10,000 monthly; US10, 000-20,000 monthly; and More than US 20,000 monthly (SeekingArrangement.com, 2014). Per recent changes, these amounts are labeled Negotiable, Minimal, Practical, Moderate, Substantial, and High (Member, 2015).

Discourse of SeekingArrangement.com (2010-2015)

The verbiage on the Seeking Arrangement site has gone through many phases and changes over the years. For example, the 2010 description of a Sugar Daddy was a "wealthy, usually older man who gives expensive gifts to a young person in return for intimacy or companionship" (Miller, 2012). For a Sugar Baby, the description was a "young person who gives intimacy or companionship to an older man or woman in exchange for expensive gifts" (Miller, 2012). The website has also removed the

following language regarding Sugar Daddies: "Rich and successful. Single or married, you do not have time for games. Lover? Student? Or a mistress for an extramarital affair?" (Miller, 2012) It has also removed the statement that Seeking Arrangement is an "online matchmaking site for 'wealthy benefactors' and willing women – women who understand there will be no long-term romance, who understand their Sugar Daddy may be married, who understand that sex, and secrecy, is expected" (Miller, 2012). Clearly, the language at that time more closely resembled that of an escorting site, highlighting such components as a short-term romance, discretion, and money.

In 2012, the site was redesigned for "public relations purposes" (B. Wade, personal communication, November 2, 2014). The social networking tabs on the website were moved to the upper left side of the page and categorized as "Social Sugar." Another link, "The Modern Daddy," was also added, with the language, "You are always respectful and generous. You only live once, and you want to date the best. Some call you a mentor, sponsor, or benefactor. But no matter what your desires may be, you are brutally honest about who you are, what you expect and what you offer" ("How It Works, 2012). Similarly, a link for the "Goal-Seeking Sugar Baby" explained this role as "Attractive, intelligent, ambitious and goal-oriented. Sugar Babies are students, actresses, models or girls and guys next door. You know you deserve to date someone who will pamper you, empower you, and help you mentally, emotionally, and financially" (2012). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the site has added a companionship component that described relationships as having the potential to be

meaningful and empowering for both participants. Language of secrecy, short-term arrangements, and the expectation of sex were removed.

This overhaul, however, did not include a removal of traditional heterosexual norms, defining a Sugar Daddy as a respectful, generous and usually older male mentor or benefactor who is honest about who he is and what he expects, and a Sugar Baby as a younger, ambitious, and attractive female who knows how she wants to be treated and who wants help "mentally, emotionally and financially" ("How It Works, 2012). The website also had a description of "Sugar Mommies," who were defined as "older, wealthy women who want to support usually a younger 'Sugar Boy,' but also can support a 'Sugar Girl'" (2012). While this description made members aware of the site's openness to all types of arrangements, SA's primary audience remained older male Sugar Daddies and young female Sugar Babies.

Even with all of its changes, the site as of 2012 clearly still relied on heteronormative social stereotypes, with language that stated it was human nature for older men to want younger women and to want to take care of them. Seeking Arrangement's "How it Works" page (2012) included content about anthropological findings of cavemen and cavewomen who had this exact perspective on "human nature" and how this heteronormative social stereotype is still ingrained in our culture today. The website further rationalized its point by arguing, "The French had courtesans. The Japanese had geishas. And in today's society, we now have Sugar Babies" ("What is an Arrangement" 2012).

The website presented a portrait of traditional relationships as inherently unequal, stating that relationships are often if not always one-sided, and one person almost always feels taken advantage of or used. The site also contended that in the arrangements created on SeekingArrangement.com, such one-sidedness does not occur, and although the site's transactions may begin with negotiations of money and companionship, other elements are also presented as necessary in forming a mutually beneficial relationship ("What is an Arrangement" 2012).

The site has recently undergone another interesting revision, and currently defines Sugar Daddies and Mommies as "[s]uccessful 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" (How It Works, 2015). Sugar Babies are defined as "[a]ttractive 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" (2015). Seeking Arrangement has removed any suggestion of secrecy, sex, prostitution, geishas, or other historical notions of what it means for a man to take care of a woman. Instead, the site now gives more attention to the little details one can find in a Sugar Dating relationship, highlighting the nuances of the community and promoting the arrangements as mutually supportive, caring and empowering. Most significantly, more emphasis was put on the fact that Sugar Babies can be men or women, and Sugar Mommies are just as welcome as Sugar Daddies.

The changes in definitions also extend to age. A Sugar Daddy used to be defined exclusively as someone older; now, he "may be young or old, single or married, but you are generous and successful. You are seeking a mutually beneficial relationship and you have no time for games" (SeekingArrangement, 2015). An "Attractive Sugar Baby" is defined now as "attractive, ambitious and young at heart," with age presented as more of a state of mind (2015).

Despite the various changes in messaging, the core of Seeking Arrangement remains the same: it is a site offering a perceived mutually beneficial relationship where companionship is exchanged for monetary gain. That said, it has, over the course of the past five years, evolved along with cultural shifts. Instead of relying on the "natural" notions of what humans used to live like, the site now relies on "modern" assumptions of what men and young women are supposed to do and expect. Former notions of the Sugar Baby identifying with geishas and courtesans, where "sex and secrecy" were to be expected (Miller, 2012), have now been replaced with the idea of a modern and empowered woman who knows what she wants and deserves. Words of empowerment for the young ambitious Sugar Baby now include young men, as well as the notion of stability as core to an arrangement. However, while there is less emphasis in the text on age and gender, the photographs of Seeking Arrangement members, as well as the present research, demonstrate that the norm still holds for Sugar Babies to be physically young and attractive women and Sugar Daddies to be physically older white males.

Current Debate on Seeking Arrangement: Is it Prostitution?

On their surface, Sugar Dating websites differ significantly from escorting websites, primarily because Sugar Dating is deemed to be promoting long-term relationships. Motyl (2013) argues that there is complexity and variety to online Sugar Dating arrangements and contends that Sugar Dating websites are a combination of escort sites and mainstream dating sites, and says, "Sugar Babies, particularly college students, view themselves not as prostitutes coerced into the sex industry, but as problem-solving, empowered women looking for benefactors to pay for schooling" (p. 948). Motyl (2013) goes on to state that, "Critics of the Sugar Culture inaccurately claim that sugar arrangements are merely a new form of prostitution. This broad interpretation fails to take into account the different types of arrangements within the Sugar Culture" (p. 929).

Currently, Black's Law Dictionary (2012) defines prostitution in the United States as an "[a]ct of performing or offering or agreeing to perform a sexual act for hire" or as "engaging in or agreeing or offering to engage in sexual conduct with another person under a fee arrangement with that person or any other person" (Motyl, 2013, p. 935). "Business" is arguably a nebulous term, but it most commonly describes some action engaged in for gain of living expenses (Miller, 2012). The Model Penal Code (MPC) defines sex work as "engag[ing] in sexual activity as a business" (Motyl, 2013, p. 935). The term "business" in this case creates a notion that the prostitution statutes are aimed at punishing commercial sexual activities only. These sexual activities are

characterized as an interaction between two or more parties in which goods, services or items of value are exchanged for some type of remuneration and are governed by law.

Additionally, Motyl (2013) claims that under the Common Decency Act, Section 230, the site creators cannot be held responsible for any content that the website users post; law enforcement would have to prove that the site is the sole provider of all the content found on the site. SeekingArrangement.com is not held liable because SA participants create their own profiles and can blog in the community forum. Another possible way to find such a site liable would be to show that it was inducing members to violate the law (i.e. promoting prostitution). Here, too, SA could not be held liable as the site contains warnings that members will be kicked off if they engage in prostitution. Therefore, Section 230 offers immunity to such websites, irrespective of whether the site creators have the general knowledge regarding their users' misconduct, and such Sugar Dating sites could only be held liable for fostering sex work online if the intent of the website is to facilitate the exchange of money for sex. Sugar Dating websites that foster both illegal and legal user activities can easily evade punishment.

Motyl (2013) argues that Sugar Dating falls into three general categories, which are relevant to this discussion as they provide information about the characteristics of arrangements. "Category One" arrangements are paid-per-visit transactions and lack a social companionship element (i.e. dinner or time spent outside the sexual act). In this category, the money is closely tied to the agreed-upon time the parties are willing to spend with each other. "Category Two" arrangements are long-term arrangements with

"high levels of companionship" and where "sex and money are incidental" (Motyl, 2013, p. 946). "Category Three" arrangements are long-term and hold little companionship, but consistently involve the exchange of money for sex. "Category Three" arrangements may be paid-per-visit for an extended period of time or they may feature a monthly allowance. However, Motyl (2013) states that "Category Three" arrangements may be hard to identify and generalize because they are a combination of "Category One" and "Category Two" arrangements. To establish social companionship, there needs to be dinner or some type of outing together, which can complicate the "Category Three" arrangement. Thus, U.S. courts cannot classify Sugar Dating arrangements as in the "realm of prostitution" (which consists of no social companionship and an exchange of money for sex), when the arrangements are accompanied by other elements such as dinner or companionship (Motyl, 2013).

Wexler (2013) claims that the transaction of a sex worker with a client is "linear and non-emotional," whereas a Sugar Dating relationship is more complex. However, Holts and Belvin (2007) conducted a study on the subculture of johns (men who buy sex) and found that while there was a major emphasis on the importance of the sex act itself, many johns preferred an emotional connection tied with intimacy, creating a dating-esque experience. If the sex worker could elevate an experience by making it feel less like a paid encounter, the chances of the sex worker earning a repeat customer were high (Holts & Belvin, 2007). What Holts and Belvin (2007) call the "girlfriend experience" is an experience in which sex is not the only element in the arrangement and both the customer and the sex worker provide sexual pleasure and

emotional intimacy for one another. The resulting encounter is a co-creation of social value, companionship and romance (Huff, 2011).

In the Sugar Dating culture, most arrangements/relationships resemble the traditional boyfriend-girlfriend experience, but with an accompanying financial incentive (Wexler, 2013). This understanding of sugar relationships, one that paints the participants as using negotiation practices, is important to study through a feminist lens to understand where agency and power reside in those negotiations. The focus of this thesis is not to decide whether or not a person's actions should be deemed as criminal, or to label a sugar dater's actions as prostitution. Of unique interest here are the ways in which two individuals decide on the terms of their companionship. An examination of Sugar Dating, specifically as presented through Seeking Arrangement, can lead to a greater understanding of how people socialize with one another and how these interactions shape courtship, sexual exchange, prostitution, and the economic and social value of sex. Using a feminist lens allows for an exploration of the concept of power and the agentic practices of both female and male SA users. Understanding the Sugar Dating subculture created on SeekingArrangement.com and how the members are conceiving their own actions and attributing responsibility to the situations within their arrangement(s) allows for understanding more about individual agency in relation to contemporary society.

Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist Theory

Transactional relationships have long been nurtured in many cultures across the world. Traditionally, women provided men with their virtue, dedication to their families, and the "ability to bear children while the men offered financial security, homes, clothing and food in return" (Abigail, 2014, p. 62). In virtually all societies, men have held the positions of power, dismissing the importance of women and decentering them from most political conversations unless it was to ensure a woman's "place" in society (Bryson, 1999). Feminist literature often identifies power in western culture as male-dominated and weaving in and out of every thread of life. Kate Millet (1970) introduced the term patriarchy into the academic conversation on feminism to "argue that men's power is not confined to the public worlds of economic and political activity, but that it characterizes all relationships between the sexes, including the most intimate, and that it is sustained by the whole of our culture" (Bryson, 1999, p. 3). This patriarchal power is incessant and is primarily maintained through social conditioning, starting at birth. However, Bryson (2003) argues that male dominated power can also be contested.

Studies on patriarchy highlight male-dominated structures; however, they also explore how men can be harmed by patriarchy as well. As mentioned earlier, a central theme of the literature on, patriarchy is that men do not consider gender inequalities, and they will not position themselves away from being central to the human experience

(Coole, 1988); this is due to the fact that they are considered "standard" or the "norm" and women are seen as Other. Walby (1990) offers an explanation of the shift to public from private patriarchy; she explains that transformations in women rights and freedom are not restricted to the private sector and personal lives of women but also in the structural revisions that were made in various parts of the western capitalist economy, a change that has important implications, not just for women's quest for equality and inclusion in predominantly patriarchal structures, but also for a radical dismantling of existing systems and practices. Private and public revisions brought about a significant increase in demands for waged labor, and change was also brought about by the power of effective feminism in the early years of the 21st century, as well as highly successful campaigns for attaining political equality, rights and recognition. In this sense, patriarchy becomes a hearty starting point for recognition of the patterned nature of male power in society in both the private and public sectors (Bryson, 1999).

Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism rejects dichotomous statements and examines how meanings are constructed situationally and contextually. The point of using post-structuralism is to understand women's situation so that it can be challenged and changed. If one is to question manmade structures in our culture, one must be ready to challenge what is considered normal in those manmade structures and the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed within that culture.

Post-structural critics are concerned with the meanings that individuals produce and the implications this production has on existing social relations. Structuralism, an intellectual movement that developed in the mid-20th century Europe, is based on the premise that a culture can best be understood by its structures (Weedon, 1997). Post-structuralist inquiry critiques the binary oppositions that are inherent in structures and interrogates the rules and resources that constitute a structure's rigidity by using anthropology, linguistics, psychology and other fields to interpret the structures (Giddens 1989). Post-structuralism allows for this interrogation by offering the idea of pluralism, which illuminates the complexities of a situation and, sometimes, conflicting perspectives. With post-structuralism, meaning is never fixed and never singular; it is constantly changing. Language is at the forefront of this theory (Bryson, 2003), as post-structuralists consider language to be at the core of how we create our identity and how our sense of self is constructed (Weedon, 1997). Hence, meaning is co-constructed by the use of language to create a social reality. Language does not just reflect a pre-existing reality but also helps create it (Ahearn, 2001).

With post-structuralist theory, one must remember how words have been historically created and what they may mean today, allowing for insight into how words are always competing with one another to shape and define our world and to give meaning to it. Weedon (1997) states, "How we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interest which they represent" (p. 26). Hence, the words and

discourses we argue over are important and relevant, and they highlight how ingrained historical and cultural contexts are in each individual. A post-structuralist approach to feminism decenters "the rational, unitary, autonomous subject of liberal humanism, or the essential female nature at the centre of much radical feminism, rendering it socially constituted within discourse" (Weedon, 1997, p. 121). However, even though individuals are socially constructed, they are nevertheless thinking and active individuals, each being capable of resistance and producing her or his own world.

Michel Foucault: Subjectivity & Power

Language as discourse started with post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault, who wanted to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power (Weedon, 1997; Bryson, 2003; Mansfield, 2000). Foucault looked specifically at how bodies, in everyday situations, perform their gender category, their class position and their place in culture (such as sexual orientation, normative standards of beauty and mental health). Foucault also studied how something comes to be true by looking at the political and economic institutions that produce truth (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012)

Foucault (1980a) argues that as people acquire language they learn how to make sense of these experiences and give them meaning, and that the language people use dictates the understanding of those experiences; he says, "This is the essential thing: that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant

optimization and an increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself" (p. 282). Language is designed and curtailed to limit and control sexual expression, making it hard to recognize or emancipate from its repressive nature. The forbidding of certain words to describe sex, censorship of vocabulary and creating what is considered "decent" were all ways to control sexuality. However, Foucault argues this act of control was only secondary to the real control power had over sexuality, which was making it into forms of discourse that describe what is acceptable and moral and useful for production; who decides what is said as well as how sex is regulated and circulated.

When Foucault talks about discourse, he is not just talking about language or discussions in which people talk only about what has been said. Instead, when he uses the word discourse, he is also talking about who is speaking, how they speak about their topic, in what context and in reaction to what. Discourse is important to Foucault because language and knowledge are closely linked to power; therefore, they always have a political edge. As Foucault (1978) wrote, "we need to abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies have begun repression in matters of sex. On the contrary, we are witnessing an explosion of heretical forms of sexuality" (p. 73). Instead of repressing sex, power has been exercised to bring it increasingly into discourse. Thus, sexuality becomes a mechanism of power-knowledge.

The more people know about their world, the more power they can exert over it. There is a drive to not only know sexuality but to create it as well. In a Foucauldian

sense, "In practice we speak ourselves into existence and thus become objects of our own and others' discursive practices" (Davies, 1991, p. 47). Individuals repetitiously create and co-create their lives through the use of discourse. As a result, the power of discourse governs our actions and defines our situations and subjects. However, an individual can change this discourse to work against power. As Foucault (1980a) states, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 123). If power/knowledge works at the level of the subject, then it is up to the level of the subject that it will most effectively be resisted (Mansfield, 2000, p. 63). The discourses of truth and knowledge dictate and prescribe what is deemed as normal behavior, as Mansfield (2000) argues, and the power of truth and knowledge creates ideologies that need subjectivity. Thus, it is not the individual who emerges first, but rather a subject who becomes an individual through her use of power. Power is manifested through the discourses of truth and knowledge, making us what we are (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012). Power cannot exist without knowledge, and the idea of truth validates and justifies all preceding actions. Subjectivity, as it relates to discourse, is important because once we connect on an individual level to the subject or status within the context of the discourse, we then perpetuate the discourse ourselves. Subjectivity then, is the constitution of individual minds, hearts, bodies, and emotions. As the present research will demonstrate, each Sugar Dater's subjective understanding of their roles, as well as gender roles in general, affected her or his ability to exercise personal power within the relationships on Seeking Arrangement.

Subjectivity works most efficiently when there is an established hierarchy because the person already knows her or his place from what has been historically communicated, and she or he "assumes" the position (Mansfield, 2000, p. 124). Therefore, subjectivity is an abstract concept, not something innate and distinct to oneself but always in relation to something else, whether a person, object, idea or principle (Mansfield, 2000). Butler (1997) notes that subjection is a paradoxical form of power. Subjectivity inhabits both domination and subordination. Butler states that "if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are" (p. 2). The subject makes us turn into ourselves and believe that there is an actual stable idea of the self that science can document and understand, where institutions can organize and dictate, and experts can correct behavior and prescribe what is normal (Mansfield, 2000). Subjectivity is the way we are led to believe who we are, so that people present themselves in the correct way (not as criminal, unkempt, perverse, insane, or undisciplined).

As Foucault (1978) further clarifies, "By power…I do not understand a general system of domination exercised by one element or one group over another, whose effects traverse the entire body social" (p. 102). According to Foucault, power is not a group of people who have domination over society; instead, power precedes the individual and the very notion that the subject believes she/he can have freedom turns

each individual into the sole vehicle for power. Power compels the individual to be

perpetually aware of and consistently monitoring her or his desires and actions. This

power "saturates the pettiest and quietest moments of our personal lives, pressing us

with what we should be – at the height of its operation, even becoming us" (Foucault,

1978, p. 132), and this saturation of power dictates our lives and creates our individual

essences. One of the most important features of power is this self-monitoring behavior

and the monitoring of others (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012). The more we strive

for an intrinsic self, a natural self, the more an individual will give into this

power/knowledge entity and will monitor what is appropriate and what is not. Since

there is no true self that one can recover, one must self-create and resist and become

aware, first and foremost, of the societal prescriptions and dictations of what one ought

to be. Even so, the individual will continually reproduce herself or himself in relation

and response to cultural and historical contexts and will strive for truths that will

forever be drawn away (Mansfield, 2000).

This Foucauldian sense of power is ubiquitous and circulatory because it comes

from every strand of existence, discourse, and situations and is ingrained in the very

essence of who we are. Schirato, et al. (2012) states that, "the technologies, institutions

and discourses through which power circulates produce an almost infinite variety of

categories and sub-categories of people and forms of behavior, which compete with

one another to regulate and control populations" (p. 49). More importantly, this

circulation of power is never possessed but rather exercised and can be both coercive

and productive at the same time (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 2000). Power is

considered to be productive because it can shape and mold the values and practices of people, and it is also considered coercive in the constraints that are put on this production (for example: how one goes about incorporating those values or practices as well as what is deemed acceptable and/or abiding by the rules that follow in a given culture). Power naturally produces resistance (Foucault, 1980a) because discourses and forms of knowledge are not natural – they are part of the "effects of power" because discourses and practices of power have to claim universality that in reality does not exist (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012, p. 49). Foucault believed that one could not look objectively at the society that she or he is in, and that is it impossible to move away from one's embedded structures. Foucault does not tell what form power takes; therefore, when doing post-structural analysis, the researcher has to search for power, unlike other studies that use theories of power like Marxism or liberal-humanist analysis, where there is a starting point. However, Foucault's concept of power helps to uncover the multiplicity of power formations found in the nuances and crevices of human relations and their agentic practices (Weedon, 1997). His work is therefore a useful tool in exploring the subtleties of Sugar Dating, where women can find and exercise their own power even within a traditional heterosexual hegemony.

Hegemony

Subjectivity relies on the interests that have been socially constructed for the individual; however, to act, to have choice, to be agentic, is reflected in an individual's interpretation of discourse, via her or his actions and emotions. Resistance only takes

form when he or she no longer wants a particular position in society (Weedon, 1997).

Foucault (1980a) states that power is so invasive in one's culture and personal

discourses that one can *never* have agency. His argument is that power cannot exist

without resistance; however, resistance is dependent on power. For example, for every

hegemony (a governing power) there is a counter-hegemony at work that can push

unaccepted practices underground, where they can take on subversive qualities and

continue to exist. First developed by Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is

> the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the
>
> general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group;
>
> this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent
>
> confidence), which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and
>
> function in the world of production (Gramsci as cited in Jackson Lears, 1985,
>
> p. 568).

Our actions and ideas of ourselves have a cultural and historical inscription and

dominance on our daily lives and actions. As individuals, we consent to this

domination unconsciously, and even consciously, we cannot fully remove ourselves

from this dominance. Pivotal to Gramsci's work is understanding how ideas function in

society. One must acknowledge the social constraints of less powerful participants and

how strategies form within those constraints. Gramsci states, "No top-down model of

domination can explain the complex growth, dissolution, or transformation of

hegemonic cultures. Hegemony is not simply social control and a top-down strict order

of enforcing ideologies; rather, culture is highly complex and closer attention to the

internal processes of how ideologies are produced should be of more concern" (Lears, 1985, p. 588). Furthermore, Foucault states that one must go deeper, to not look at hegemony as mere reflections of ourselves, as something supposedly deeper or more real, but as a means of power and control through discourse, knowledge and the regimes of truth (Rabinow, 1984). Hence, a closer look at how meaning is construed in a particular text as a process of ideology needs to be examined. For example, feminist scholars have questioned the presumed nature of female and male sexuality, to make visible the underlying assumption that reinforce the social constructions of sexuality and the heteronormative attitudes that are so apparent through the discourses surrounding prostitution. These assumptions are embedded in heterosexuality and are the cause and consequence of gender constructions, based on the premise that women are subordinate. Heterosexuality is not femininity-masculinity in opposition; it is simply masculinity. Equally as important is understanding how heteronormativity limits women's space for action.

To be counter-hegemonic is to be resistant to the many forms of socioeconomic power. This resistance is defined by Wade (1997) as:

any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions which make such acts possible. Any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on one's self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression (as cited in Deepak, 2011, p. 786).

This resistance and consent to hegemony takes form within the concept of agency. Drawing primarily on Foucault's later work, Butler (1997) argues that Foucault proposes a model of agency that is "a matter of plurality, mobility, and conflict" (Ahearn, 2001). Bordo (1993) also highlights and makes use of Foucault's understanding of power relations as inherently unstable and always accompanied by, and even generating, resistance. Bordo (1993) says, "So, for example, the woman who goes into a rigorous weight-training program in order to achieve the currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles give her the self-confidence that enables her to assert herself more forcefully at work" (p. 125). However, this example may represent yet another way of consenting to heteronormative behavior, where beauty begets and is equated with confidence. Nonetheless, resistance is only one form of agency; there are other forms as well, for example, whereas a prostitute was once considered powerless and without agency, many academics now argue that he or she is in fact exercising both power and agency by engaging in a commercial enterprise (willingly using his/her body as a commodity) (Brown, 2002).

Feminism & Agency

The idea of agency is rooted in the Enlightenment period, during which philosophical notions of free will referred to a removal from any social constructions and material constraints. Free will is better known for its vivid descriptors of the autonomous individual, such as self-identity, integrity, rationality, and moral authenticity (Bryson, 2003). The autonomous person was believed to be able to strive

to maintain her or his rational self-direction in a world that was full of complicated commitments and impinging judgments, and a world that required transcendence (Wilson, 2007).

This historical notion of agency raised an issue within feminist theory as to the existing relationships between structure and agency. There is a complex dilemma in feminist theory over the extent to which the actions of women are viewed as being constrained by social and/or patriarchal structures (Lim, 1991). The majority of the interventions that take place in various debates on the agency of women have gravitated towards advocating for individual agency. Lim (1991) argues that the female gender actively makes choices under several conditions that have been determined by structures and institutions over which they often do not have any power to influence. If one accepts that the voices of women are not constrained by male domination, then one ignores the social contexts and legitimizes the status quo. However, if one accepts instead that agency is socially constructed, then one strips and denies a woman of agency and takes away her chance to create social change (Wilson, 2007). Often, when agency is forced into the binaries, context, motivations, individual desires, and strategies are dismissed.

One compelling example of this debate is the argument forwarded by Mahmood (2001), in which she discusses agency through her ethnographic research of women from various socioeconomic standpoints regarding their ideas of becoming an "ideal virtuous self" through moral agency and discipline (p. 202). She challenges normative western and liberal assumptions of agency and freedom and states, "I want to suggest

we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood, 2001 p. 203). Thus, having agency means that women may use their own instruments of oppression, but within that use they still have a means of resistance to the dominant structure (Mahmood, 2001). Mahmood (2001) seeks to understand women's agency as disciplining the body and regulating the self through a woman's own will and not through male domination. She examines the dualism of structure and agency where there is not a "right way" for women to be agentic, and she allows for multiple perspectives and realities to be visible so one can really understand the depth and complexity of the situations women are in. Mahmood (2001) argues that, "In order for us to be able to judge, in a morally and politically informed way, even those practices we consider objectionable, it is important to take into consideration the desires, motivations, commitments, and aspirations of the people to whom these practices are important" (p. 225). Mahmood's goal as a critic is to help remove invalidation or criticism of the desires and goals of women and discounting of their agency, which allows for deeper understanding as to why those desires exist and under what constraints. Bryson (2003), however, contends that Mahmood fails to give any meaning to the power structures and only shows how people abide by the dominant structure. That said, Mahmood does not just show how women consent to the dominant structure; she also illustrates how a woman can "accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest - sometimes all at the same time" (Ahearn, 2010, p. 116). It is the very nature of a post-structuralist view to try to ascertain and explore an individual's frequently

conflicting responses to the outside world so that binary categories such as "either/or", and "good/bad" can be broken down and the intricacies of power can be highlighted.

Giddens (1984) states, "Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place (which is why agency implies power: cf. the Oxford English Dictionary definition of an agent, as 'one who exerts power or produces an effect')" (p. 9). Young women and girls possess agency within the conditions they experience. The normalizations of sexuality and other standards become the bounce pad upon which people make decisions. Gill (2011) states that individuals are misled by culture and are the victims of it, trapped within the depths of ideology and mass cultural domination. Individuals look at choice by "address[ing] how power works in and through subjects, not in terms of crude manipulation, but by structuring our sense of self, by constructing particular kinds of subjectivity" (Gill, 2011, p. 73). Ahearn (2010) states that agency is not the reductive sense of free will but rather "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act…both in its production and in its interpretation" (p. 112). Therefore, it is the "habitual condition of the body that is conditioned and bounded by culturally constructed meanings in which actions, thoughts and perceptions are limited" (Ahearn, 2010, p. 118). A person identifies and distinguishes her individuality by comparing herself to the outside world. Her self-concept of who she thinks she is directly affects her modes of actions. How an individual chooses to act defines the environment in which she lives in and thus, one can then see the social constraints of her agency (Ahearn, 2001). Dow (2003) adds that defining and criticizing a women's agency only goes so far; it is a matter of

understanding the limitations within that agency that is important. As mentioned earlier,

post-structuralism rejects the concept of the free-thinking rational individual as not

affected by social constructs and believes that individuals have many and varied

identities due to the power structures that dominate and influence them (Bryson, 2003).

The above theories around agency are critical to understanding both why female Sugar

Babies consider Sugar Dating as a means of economic support, how they view

themselves in light of the fact that Sugar Dating is viewed by the larger culture as

prostitution, and, finally, their perception of how much power they have to negotiate

the terms of their arrangements with Sugar Daddies. Giddens (1984) states that human

beings monitor themselves as well as others, a process he calls reflexivity. He states

that reflexivity is not just self-consciousness, but also a way to monitor and understand

what actions humans do and repeat on a daily basis. Human actions are purposive, but

are not always done consciously. Therefore, motives are hard to tie with actions and

most day-to-day actions are not directly correlated to the inspirational motive. Actions

can be better explained by intentions. Often, a person's intent does not result in the

desired consequences. Actions are considered fluid and on a continuum and they have a

historical and cultural legacy in each individual, in that the repeated acts have built

upon one another on a daily basis since the person was born. Hence, actions cannot be

discussed in isolation, as separate from the body, and with the individual's negotiations

with the surrounding world (Giddens, 1984).

  Referring back to individual subjectivities, clarifying the meaning of women's

lived experience as a starting point to understanding the structure of particular power

relations is imperative. Subjectivity is used to refer to the "conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Furthermore, post-structuralism recognizes that there are competing subjective realities and allows one to see how certain conditions are created, offering individuals a chance to change their perspectives and choices; it also opens the door for oppressive structures to be politically changed (p. 9). However, post-structuralism must also account for the resistances to change and understand why women tolerate social relations that subordinate their interests to those of men and the mechanisms "whereby women and men adopt particular discursive positions as representative of their interest" (Weedon, 1997, p. 12). Hence, agency is revealed as a critical concept in understanding this research location, and it becomes an appropriate tool for analysis in understanding the lived experiences of SA participants.

In sum, even with the changing discourse on the SA website, the essence of what the site is trying to do remains the same. While words may change to characterize the SA relationships, they are still marketed as mutually beneficial arrangements in which companionship is exchanged for monetary gain. With the average age for the Sugar Baby as 26 years old and 45 years old for the Sugar Daddy (Miller, 2012), the roles described on the SA website give the sense that these relationships are healthy, natural and beneficial (Motyl, 2013). The modern Sugar Baby (female or male) is a young, attractive and empowered individual and the modern Sugar Daddy is primarily male but always described as the sophisticated type that, due to financial wealth and

age, can be perceived as a mentor. Both of these characterizations are supposed to complement each other, as if this type of relationship is the destiny of the genders and the ideal prototype for an individual's age bracket.

On its surface, Seeking Arrangement differs significantly from escorting websites in that Sugar Dating presents itself as promoting long-term relationships and companionship, even though, as pointed out in Motyl's (2013) study, there is a paid per-visit arrangement. Furthermore, Motyl (2013) argues that Sugar Dating sites such as SA are a combination of escort sites and dating sites, making it difficult for law enforcement to hold any Sugar Dating site liable for the criminal conduct (namely prostitution) that may be occurring on the site. The social component of being out of the bedroom or hotel room and engaging in dinners, trips, and intimate encounters that foster emotional connection and mental stimulation separates itself from the "business" aspect of prostitution. However, Holts and Belvin (2007) characterize this type of social component as the "girlfriend experience" that one can find within the sex industry. Wexler (2013) argues that prostitution cannot be seen as exclusively non-emotional and transactional, because even with the "girlfriend experience," prostitution does not hold the same level of companionship and emotional connection as Sugar Dating.

While Sugar Dating may be a mixture of escorting and dating, the website also resembles (in its discourse) the traditional boyfriend or girlfriend experience, but with a more noticeable and formalized financial incentive (SeekingArrangement.com, 2015). As the present study will show the characterization of SA arrangements as being

natural can be destructive to the true desires and wants of both men and women. Living in a male-dominated world leads to pervasive ideologies of what is right and natural in society and highlights how women's economic inequality and insecurities reflect the negotiations women and men make over the economic and social value of sex and companionship.

In a patriarchal society, the theory of post-structuralism attempts to explain the concept of power and agency within SA sugar relationships. Both theories reject dichotomous statements and examine how meanings are constructed situationally and contextually. The point of using these theories here is to understand more about women's situations so that they can be challenged and changed. Comparably, post-structural critics are concerned with the meanings that individuals produce and the implications these meanings have on the existing social relations. Post-structuralism is essential to understanding the economic nature of dating, the importance of sexual exchange, and how gender norms are constructed.

Post-structuralists consider language as the very essence of identity and social reality (Weedon, 1997). The study of language as discourse began with Michel Foucault, who wanted to understand how power, language, social institutions and subjectivity interact, resist and depend upon each other (Weedon, 1997; Bryson, 2003; Mansfield, 2000). According to Foucault, power precedes the individual and the fabrication that an individual can exercise free will is the sole vehicle for power (1980b). Hence, the concept of agency refers not just to the intention of the individual but also the capability of doing things in the first place (Giddens, 1984). Therefore,

agency is the "habitual conditioning of the body that is conditioned and bounded by culturally constructed meanings in which actions, thoughts and perceptions are limited" (Ahearn, 2001). The agency of an individual tells a cultural and historical story that precedes that individual; accordingly, in order to observe and evaluate the actions and practices of an individual, it is important to take into consideration the culture the individual is in, what structures of power reside, and the desires and goals of the individual to understand the context and content of the given situation (Mahmood, 2001). This holistic view of individuals helps the researcher refrain from invalidating or criticizing the desires and goals of women and discounting their agency and instead allows one to go deeper into understanding why those desires exist and under what constraints. This insight into the complexity of agency and how it is influenced by power will guide the in-depth interviews and the analysis that follows.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Critical and feminist research fosters the recognition of politics that shape an individual's identity and her/his relationship to those politics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In order for critical researchers to not become self-serving in their beliefs and values, they must pursue rigorous self-reflection and account for the history and culture that impacted their points of view. While the purpose of critical research is to unveil the dominant ideologies present in western culture (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), those conducting critical research understand that there is no absolute truth outside of these ideologies but instead "a field of competing narratives about what is good, true, and possible in social life" (p. 55).

Therefore, "the chief value of qualitative research lies in achieving in-depth understanding of social reality in a specific context" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 109). One can achieve this understanding through qualitative interviewing, a social process that is co-created between the interviewer and the respondent. Qualitative research is not just about learning a topic but also learning what is important to those being studied (Rubin, H. & Rubin, I., 2005). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) state, "Ideally, what emerges is a richly expressive inter-view that neither person could have produced alone" (p. 171). Interviews have a referential purpose in that they point us to certain people, places and situations that will give us insight into particular settings. While a researcher searches for truth and reliable information, she/he must also remember that how or by what means a participant speaks on an event in the way he or she does is due

to her/his inherent biases. Thus, knowing the participant on multiple levels is important; the researcher must consider the participant's history, understand her/his perspectives and experiences, verify and validate her/his information, and gather other information that cannot be accrued during the formal interview process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

For this study, I conducted 12 respondent interviews in which the main goal was to determine what social constructs are influencing particular thoughts and actions and to understand the interpretations people assign to their agency. These interviews were conducted with the understanding that individuals use discourse to perform their identities and make sense of the social structure they are in (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 180). Discourse refers to "the ways in which narratives are patterned in both public and private conversation in reference to existing systems of power as they operate through cultural categories such as race, gender or socioeconomic positions" (as cited by Webber in Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 180). Hence, the words and discourses an individual uses when speaking are important and relevant, and they highlight how ingrained historical and cultural contexts are in each individual.

Due to the discreet nature of participants on the website Seeking Arrangement (most participants prefer discretion in all arenas), I used the method of snowball sampling. I conducted interviews in the past with SeekingArrangement.com participants and contacted these participants in order to be referred to potential new subjects. This strategy built a pool of respondents, reaching different age groups, sexual preferences, and demographics. One downfall of snowball sampling is that it

can introduce biases into the data due to the social referral mechanism. However, these "biases" can be interrogated if a set of particular characteristics are found to further one's interpretation of what is being understood by a particular set of respondents (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I also signed up on SeekingArrangement.com to recruit volunteers and generate another snowball sample. I created two different profiles on SeekingArrangement.com: one as a Sugar Daddy and another as a Sugar Baby. Both profiles identified me (including my institutional affiliations) and included a brief description of the study so that any SA member that looked on my profile could clearly see that it was for research purposes only. The spot reserved for a photo upload instead had the words "Student Researcher at CSU-Sacramento Conducting a Sugar Dating Study."

In addition, I performed basic searches using the website's internal search engines. These searches included choosing the United States as the country and a state from the drop down menu, as well as clicking on the most recently logged-in participants. Participants from each state (the first to show up in the search engine) were emailed (via the site) a short description of the study and an invitation to interview. Those that were recruited in the study were told that their participation would be voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. There was also no identifying information recorded and each participant received a pseudonym. A consent form including the potential risks and benefits of participation was read out loud to each respondent and each one was asked to state her/his name and her/his express agreement. The consent form was recorded (audio only) for each respondent. I

sent each respondent an electronic version of the consent form for her/his records [see Appendix A].

Each respondent's profile page was printed and read for further understanding of how the participant presents herself/himself. However, no personal information was stored, and the printed profiles were destroyed at the conclusion of this study. Each interview took one or two hours to complete and was recorded through Skype. The interviews were semi-structured, beginning with overarching questions, then narrowed in scope in order to gain a deeper understanding of the individual's experience [see Appendix B]. Follow-up questions were used to explain certain concepts and themes that emerged and spoke to my questions.

 In keeping with the confidentiality agreement, all Skype calls were recorded in audio format only; no video recording was conducted. The Skype names were separated from the responses and each respondent received a pseudonym (even if her/his Skype handle was already a pseudonym) to further protect their identity. Measures taken to insure confidentiality include storing all data in a password-locked computer and in a password-locked folder specifically created for this research project. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed and was coded and recoded by highlighting words, metaphors, concepts and symbols with a marker and classifying them into different categories creating dominant themes. According to van Manen (1990), isolating thematic statements can be done in three ways: by looking at the text

as a whole, looking at phrases that stand out, or looking at every single sentence. The

present study utilized the first two suggested approaches, examining the text as a whole

and the phrases that stand out. Categories were created by using concepts, constructs

and themes that appeared to be similar. Simple categories such as demographics (sex,

race, age, occupation, and education) were gathered as well. The categories were

aligned with the post-structuralist theory of power, subjectivity and agency, as I

examined how each person constructs her/his wants and desires and what she/he is

willing to do in a SA arrangement. Another category consisted of how the

arrangements start and develop. As more categories emerged, I considered how the

categories were related on a systemic and structural level within contemporary society.

I also looked for how certain words or phrases related to each other, making new

categories that represented Sugar Dating interactions and connections between these

new clusters and existing social phenomena.

In interpreting the data, a researcher must have an in-depth understanding of the

situation, the history and the biography of the explanations used by SA members

(Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). A feminist lens, specifically one centered on post-

structuralism, was used in the analysis so that a multifaceted interpretation could arise

out of the interviews, revealing how meaning may shift with certain words, metaphors

and concepts. This approach focuses on language and reality, and provides a means of

explaining the relationship between subjectivity, agency and power. Using a feminist

lens illuminates "the mechanisms whereby women and men adopt particular discursive

positions as representative of their interests" (Weedon, 1997, p. 12). These

commitments helped to clarify the discursive themes uncovered within the interview data offered by members of the community who play different and specific roles in sugar dating. When the feminist voice is silenced, important perspectives are lost within society. Therefore, a feminist critique is most useful when there is tension between a patriarchal dominant discourse and a minority voice, and when there is a need to bring about awareness of how oppression occurs.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESCRIPTION & ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Sugar Babies

Rebecca: Bisexual, Caucasian, 30 years old, Sugar Baby, BA Degree, Single, CA

Sasha: Bisexual, Caucasian, 31 years old, Fashion Stylist, Some College, Widow, CA

Lily: Straight, Caucasian, 21 years old, Deli worker, High School, Single Mother, NV

Margo: Straight, Caucasian, 24 years old, Sugar Baby, High School, Single, MI

Silvia: Straight, Caucasian, 28 years old, Yoga Teacher, High School, Single, CO

Skyer: Straight, Caucasian, 40 years old, Sugar Baby, Some College, Single, CA

The Sugar Babies interviewed have little to no college experience, with one exception. All of the Sugar Babies identify themselves as straight, except for two who identify as bisexual. All of the women are Caucasian. This sample group contains four single women, one widow and one woman who has a child and is currently single. Their professions vary greatly, from identifying as a Sugar Baby to a Yoga Teacher, Quiznos worker, or Fashion Stylist. All of the women depend greatly on the financial assistance of Sugar Daddies.

Sugar Daddies

Mark: Straight, Caucasian, 40 years old, Architect, Masters Degree, Married, CA

Louis: Straight, Caucasian, 42 years old, NA, Bachelors Degree, Married, CA

Elijah: Straight, Caucasian, 53 years old, Banker, Ph.D., Single, CA

Owen: Straight, Caucasian, 50 years old, CEO, Masters Degree, Separated, CA

Rico: Straight, Caucasian, 51 years old, Owner of Business, BS Degrees, Divorced, FL

Richard: Straight, Caucasian, 56 years old, VP of Sales, Masters Degree, Divorced, CA

The Sugar Daddies interviewed all have at least a college education. All of the Sugar Daddies identify as straight and are Caucasian. Two Sugar Daddies are married, one is separated, two are divorced and one identifies as single. Their professions vary greatly from architect to business owner, to VP of Sales to banker to CEO. One participant would not disclose his profession.

The sample group for this study was gathered using the snowball method. In this method, the first participant provided contact information for another Sugar Dater, who then referred the researcher to yet another participant and so on, thus creating a "snowball effect." While each of these 12 individuals had unique reasons for being involved in Sugar Dating, as well as unique experiences while Sugar Dating, several trends and themes emerged throughout the interview process.

One consistent trend was readily apparent concerning the logistics of the arrangement itself and how Sugar Daters initially communicate desires prior to negotiation. After a Seeking Arrangement member identifies another Sugar Dater with whom she/he might be interested, the first step is usually to send her or him a casual message, or what is called a "wink" within the SA community. After that first wink, ensuing communication involves the asking of basic questions in an attempt to gauge compatibility. There are several common questions that Sugar Daters feel comfortable

asking in order to get to know another member. For example, Richard states, "When you meet somebody from the website, the first thing they're asking you is, 'Why are you on the site, and how long have you been on the site? Have you seen anybody and how did that go?'" In other words, intentions and expectations regarding the arrangement are first communicated implicitly, saving the direct negotiation until after pleasantries and flirting have signaled a potential match. It appears that for both the female and male participants, the more successful they are at this initial gauging of potential compatibility, the more likely they are to find an arrangement that is consistent with the type of relationship they are looking for. Essentially, the degree of authenticity with which a Sugar Dater is able to communicate their experiences and expectations to another Sugar Dater, is related to their individual perception of power, and their exercise of that power.

Participants consistently reported feeling ambiguous when they first joined Seeking Arrangement; they were unsure about what they wanted in an arrangement and whether or not they belonged on the site at all. However, they typically admitted to joining because they were intrigued by the site's professional and upscale appearance, as well as the way in which the arrangements were described, i.e. "fun," "exciting," "uncomplicated" and "mutually beneficial." In addition, while most participants reported the desire to be straightforward with other SA members, many Sugar Daters also admitted to being hesitant about completely truthful about their own identity and intentions. This hesitation is likely related to a variety of influences, ranging from the association Sugar Dating has with prostitution to the simple fear of rejection. One

strategy commonly used by participants to overcome their fears and hesitations involves the internal rationalization of their behavior, as well as a simplification of the arrangement itself. In fact, the apparent simplicity of the Sugar Arrangement was what first drew them to the site, which perpetuates the perception that the site facilitates straightforward sex-for-money transactions. Interestingly, many Sugar Daters actively reject this perception of sex-for-money as a mischaracterization of the nature of Sugar Dating in favor of a more socially acceptable narrative. Many participants also sought to legitimize the arrangement by focusing on the companionship as primary and the economic transaction as secondary. The act of prioritizing companionship over money allows the Sugar Dater to conceive of the relationship as socially acceptable because, as one Sugar Dater, Margo, stated, "it's not just about sex." This strategy of controlling the narrative, especially as it relates to societal rules and stereotypes, is very important to consider when examining the dynamic nature of agency and power in the Sugar Dating culture.

<div align="center">Patriarchy, Agency & Power</div>

Sexual Chemistry

While SA members did exhibit a general reluctance to reveal the unmet needs they are seeking to fulfill with an arrangement, they were quite candid about the topic of sexual chemistry, and how sex relates to the general compatibility necessary for an arrangement to be successful. Whether sexual chemistry was related to the unmet needs

mentioned above remains to be seen; however, their answers seemed to indicate that arrangements lacking in sexual chemistry are unlikely to progress past a few preliminary meetings, further suggesting that sex plays a stronger role in determining the success of an arrangement than most participants readily admit. Further, their reluctance to admit the power sex has in an arrangement could be an attempt at self-preservation; in other words, since the outcome of the sexual interaction is outside of the control of the individual (i.e. the other person may decide not to continue the arrangement), the act of minimizing the importance of sex is an attempt at regaining some of that control, and thus, power.

That said, sex appeared to be key in establishing an arrangement. Sex usually entered the picture shortly after or sometimes even during the first meeting as a means of testing compatibility and chemistry. As Silvia, a Sugar Baby, stated:

I hadn't met him before. I'd talked to him on the phone and we'd had a number of e-mail conversations. We decided to meet for dinner. I asked him, overall, would he consider if the relationship moved on and worked out, was an allowance part of what he considered an arrangement. He said yes. And I asked him what kind of an allowance would we be talking about, and he said that it really would depend on how often we were able to get together. Quite honestly, until we found out if we had some chemistry and connection, as far as he was concerned, it's a discussion that he just wasn't ready to have.

Silvia's implication that an undetermined amount of additional courting, and opportunities for sex, would have to take place before the logistics of the arrangement

could be discussed in detail reveal that the sex has a real economic exchange value. To further illustrate this point, when a Sugar Daddy pays for an evening of dinner and drinks and the meeting also includes sex, such an arrangement is known as a "paid per visit," which basically translates into additional remuneration for the Sugar Baby. In describing this part of the process, Silvia stated, "In the beginning, it seems like you don't have any arrangements going, but it's kind of cyclic in the sense that you go through a lot of, I guess, dates, and a lot of times that involves sex to see if the chemistry is there, and yeah you do get paid for that time." This statement indicates that Silvia is engaging in what many may consider to be acts of prostitution in hopes of eventually finding an arrangement that involves not only sex, but companionship and chemistry as well.

While there may be many code words for sex, "chemistry" and "companionship" appear to be the most often used, seemingly to fit the narrative around sexual behaviors that are deemed socially acceptable. The use of such code words, particularly in the context of SA, are significant, as they are consistent with Foucault's understanding of the way we are constantly adapting our vocabulary to reflect modern values of society (i.e. the status quo). In short, the terms like "chemistry" and "companionship" are used to exonerate acts of prostitution and other behaviors considered unacceptable by American culture. As Longmore (1998) states, "that we are sexual is determined by a biological imperative toward reproduction, but how we are sexual - where, when, how often, with whom, and why – has to do with cultural learning, with meaning transmitted in a cultural setting" (p. 44). Hence, it can

be argued that it is more socially acceptable to say the words "companionship" and "chemistry" than other terms that directly refer to sex; arguably, this language helps Seeking Arrangement participants not only to characterize and make sense of the arrangements themselves, but package them to the outside world so that their behavior is not classified by others as prostitution.

Furthermore, using the words "chemistry" and "companionship" elevate the arrangement to a more traditional relationship, one that encompasses a modern set of values and thus, will be regarded in higher esteem (Primoratz, 1993). By resisting the traditional narrative of sex-for-money arrangements and proposing an alternative characterization of the motives of Sugar Daters, participants appear to be creating a space in the discourse that allows for them to challenge hegemonic thought. The male participants also emphasized the importance of chemistry when describing the initial stage of an arrangement process. For example, Richard offered this characterization of an arrangement:

> To me, there has to be a financial aspect, that's one cornerstone. There has to be an intimate part, that's another cornerstone. For me, for it to work successfully…and I've found several instances where it has, there has to be this chemistry and this connection, and relationship, even though it's not a 24/7 girlfriend/boyfriend situation. There still has to be a connection. If it's too much of, 'I want this amount of money, and then I'll sleep with you,' that doesn't work for me.

The insight provided here indicates Richard′s awareness of a financial motivation on behalf of Sugar Babies; however, he is also clearly stating his desire for a relationship beyond a sex-for-money transaction. Essentially, he is saying the same thing as Silvia: that while arrangements arguably contain components of prostitution, participants are also seeking a deeper connection in their arrangements that falls somewhere between prostitution and traditional dating. Furthermore, they apparently feel that the arrangements on SA can fulfill their unmet needs, financial and otherwise.

That said, some Seeking Arrangement participants acknowledge that prostitution can be the starting point for a compatible arrangement. According to Margo:

> I require five hundred [dollars] once we start dating and every time we go on a date and I need to have five hundred in my purse first and the date can't be any longer than a couple of hours because I need to go home and sleep. Once we start to get comfortable with each other and I start to feel secure then we can start talking about an allowance, but until then, five hundred is what I need right up front, every time.

Margo's statement suggests that despite a woman's economic need (and presumably her relative lack of power), she is acutely aware of how to make an arrangement worth her while and to insist upon these terms. She may indeed have an ultimate goal of finding companionship; however, that does not stop her from ensuring that first and foremost, her economic needs are met. After all, this is the reason why Seeking Arrangement is preferable to, for example, engaging in a one-night stand with someone

met at a bar or other socially acceptable dating practices in which money is not necessarily directly intertwined with sexual intercourse. On the other hand, arrangements are not the stereotypical portrayal of prostitution either (Motyl, 2013). Therefore, within the context of SA she is able to resist the social limitations that dictate which relationships are or are not acceptable and take advantage of her own situation. The power a Sugar Baby exercises within this context is, then, on a relational level and not a structural one.

To further illustrate this point, our understanding of subjectivity and our ability to act are constantly being governed by the values and definitions that have been socially constructed; therefore, the potential an individual has for choice, action, and agency depends upon her ability to interpret discourse as reflected in her daily behavior and self-expression (Weedon, 1997). Individual instances of resistance often appear in the form of refusing to accept a prescribed position within the status quo; however, in order for these acts of resistance to take place, the individual must first become *consciously* aware of the prevailing social conditions and the role they play in perpetuating structures of domination. For example, whether a woman engaging in multiple "paid-per-visits" will believe she is engaging in prostitution depends on which rhetoric she buys into – that of the larger culture, which would say she is, or the language of SA, which characterizes the arrangements as "fun" and "mutually beneficial." While it can be said that she is rebelling against the status quo by choosing a nontraditional route to companionship and financial gain, she is also, in the way she characterizes the arrangements and her acts of pursuing such arrangements, relegating

herself to a patriarchal structure which ultimately limits her options for agency and empowerment. It is only when she truly sees it *all* as rhetoric within the larger patriarchal structure, and her role within that structure, that she can begin to resist it. Without this awareness, regardless of her actions and negotiations within an arrangement, it can be argued that she is instead submitting to that patriarchal structure and, some may say, hindering her independence.

In any case, arrangements are clearly a blend of prostitution and traditional dating that allows participants to have experiences throughout the spectrum of romantic relationships. They can begin and remain as sex-for-money transactions, or evolve into something more substantial. As we will continue to see, it is this blending of prostitution and traditional dating that participants describe at various levels which allows for a more progressive discourse to be created with the hopes of being accepted in society – a discourse that incorporates the concepts of dating, companionship, and chemistry and ultimately affects the characterization of one's agency.

Mutually Beneficial

In addition to the importance of sexual chemistry, Richards's response also indicates the importance of establishing a "mutually beneficial" relationship (mutually beneficial being a phrase frequently used on the SA site and among its members. According to Mark, one of the male participants, the phrase "mutually beneficial" is a "euphemistic [term] about the fact that money is involved most of the time…for one of the people getting paid and the other person usually getting sex." The SA website

discusses the "mutually beneficial arrangement," a phrase acknowledged by the

members themselves to be a code that encompasses the financial component of Sugar

Dating. When joining SA, both men and women are fully aware that money will play a

significant role in determining whether or not an arrangement is formed, as well as in

terms of dictating the parameters of that arrangement, such as how many times a week

the Sugar Baby and Sugar Daddy will see each other. Rather than going on a typical

first date, SA members often meet for the first time to see whether there is enough

chemistry in order to justify an allowance (namely, the money paid on an ongoing basis

by the Sugar Daddy in exchange for the Sugar Baby's companionship). As was

revealed in the interviews, sex is often part of the criteria in determining whether the

arrangement will move forward, but the regular characterization of the arrangements as

mutually beneficial also illustrates how participants view the power dynamic in terms

of knowing who brings what to the table. Additionally, it reflects that one′s influence

within the arrangement is directly related to her/his understanding of the other Sugar

Dater′s needs and desires, and an ability to fulfill them.

Sugar Baby Rebecca contends that the arrangement is not necessarily all about

sex, "But an arrangement is literally an exchange of money for companionship and that

companionship can either be with or without sex." Again, the use of coded phrases and

euphemisms such as "chemistry" and "companionship" serves to broaden the narrative

around arrangements, a conscious effort made by those in the Sugar Community to

validate their actions and desires by associating arrangements with traditional

relationships. Yet Lily's characterization of an ideal arrangement supports the theory of

a more traditional characterization of dating: "It is two people who have an understanding that they will take care of each other, so it's a mutually beneficial relationship. It's a relationship, it's like dating, there is a significant amount of trust and there is some sort of connection or understanding that needs to happen about the situation, not just 'pay me this much for this amount of time'." By characterizing Sugar Dating in such a way, Lily has revealed that while SA is a nontraditional platform, Sugar Dating can operate according to traditional constructs of romantic relationships. Also significant about Lily's answer is that it illustrates how Sugar Dating can evolve from prostitution-like arrangements to a more traditional relationship, in addition to suggesting that prostitution-like arrangements can result in a significant amount of "trust" and "connection."

In examining the work of Abigail (2014), Miller (2012), Bryson (1999, 2003), and other feminist writers as they apply to the context of SA, one could make the argument that the difference between Sugar Dating and traditional heterosexual relationships is simply a matter of degree, considering that historically, it was the man who brought more financial resources to a relationship and often used those resources to provide for the woman's material comforts. It can also be argued that, historically, women sought relationships with men of financial means, and furthermore, that this goal still exists today, regardless of whether they are seeking those relationships online or organically, thereby perpetuating the patriarchal construct of man as provider. Interestingly, while traditional gender roles as they pertains to economic status and marriage are socially acceptable in American culture (because marriage and romance

are the goals in said culture) (Primoratz, 1993), a woman on SA who desires the same things is criticized for the way she goes about seeking them. It can therefore be argued that while power insofar as it relates to the economic needs of the Sugar Baby is similar to the dynamic found in the traditional heterosexual relationship, SA arrangements fall outside the traditional discourse and as a result are deemed "immoral" and "abnormal" (Motyl, 2013).

Financial Need

As mentioned above, when female participants were asked what drew them to Sugar Culture, the topic of economic need invariably came up. Their answers revealed how more often than not, female participants resorted to maintaining hegemonic discourses on gender and money by seeking out men to meet their economic needs, thus succumbing to the patriarchal idea that an adequately resourced male is better suited to solve a woman's problems than she is. As Margo recalled, "I was having a hard time financially and I was familiar with Sugar Daddies because I had one before and was accustomed to that lifestyle and was sort of in panic mode so I decided to find myself another Sugar Daddy." Overall, the responses seemed to indicate that women accustomed to the lifestyle provided by Sugar Dating chose not to access other means of economic survival.

According to the participant known as Rebecca, the Sugar Dating relationship typically involves a female in some type of financial need and a male in need of companionship, friendship, or somebody he can help support and mentor. When

Rebecca was asked more about what these financial needs look like, she replied, "I have college loans, but then he ended up supporting me in more ways than one and then I was financially dependent on him for almost all things while I tried to figure out what my next career step was." This response implies that Rebecca feels stuck in a situation where she is financially dependent on one man; however, she still maintains that she did benefit from the arrangement, having enjoyed the companionship and the mentorship she believed the older gentleman was providing her. Rebecca also shared some intimate thoughts and details during the interview, including how she had felt empowered when she had multiple arrangements; it was after finding one long-term arrangement that she started to feel trapped. Her suitor had put her through school, bought her a new car, paid off her loans, and paid her rent. She had been a Sugar Baby for almost six years, during which she had plenty of free time and the resources to spend lavishly; this "freedom," she said, made her feel like an empowered independent woman, despite the fact that she had gained little employment experience. Given the way Rebecca characterizes her understanding of personal empowerment - as a direct consequence of being able to live a lifestyle she could not have attained without Sugar Dating - we must then examine the extent to which her sense of empowerment is in the hands of the Sugar Daddy.

It appears it was only after Richard, Rebecca's Sugar Daddy, decided to call things off that she realized how dependent on him she had become. She had not completed her schooling and she was not working; it seemed like her world had fallen apart. "It was more like work and like I had more confidence and independence when I

had multiple Sugar Daddies and did not rely on just one man. I had gotten comfortable with Richard." At this point Rebecca did not want to go back to Sugar Dating, yet the alternative was terrifying. She suddenly felt unsure of herself--where would she work and how would she manage her money now that her one financial resource - and a generous one - had evaporated.   If agency is defined as the socio-mediated capacity to act and, in this case, the resistance to a patriarchal structure, one might ask whether Rebecca felt like she had choice in the manner. Did she feel like she had power? Within the context of SA, it seems that power stems from a sense of having control, and that control appears to be related to feeling a sense of predictability and consistency, in terms of knowing that you are safe in your role and can't be easily replaced.

Rebecca said, "Power is the one that is in control, the one that is able to influence another person, the one that can leave the situation if they so choose." Power relates to choice on divaricating levels, for, as Foucault argues, power is more discursive than coercive and constitutes agency rather than being deployed by one's agency, suggesting that the connections between individual choice, power, and agency are not black and white (Fillingham, 1993). Within the context of Sugar Dating, the way power manifests itself is complicated by several influencing factors, not the least of which is sex. Rebecca for example, exhibits a tremendous amount of agency is her arrangements, as she chose to get into them and, although risky at times, she chose to get out of them. What she did not choose is the fact that she grew up socially conditioned in a patriarchal system that taught her to believe that sex, and therefore her

body, was something that could be commodified. It was not until she consciously realized how dependent she was on a man that she wanted out, and that her former sense of empowerment was simply an illusion, which was shattered when the meaning of independence changed for her. Therefore, the element of power in SA is a constantly evolving narrative that has less to do with what happens to a Sugar Baby, and more to do with how she reacts to it.

The female Sugar Babies who participated in this study all depend upon Sugar Dating as their sole source of income, a fact that seemed to strongly influence how they characterized their status within an arrangement. When asked about the issue of choice and Sugar Dating, the majority of the Sugar Babies indicated that they ultimately had a choice about whether or not to seek out arrangements. They also made astute observations about the different social influences and economic pressures that inform these decisions, in that they were at least to some degree gender-based. Silvia, for example, gave this explanation for why she began Sugar Dating: "I got myself into a situation where I didn't really feel I had a choice. I needed money, you know? And those are choices that both affect men and women. When women are backed into a corner sometimes they put their values aside." Silvia seems to be suggesting here that because of her financial need, she has had to engage in behavior that she would not otherwise consider, perhaps even things she finds unsavory. More importantly, she indicates that it is acceptable, even expected, that women will have to engage in such behaviors in order to survive (and men will not). Arguably, the sentiment Silvia is expressing here has to do with the spectrum of economic opportunities that are made

available to men in a way that they are not for women, due to the very long sociocultural history of systemic oppressions perpetuated by the patriarchy. Silvia speaks to the experience many young women face when they feel they have run out of viable options, given their current set of circumstances. While the narrative seen in this part of Silvia's story appears to simplify the complexities behind the concepts of choice and value, it is important to consider why she characterizes her situation as one with few options.

According to Kandiyoti (1988), "the term patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders" (p. 98). The point made here by Kandiyoti is that patriarchy is more complex than "male dominance" and acknowledging this is essential to our understanding of the various manifestations of power within the world of Sugar Dating. It is within each individual woman's description of her experience that we will then see the examples of "patriarchal bargains," which are illustrated by how she negotiates within the gendered confines of the SA culture. Therefore, based on our understanding of agency within the context of the Sugar Babies' responses, we can also think of these patriarchal bargains as a means through which the Sugar Baby can ascribe some sort of power to herself while negotiating within the patriarchal power structure.

Patriarchal Discourse

The responses of both female and male participants are consistent with Gerda Lerner's understanding of the creation of patriarchy in relation to how gender roles have evolved according to our social values, specifically, the juxtaposition between gender and class. In other words, the Sugar Babies are gaining access to a lifestyle they probably would not have had if they were not involved in Sugar Culture, while the men seemed to indicate that the Sugar Baby is just one more woman they support. Consequently, the supposed psychological and financial dependence of women upon men is a direct result of centuries of systemic socioeconomic oppression (Lerner, 1986). One compelling example of this social convention, as evidenced in this study, was a statement made by Owen, a Sugar Daddy: "I have been the provider and been financially responsible for several women in my life. To me, it's an extension of that. [SA] is a little more straightforward than that." Terms like "provider" and "father figure" are applied in the context of Sugar Dating, especially by Sugar Daddies, to rationalize the financial aspect of the arrangement without compromising the image of themselves as virile men. These terms are consistent with patriarchal constructions of gender, especially in relation to the man's role in a heterosexual relationship. The Sugar Daddy known here as Louis revealed the importance of this narrative when he said, "A Sugar Daddy is at the other end of the universe; he is the father figure, the strong archetype, the provider, the wisdom, and he is a little bit older. 'Sugar' means that he is a little more extravagant than your typical daddy." The paternalistic characterization of the Sugar Daddy's role as described by Louis facilitates the

patriarchal narrative by normalizing and justifying his motivations in relation to Sugar Dating. In other words, by comparing his role to that of a caring and devoted father, the Sugar Daddy shifts the focus of the narrative onto the dependence the Sugar Baby has on him and away from any dependence he may have on her.

Female Sugar Babies had similar responses with regard to the image and role of a Sugar Daddy. When asked about the respective roles of Sugar Daters, Sugar Baby Margo replied:

> I would say it's indulgent…somewhat experimental and I think it is about someone looking to upgrade their life. This is not a vanilla site or a fetish site but it is kind of an ultimate lifestyle site and an upgrade from the life a lot of women are in, the kind of circumstance where they prefer not to be. Other women might be doing okay by themselves but I think they like being taken care of financially. There is something about it that is primal. You know, the white knight goes out and slays the dragon and brings home the golden stuff not for himself but for the princess, and there is something there in that culture as well.

Margo's characterization of the interaction as "primal" demonstrates her belief and/or acceptance that having a man who protects and provides is not only a normal desire for women, but an *innate* one. She then connects that with the language on the site, thereby acknowledging that on some level Seeking Arrangement is tapping into and perpetuating the paternalistic narrative. Further illustrating the patriarchal discourse, Sasha stated,

>To be mutually beneficial is like the arranged marriages where there was a
>
>dowry. The women are in need of financial help and the male can provide that
>
>in exchange for companionship and some romance. So I guess to be mutually
>
>beneficial is like a legal contract in some ways, unless the relationship evolves
>
>and becomes something more voluntary or just evolves naturally to a more
>
>typical relationship, I guess.

The willingness to accept such a narrative is important for both female and male Sugar

Daters, as it allows them to *consciously* conceive of the exchange within patriarchy's

limits on sex and gender. Arguably, the hegemonic characteristics of Sugar Daddies as

providers and protectors, coupled with the economic vulnerability of female Sugar

Daters, maintains the patriarchal construct of the strong, affluent man and the docile

and needy woman.

Furthermore, there is a certain willingness to surrender to the status quo of

Sugar Dating, as it is only by operating within that status quo that they can become

empowered subjects, and thus perceive themselves as having any sense of real control

over the direction and outcome of the arrangement. This willingness to embrace a

culture that arguably perpetuates a historically oppressive structure relates directly to

Foucault's understanding of subjectivity and power, because power is defined as a set

of relations to the subject, not just in the form of domination but in the form of

possibility as well. The possibility accessed by the Sugar Baby within the discourse is

manifested in her choices, as well as in her ability to understand those choices in

relation to the prevailing social conditions.

<u>Manhood</u>

While providing financial and other forms of support are inherently part of the Sugar arrangement, the validation men are seeking on SA is not fulfilled by providing these services, so much as it is by the experience of being wanted and needed by a younger, attractive woman. Since "real" manhood in the patriarchy is so heavily predicated on a man's ability to be sexually involved with a woman, it is reasonable to argue that the narrative on masculinity is a driving force behind the motivations of a Sugar Daddy. As Mark stated, "One of the reasons why I did this was because I wanted to believe that somebody younger and attractive would be interested in me. What I found in a few cases was that I truly believe that they weren't doing it only for the money." On the one hand, a Sugar Daddy will meet young women because of his financial status, yet on the other hand these men are never sure whether they are desirable beyond their ability to provide. While it is certainly possible that at least some Sugar Babies have genuine romantic feelings for their Sugar Daddies, the fact is that the socioeconomic component will always muddy the waters, in terms of understanding why members are really drawn to the site in the first place. Ultimately, however, the Sugar Baby's true motivation for seeking his attention is irrelevant, for the Sugar Daddy can prove his manhood to himself by virtue of the fact that she is there.

When Charles was asked about his reasons for joining SA, he replied, "The validation part, because you kind of skip like if you're not very outgoing or you don't have a lot of friends who are in the demographic of people that you're interested or

whatever. You sort of skip all that." Essentially, by signing on to be a Sugar Daddy, these men are able to circumvent social insecurities that might otherwise hinder them. The site gives them access to a variety of young women to choose from, thereby sustaining their ego while simultaneously allowing them to prove their manhood to themselves and other men. Interestingly though, it appears that the Sugar Daddy's sense of empowerment stems from his ability to fulfill the traditional gender role of masculine heterosexual male, while the Sugar Baby's sense of power more often relates to how successful she is at breaking the traditional rules of gender normativity. Seemingly, a Sugar Daddy's sense of empowerment (stemming from his feeling of being proven as a "real man"), is more strongly related to concepts of masculinity (i.e., wealth, power, prestige, strength, independence). On this subject, Owen stated, "What am I trying to prove? I've proved this to myself over and over again. I don't talk to anybody else about it." When asked, "What is it that you are proving?" he replied, "I don't know. Maybe it is about self-worth, a sense of accomplishment and status." Perhaps it is not that Owen is trying to prove anything to anyone; rather, his sense of achievement and fulfillment provided by SA is more directly related the fact that Sugar Dating sustains an essence of his manhood in ways that other relational activities do not.

Consenting to "Reality"

Similarly, the response patterns of female participants to this particular interview question indicated that expectations of Sugar Arrangements are gendered,

meaning that the way women and men describe their expectations for the relationship

relates directly to patriarchal discourses on gender roles in heterosexual relationships.

Sasha, a thirty-year-old widow, found the idea of someone taking care of her

financially and emotionally appealing. She said, "I guess I was just kind of hoping…

like I am a hopeless romantic and I kind of wanted someone to fall in love with me and

take care of me. That was really more my intention, I think." This statement seems to

reflect the typical narrative around marriage in a patriarchal society, depicting a

paternalistic husband and his devoted wife. As this image is socioculturally ingrained

in the minds of girls and boys from a young age and is often carried into adulthood

(Primoratz, 1993), it is not surprising that SA members also believe this narrative is the

standard for an ideal relationship. These expectations, however, do not reflect the

reality of Sugar Dating as experienced by the female participants. Sasha, for example,

was quite devastated when she realized how crass some of the men on the site were for

example, asking for one-night stands and naked video cam sessions. After that, "I

learned I had to be more realistic about my expectations, that the expectation for sex

was more dominant than them wanting to actually take care of me." In fact, each of the

female participants expressed the need to take a more realistic approach to Sugar

Dating, as opposed to pursing a relationship based only on a romanticized notion of the

perfect man.

In addition to what they expected of their Sugar Daddy, the female participants

also expressed the importance of being realistic about the Sugar Daddy's expectations

of them. Margo, for example, described the ideal relationship as such:

An arrangement is where you find a man with a particular set of resources that you are interested in and vice versa. There needs to be a match where he finds your resources a particular fit for him. But you need to be realistic about what you have to offer…you need to know what really makes you special or different from all the other girls that are after that man as well. For example, if you are of lower class and shop at Walmart, you are not going to get the sophisticated jetsetter that is the CEO of Google.

Interestingly, Margo's response reveals the effects of gender and class socialization on the perceptions of the Sugar Daters themselves; namely, that women are expected to have the looks and demeanor to attract a wealthy man who will then take care of them. That is not to say that business and romance are mutually exclusive; however, the Sugar Babies participating in this study were very clear that some degree of monetary compensation was a necessary component of the arrangement. Skyler, who had been Sugar Dating for over five years, stated, "There are many levels I guess you can say to an arrangement, but for me personally, I am looking for a deep connection. It is not just financial. Finances do come into play, though, because why else are you on the site?" While the desire for a deep connection is what differentiates Sugar Dating from prostitution, it should be noted that the importance of connection was not emphasized nearly as often as was the importance of money. When asked the question, "If you found the deep connection and chemistry you were looking for but he was not offering what you wanted financially, would you still pursue the relationship?" The majority of the female participants' responses indicated they would not be inclined to do so.

These responses suggest that power in Sugar Dating is exercised according to the patriarchal narrative on gender and gender roles, and perceived and articulated in the same hegemonic vein of thinking that reinforces Foucault's capillary analogy. For example, Foucault asserts that it is within the discourse and repeated practices informing our everyday lives that one can make sense of herself as subject. In a Foucauldian sense, "In practice we speak ourselves into existence and thus become objects of our own and others' discursive practices" (Foucault as cited in Davies, 1991, p. 47). Individuals repetitiously create and co-create their lives through the use of discourse. As a result, the power of discourse governs our actions and defines our situations and subjects. Subjectivity as it relates to Sugar Dating is particularly important when discussing power, as evidenced by the reoccurring themes present in the Sugar Baby interviews. With the theme concerning the issue of being realistic with one's expectations, particularly around what is expected of *her*, the Sugar Baby Lily explains, "First of all, you need to know that your Sugar Daddy wants a young beautiful woman. We are not always going to be young and beautiful. All women should know this." Similarly, Sugar Baby Rebecca revealed:

> Guys, and I guess girls too, are very easily distracted. No matter how much you are enjoying the honeymoon of the relationship, the honeymoon goes away and a lot of times, with guys that are wealthy, they need that thrill of a young woman. When somebody can have everything…you know what I mean. So I think it is important to have a really realistic idea of how long a female can do this and what to expect in terms of her youth.

In one sense, Sugar Babies assign value to their beauty, youth, and vitality as they can

yield rewards from those characteristics in the forms of financial security and

mentorship. It is therefore interesting that this realism is where their perceived power

lies. The notion that Sugar Babies have a "shelf life" was common and accompanied by

the fear that access to these lucrative relationships would fade along with their beauty.

As Sasha stated, "I am young and beautiful so I feel I can get almost any guy I try to

get, but you have to be realistic about what that will get you in the long run. Will I find

my Prince Charming? I sure hope so. But for how long will he keep me?" It is almost

as if Sasha is (subjectively) aware of the role she is supposed to play, and steps into

that role easily, but always keeping in mind that one day, this option will be closed to

her (Mansfield, 2000, p. 124). However, this statement also reveals Sasha's

apprehension over her loss of control, and thus her lack of power, over when and how

her Sugar Daddy might end the relationship. As Silvia stated, "I already know what

type of guys I can get. I already know that this helps me, but not in the long run. Looks

only get you so far…then what?" It is not quite clear whether Silvia's ultimate aim

would be a more traditional (romantic) relationship or a financially-based arrangement;

however, in either case, her answer does reveal a certain amount of cynicism in that she

relies on her looks and expects to be at a disadvantage once they have faded. The

significance of these two women's responses is twofold: on the one hand, they reveal

the awareness on the part of female Sugar Daters that regardless of their financial

position they do have power in an arrangement and that the exercise of this power

stems from their sexuality and their ability to be perceived as young, attractive and

sexually available. On the other hand, they are also aware that this power is tenuous, temporary and ultimately determined by the aesthetic taste of their Sugar Daddy. In other words, it does not matter what label is placed on the relationship; in either case, the woman's equality is an illusion and her empowerment has an expiration date.

The term "being realistic" is also used very differently by the men and women on the SA site. Men seem to be determined to avoid being realistic, and more interested in establishing their manhood and escaping their "real" lives. On the other hand, female Sugar Daters were very aware of the need to be realistic about their position; namely, they seemed to suggest that while women may have some power in the arrangement, it stemmed solely from their youth and beauty and gave them just enough leeway to set certain boundaries. However, they were also painfully aware that whatever power they have will inevitably fade along with their looks, leaving them staring at a precarious and uncertain financial future. None of the Sugar Babies indicated that they had an alternate plan to provide for themselves should Sugar Dating not work out. This indicates that the Sugar Daddy's contentment with the arrangement is less likely to go through the ebbs and flows in the way that a Sugar Baby's level of contentment does.

It's All About Having "Fun"

Another theme consistently presented by the participating Sugar Daters is that of fun, as evidenced by the use of this word in characterizing the arrangement process. By characterizing arrangements as "fun", the Sugar Dater absolves herself or himself of the emotional responsibility or entanglements traditionally associated with romantic

relationships; the context is paramount when analyzing the ways in which women and men conceptualize fun within such an arrangement. While both the Babies and Daddies being interviewed used the word fun to describe Sugar Dating, the implications of this so-called fun are gendered. The Sugar Daddies described their desire for fun with a matter-of-fact attitude that seemed to indicate their awareness that they were in some extent paying for it; this was not surprising, considering that these men are arguably supporting and perpetuating a patriarchal bargain that has existed, in one form or another, throughout history. In discussing his reasons for joining SA, Rico said he wanted "just to meet somebody and go have fun and have a really fun time. And we are going to live life. You know, everybody gets to write their own life story and I get to write mine." While there is nothing malicious or explicitly sexist about Rico's admission, he appears to be unaware of underlying social constructs that may have led to his Sugar Baby's circumstances and her decision to enter into the arrangement.

In this regard, Rico and other Sugar Daddies appear to fit into Cool's (1988) contention that men tend to be unaware of gender inequality. They may also not be aware of the complexities of a Sugar Baby's situation for the simple reason that these women do not, in looks and demeanor, appear desperate in the way one normally might associate with a prostitute. To the Sugar Daddies, a female Sugar Baby is just a woman who wants to have fun and live an upscale lifestyle. Couple that with the fact that the man wants to believe she enjoys his company—as much as, if not more, than his money—and he is much less likely to think of her as a victim. As Elijah states, "Ideally, it's this weird combination of living in the moment, and having fun without

extreme amounts of depth, as far as knowing all the trials and tribulations of each other's lives." The fun narrative caters to the Sugar Daddy's needs and builds the male ego at the expense of the subjectivity of the woman. Again, it is noteworthy to mention the awareness most Sugar Babies appear to have of the reality behind this discourse. For example, as Sasha stated, "A typical arrangement is usually someone in their twenties who needs help with their financial debt, usually college loans, and a Sugar Daddy is usually married and just wants to have fun." This narrative encourages both men and women to dismiss the real economic need in which Sugar Babies find themselves, while at the same time promoting and perpetuating the very fantasy that leads men to the site in the first place.

In sharp contrast, the Sugar Daddies who were interviewed appeared far less concerned with being realistic and much more likely to use the word "fun" when describing their expectations around Sugar Dating. Their responses indicated that fun is synonymous with a desire to avoid emotional entanglements. Rico, for example, stated, "I just wished I could have laid it all on the table…let's get everything out there, then move on and have fun…not be worried about a relationship and what kind of guy or gal are you, and what will my family think of you." Elijah, another Sugar Daddy, said, "For the first year we just had fun. We did have a connection, we did have chemistry, but we just had fun." The fun narrative perpetuated by these Sugar Daddies serves the patriarchy in the sense that it allows the man to continue to focus on his job and/or family without sacrificing his entitlement to fun. According to Charles, who had been on the site for three months, "From the get-go, at least from my perspective, it's

this: when we're together, we're together, and we're having fun, and when we are with each other we are just focused on each other. It takes out obligation." Richard, who had been an SA member for two years at the time of the interview, echoed these sentiments and said, "It's a weird dynamic. Let's have fun; let's enjoy each other while we're together. That's the definition of a no-strings-attached kind of relationship. Not that depths do not form, it's impossible not to, but you can be selective about what you reveal about yourself and not have to feel guilty about it." The consistent use of the word "fun" presumes a lighthearted relationship of limited duration and accountability; however, beneath this loaded term lies the very real socioeconomic inequality inherent in the patriarchal structure. This inequality is evidenced by the female participants' interviews, in which they expressed an interest in finding "Prince Charming" while acknowledging that finding this kind of mate is not likely on SA and will become less so as the Sugar Babies get older.

While Sugar Babies also cited fun as part of the arrangement, it was clearly secondary to the financial incentive. Their first priority was making sure their bills were paid, while any fun that was had became part of the way in which they would justify Sugar Dating to themselves. In fact, their use of the word fun reveals not only the differences between Sugar Babies and Daddies, but also between the average Sugar Baby and other young women in their age demographic. While many college-age women would cite fun as something they are seeking in their romantic life, non-Sugar Daters would be more likely to be involved with men they consider peers (closer to their own age and socioeconomic status, such as another college student), and therefore

someone with whom they are at least theoretically on equal footing (Motyl, 2013).

While there would arguably still be an imbalance of power (to the extent that all

traditional heterosexual relationships involve an imbalance of power), the woman

would not assume her livelihood would be dependent on this "fun" relationship (Motz,

2014).

The use of seemingly innocuous phrases such as "being realistic" and "having

fun" are in fact illustrative of how language contributes to the power of discourse,

especially when it comes to comparing how women and men perceive of their

subjectivity within this discourse. It is important to remember that the words we use

have been socioculturally created, thereby dictating how discourses have formed and

evolved throughout human history. It is language and discourse that create our

existence; we are mere objects living through what our discourses have created. The

language of Sugar Dating, as understood, used, and internalized by its participants,

perpetuates the hegemonic gender roles displayed in Sugar Dating. For example, if an

arrangement is not "fun" for a Sugar Daddy, he can move on to the next with his life

still intact. However, for the Sugar Baby, the stakes can be much higher (i.e. if the

Sugar Daddy is not having fun he may end the relationship and presumably cut off her

means of support). Similarly, if a Sugar Baby is not "realistic" about her position, she

may end up alone once her looks have faded. "Fun" for her is completely different; in

fact, it has a few different meanings. On the surface, fun is simply an enjoyable time,

similar to what most young women would seek in a relationship. However, the

interviews with Sugar Babies reveal that the SA kind of fun can seem more like a job

requirement. The implication here is that if the Sugar Baby is not fun, the Sugar Daddy may end the arrangement and take away her sole support, forcing her to find one or more other Sugar Daddies to fill the gap in income. For the Sugar Babies, fun can be synonymous with pressure.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

It is clear from the interviews with Seeking Arrangement members, and from researching other online dating sites, that Sugar Dating occupies a space between traditional online dating and commercial sex work. In many ways, Seeking Arrangement.com is similar to other dating sites such as Match.com, eHarmony and Christian Mingle, particularly around the substantial time investment involved in finding a suitable match. All of these sites require members to create an in-depth profile, first answering a series of questions about their likes, dislikes, career, education, quirks and, most importantly, what they want from a match. The users are then asked to write an engaging biographical statement in which they essentially "sell themselves" as someone who is intelligent, funny, caring, spiritual, et cetera. She or he must also learn how to navigate the site; for example, Match.com members are permitted to search through thousands of profiles for people in whom they might be interested but who for whatever reason were classified as a match by the website. Over time, users learn how to adjust their search parameters so as to discern which members with whom they are likely to be compatible.

There exists a significant difference, of course, between the Seeking Arrangement website and traditional dating sites such as Match, Christian Mingle and e-Harmony. While such sites hold themselves out to be brokers of meaningful relationships, even marriages, SA discusses the "mutually beneficial arrangement," a phrase acknowledged by the members themselves to be a code that encompasses the

financial and sexual components of Sugar Dating. When joining SA, both men and women are fully aware that money will play a significant role in whether or not an arrangement is formed, as well as the parameters of that arrangement (for example, how many times a week the Sugar Baby and Sugar Daddy will see each other and how much, if any, sexual contact is involved). As was revealed in the interviews, sex is often part of the criteria in determining whether the arrangement will move forward. It is this business negotiation that would appear to place Sugar Dating squarely in the corner of prostitution.

On the other hand, if one examines the work of Abigail (2014), Miller (2012), Bryson (1999, 2003), and other feminist writers, it can be argued that the difference between Sugar Dating and traditional heterosexual relationships is simply a matter of degree. Throughout history it has been accepted that husbands are the financial providers, and that women seek out men of financial means as ideal romantic and marital partners. It can also be argued that this is still the case, despite advancements for women in professional and financial spheres. For example, Match.com advertises that it is responsible for more relationships resulting in marriage than any other dating site, yet while building their profiles, members have the option not only to include their own salary, but also to check a box indicating the salary range of a desirable match. Users of Match.com can they accept or reject a person based solely on financial standing, and without stating this decision as the reason for acceptance or rejection. In fact, according to Wrenn (2014), men who claim low salaries often receive much less attention from women, as do men who check "Would rather not say" on their profile.

By not revealing their salaries, Wrenn (2014) states, they are written off as low earners and largely ignored. The major difference between Match and SA, then, is that in Sugar Dating the financial component is placed right out there on the negotiating table.

The notion that Sugar Dating conforms to the patriarchal construct is further evidenced by the responses given by the 12 participants with regard to their desires and expectations around arrangements. For the most part, Sugar Daddies appeared to be interested in escaping from their normal lives, which, although privileged, may be lacking in some other way, such as excitement or sex. Moreover, their answers seemed to indicate that they were seeking validation as men that are sought after by several younger, attractive women. They were well aware that they would have to pay for this validation; however, their ability to do so only served to further bolster their ego. In this way, SA fulfills the vision of its founder, Brandon Wade. Wade's statement that he was a "nerd" and often passed over by attractive women was his impetus for creating a site that, for the right price, allows men to draw the attention of these women, all from the comfort of their own homes.

Sugar Babies, on the other hand, seemed to be much more interested in the financial component of the arrangement. Their responses to the interview questions revealed that they had joined SA due at least in part to financial need and their belief that a Sugar Daddy could improve their situation. This sentiment was consistent regardless of the age of the Sugar Baby, which ranged from 21 to 40 years old. Furthermore, the women participating in this study were fairly experienced Sugar Daters and seemed to consider such arrangements viable means of support. The

responses of both male and female Sugar Daters appeared to indicate that they were

perpetuating the patriarchal discourse, whether they were aware of it or not.

Like all dating websites, Seeking Arrangement uses certain euphemistic phrases

that serve to describe and therefore shape the discourse around the relationships

facilitated through the site. However, while Sugar Daddies and Sugar Babies use the

same words, the totality of their responses indicate that they assign very different

meanings to them. The terms "being realistic" and "fun" were particularly revealing in

this regard. For Sugar Daddies, having fun appeared to be the primary motivating

factor in joining the site. By all accounts, these men live full lives. They are educated,

wealthy, and successful; some even have wives and children. To them, having an

arrangement with a young, beautiful woman is just another way for them to experience

everything life has to offer. If an arrangement does not work out, they can either find

another Sugar Baby or they can leave the site entirely with the rest of their existence

intact. For Sugar Babies, however, the concept of fun was a bit more complicated, for

while it connoted an enjoyable time, the responses from the Sugar Babies also

indicated a certain amount a pressure to make the arrangement fun, lest the Sugar

Daddies decide to end the arrangement and possibly leave them in a precarious

financial situation, as in Rebecca's case.

The term "being realistic" is also used very differently by the men and women

on the SA site. Men seem to be determined to avoid being realistic, as escaping their

"real" lives was their reason for being there in the first place. Their responses indicated

a need to believe that these women were with them for more than just financial

reasons; hence the insistence from multiple Sugar Daddies' responses that everyone on the site had "chosen" to be there. On the other hand, female Sugar Daters were very aware of the need to be realistic about their position; namely, they seemed to suggest that while women may have some power in the arrangement, it stemmed solely from their youth and beauty and gave them just enough leeway to set certain boundaries. However, they were also painfully aware that whatever power they have will inevitably fade along with their looks, leaving them looking at a precarious and uncertain financial future. None of the Sugar Babies indicated that they had an alternate plan to provide for themselves should Sugar Dating not work out.

In examining this unique culture through the lens of Foucault and others' studies on power, the gap between Sugar Dating and traditional relationships appears even narrower. Since there is no true self that one can recover, one must self-create and resist and become aware, first and foremost, of the societal prescriptions and dictations of what one ought to be. Even so, the individual will continually reproduce herself or himself in relation and response to cultural and historical contexts and will strive for truths that will forever be drawn away (Mansfield, 2000). This Foucauldian sense of power is ubiquitous and circulatory because it comes from every strand of existence, discourse, and situation, and is ingrained in the very essence of who we are. More importantly, this circulation of power is never possessed but rather exercised and can be both coercive and productive at the same time (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 2000). Power is considered to be productive because it can shape and mold the values and practices of people, and it is also considered coercive in the constraints that are put

on this production (for example: how one goes about incorporating those values or practices as well as what is deemed acceptable and/or abiding by the rules that follow in a given culture). Power naturally produces resistance (Foucault, 1980a) because discourses and forms of knowledge are not natural – they are part of the "effects of power" because discourses and practices of power have to claim universality that in reality does not exist (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012, p. 49). Resistance, though not transformative in the context of Sugar Dating, takes place in the passive sense for Sugar Babies. By virtue of the fact that she is operating within a patriarchal institution, we then have to examine the individual acts of resistance within the context of the general discourse. So while the Sugar Baby practices an active choice to participate in SA and decide upon the negotiation terms, or even when she makes the decision to leave SA altogether like Rebecca, she is still operating within the constructs of the patriarchal institution and system of oppression. Thus, when it comes to analyzing how power operates in the culture of SA, it is important to understand that Sugar Dating is very much similar to other heteronormative establishments in patriarchal society, insofar as SA assists in perpetuating oppressive gender roles.

While patriarchal bargaining represents an important component of the ability of the Sugar Baby to actively negotiate within the system, this bargain does *not* signal a transformation in the overall discourse, or in the way she relates to it; rather, the bargain serves as her means to attaining a modified sense of power, which allows her to be successful in the Sugar Dating culture. Therefore, agency for the Sugar Baby is a

direct reflection of her social conditions--what little bit of agency that is possible of attaining is precluded upon first recognizing that she isn't in a position of power.

Not surprisingly, therefore, there were vast differences in the way male and female Sugar Daters view power in general and how it operates in the context of Sugar Dating. While men and women both indicated that power is often directly connected to money, they had very different opinions about who, if anyone, held more power within the context of an arrangement. Several Sugar Daddies seemed to think that power in Sugar Dating is more balanced than it is in traditional relationships, because everything is "out in the open." One Sugar Daddy went so far as to suggest that neither party has the power, which is quite different than the sentiments expressed by all of the Sugar Babies.

The female participants were very clear that by virtue of his wealth and gender, the Sugar Daddy ultimately has the power; this view appeared to be based solely on the fact that he could decide at any time to end the arrangement and thus take away her economic support. The women also acknowledged their ability to exercise some power within the confines of the relationship; for example, despite the financial underpinnings of their arrangement (allowance or pay-per-visit), some female Sugar Daters felt comfortable setting boundaries around what they would do and not do for that money. That said, both the Sugar Daddy and the Sugar Baby are still operating within the confines of the patriarchal structure of traditional heterosexual relationships, with the man as the successful benefactor and the woman as needy and dependent. This structure was articulated by the site itself, as recently as 2012, when it likened Sugar

Daddies to cavemen and Sugar Babies to geishas and escorts. While that language has

been revised, the responses of this study's participants indicates that the concepts

informing it remain, which, when viewed through the lens of feminist and

poststructuralist theory, clearly indicates that Sugar Dating operates under the

umbrella of the cultural norms of traditional heterosexual relationships. Positioned

somewhere between prostitution and normal dating relationships, Sugar Dating shares

components of both. The overt transactional nature of arrangements, particularly those

using the pay-per-visit approach, more closely resembles prostitution; however, the

hegemonic, gendered-based roles of the Sugar Daddies and Sugar Babies can easily be

applied to a traditional heterosexual husbands and wives as well. Moreover, Sugar

Daddies are considered valuable even as they age, while Sugar Babies must be

realistic, or aware that their value will diminish with time. This fear mimics that of the

larger culture, where women in general are considered less valuable as their sexuality

and beauty fade. Finally, Sugar Babies can negotiate what they will do within the

confines of an arrangement, from which the participants indicated they feel a sense of

power. While on its face this is also closer to a john-prostitute interaction, it can also be

stated that these patriarchal bargains are struck in marriages as well, thus making all

three women—the Sugar Baby, the prostitute and the wife—"empowered" subjects

within an oppressive social construct.

This study focuses on the dynamics of the Sugar Dating culture, specifically

how agency and power is exercised by female Sugar Babies vis-à-vis their Sugar

Daddies while engaged in an arrangement facilitated by the website

SeekingArrangement.com. As the bulk of the data was collected through interviews with male and female SA participants, the study was limited by their subjective experiences, and to the extent that their responses were truthful and complete. The study was also limited by the fact that it was based on the subjective analysis of one researcher.

In the course of the research, it was also deemed necessary to explore Sugar Dating's place within the larger context of traditional heterosexual norms in our culture, including the patriarchal discourses around sexual behavior. That said, I believe the next logical step for this project would be interview couples with long-term arrangements or even more serious relationships, including marriage. How do the dynamics change when a couple evolves from Sugar Baby-Sugar Daddy to girlfriend-boyfriend to husband-wife? A study of marriages originating in Sugar Culture would be a fascinating exploration into the heart of the institution of marriage (as impacted by traditional heterosexual norms), as well as the "elevation" of the woman from Sugar Baby to wife.

Finally, another important area of research would be an examination of the dynamic between male Sugar Babies and their Sugar Mommies. It would be interesting to determine what needs the male Sugar Baby fills for the Sugar Mommy and what that might say about the value of men in relationships when they are not contributing financially. Finally, it would be helpful to determine whether the Sugar Mommy is as motivated by the need to feel desired by younger men as the Sugar Daddies interviewed appeared to need being pursued by young women. In other words, whereas

Sugar Baby-Sugar Daddy arrangements may be a gauge of what has stayed the same in our society, Sugar Baby-Sugar Mommy relationships may be informative about what, and to what degree, things have changed or have not change.

Appendix A

Verbal Consent Form

Why are you being asked to take part in this research?
You are being invited to take part in a research study investigating the subculture of the Sugar Dating site Seeking Arrangement. You are being included in the study because you have a particular expertise or knowledge of one or many aspects of Sugar Dating in specific relation to Seeking Arrangement. If you choose to take part in the study, you will be one of sixteen individuals interviewed.

Who is doing the study?
I, Brittany Cordero, am a graduate student at California State University in the Communications Department. Dr. Foss-Snowden of the CSU- Sacramento Communications Department is guiding me in my research.

What is the purpose of this study?
I am conducting this study to inform research that will constitute my master's thesis. The objectives of the study are
> (1) To describe the goals and the structure of the Seeking Arrangement subculture,
> (2) To assess the subculture and understand how arrangement(s) form, and
> (3) To evaluate the power dynamics within the arrangement(s).

With this research, I hope to help the Seeking Arrangement sugar dating culture better, understand the power dynamics that exist within every relationship and understand holistically the elements that comprise the Sugar Culture.

What will you be asked to do?
Your involvement in this study will consist of a Skype video call, which will include 30 open-ended questions and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder only; no video will be taken.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?
All interview questions are related to the Sugar Dating subculture and your involvement in this community. As such, the material covered in the interview is not likely to pose any risks (psychological, emotional, legal, or otherwise).

Do you have to take part in the study?
All involvement is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable. Moreover, you may choose to end the interview at any time and for any reason.

What will it cost you to participate?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Will you receive any rewards for taking part in this study?
There is no tangible reward offered in association with participation in this study.
However, your time and effort in contributing to the study are greatly appreciated.

Who will see the information that you give?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be
identified with the you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your
permission.
All Skype calls will be recorded in audio format only, no video recording will be
conducted. Your Skype name will be separated from your responses and you will be
given a pseudonym to protect your identity for reporting purposes (even if your Skype
name is already a pseudonym).

Measures to insure confidentiality include storing all data in a password-locked
computer and in a password-locked folder specficially created for this research project.
The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed
after a period of three years after the study is completed.

What else do you need to know?
In addition to the initial interview, I may wish to contact you with follow-up questions
and /or concerns that arise as the study progresses. Again, your involvement in such
follow-up efforts is completely voluntary and you may respond in any capacity with
which you feel comfortable. If you agree that I may contact you in the future with
follow-up questions/concerns, please state so now.

What if you have question, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?
Before deciding whether to participate in the study, please ask any; questions and/or
share any concerns that come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions, concerns,
suggestions, or complaints about the study, you may contact me at XXX.XXX.XXXX.
You may also contact the Communications Department at CSU-Sacramento
at 916.278.6605 with questions about your rights as a volunteer for this study. You
may keep a copy of this consent form for future reference.

Please indicate your agreement to participate in this study as explained above by
stating your name and stating that you agree to the consent form above.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your sexual orientation?

3. What is your race?

4. What is your age?

5. What is your occupation?

6. What is your education level?

     a. Are you currently in school?

       b. Do you have any student debt?

7. Do you mind me asking if you are married?

     a. Can you tell me a little more about that?

RQ1: What are the reasons for women and men to become Sugar Daddies and Sugar Babies?

1. How did you find out about Seeking Arrangement?

2. How would you define a Sugar Daddy and Sugar Baby Relationship?

3. What are your reasons for joining Seeking Arrangement?

    a. What are you looking for in a partner(s)?

RQ 2: How do women and men characterize an arrangement?

1. What is an arrangement?

2. What does it mean to for the arrangement to be mutually beneficial?

3. How long does an arrangement usually last?

4. How often do you need to date until you find a lasting arrangement?

5. Do you have multiple arrangements?

6. Do you have relationships outside of an arrangement?

    a. Is there even a difference?

    b. And if so, what are those differences?

RQ3: How is power perceived and exercised in these arrangements?

RQ4: How is agency practiced in these arrangements?

1. When do you know that you are ready to move from the Internet to meeting in person?

2. What do you talk about ahead of time with possible partners?

    a. Anything you feel you need to get out of the way before meeting?

3. Who decides on where to meet?

4. What happens when you meet someone?

5. What are the terms that are agreed upon?

    c. To what extent do you decide these terms?

        i. Can you give me examples?

    d. To what extent do you feel you are in control of the relationship?

6. What are the ways in which you communicate your wants and needs to your partner?

    e. Who decides if there is sex in the arrangement?

    f. Is this talked about?

    g. Who decides the allowance?

        i. Can you give me an example?

7. To what extent do you believe you have a choice on the agreed upon terms of the arrangement?

8. Who do you think holds the power in an arrangement?

9. How would you define power?

10. How do you feel protected on the website and in an arrangement?

11. What risks, if any, do you feel you take when being in an arrangement?

12. Do you always get paid what you feel you deserve? Why or why not?

13. Do you always receive what you feel you deserve? Why or why not?

14. Do you have trouble ending an arrangement?

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