

The seven types of sugar daddy relationships

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It turns out being Sugar Daddy isn't a one-size-fits-all gig. While it occasionally lives up to the stereotype of a wealthy, middle-aged man lavishing gifts and money on a young woman in return for her companionship, there's more to it in the U.S.

Drawing from 48 in-depth interviews, sociologist Maren Scull, Ph.D., assistant professor at University of Colorado Denver, has identified seven types of these "sugar" relationships: sugar prostitution, compensated dating, compensated companionship, sugar dating, sugar friendships, sugar friendships with benefits and pragmatic love.

The results of her study were published in *Sociological Perspectives*.

"Whenever I read an article about Sugar Daddies or Sugar Babies, I often saw the same sensationalistic slant: the [women](#) are desperate, starved college students engaging in prostitution," said Scull. "As someone who studies deviance, I knew there were more important nuances to these relationships."

Sugaring in the U.S.

Sugar relationships are based on companionships, intimacy or other forms of attention in exchange for personal benefit (financial support, material goods, professional advancement). These kinds of agreements are hardly new—in the 1750s, Geishas were seen as socially respected entertainers even though they were paid to amuse men, usually without sex. During the first two World Wars, soldiers paid women to join them for a night out of dinner and dancing.

But the bulk of modern-day research focuses on transactional and survival sex in sub-Saharan Africa, and compensated dating in East and Southeast Asia. There was a black hole of research in the U.S.

To understand how "sugaring" works in the U.S., Scull spoke with 48 women about their experiences as Sugar Babies. She explored the kind of activities the women were involved in, whether sex was involved and whether their lives were intertwined with their benefactors.

She found that 40% of the women had never had sex with their benefactors and the ones that did often had genuine, authentic connections with the men. She also found that most forms of sugaring aren't a play-for-pay arrangement.

"I didn't have the intent of creating a typology, but there was so much variety that I knew I had to highlight the different nuances and forms that sugar relationships can take," said Scull.

The 7 types of sugar relationships

Scull labeled the first "sugar prostitution," a form of sugaring absent emotion and purely the exchange of gifts for sex. "Compensated dating," popular in Asia, involves a monetary or material compensation for grabbing a coffee, a meal or attending a specific event together.

"Compensated companionship" involves wider scope of activities and often involve the woman becoming more intertwined in the man's life. Neither compensated dating nor compensated companionship involves anything sexual for most people.

"Sugar dating," the most common form of sugaring, combines the intertwined life of companionship with sex. In this case, most women receive an allowance on a weekly, monthly or as-needed basis. The sums could range from \$200 to several thousands of dollars a month.

"Sugar friendships are a mutually beneficial relationships with someone the women consider a friend. In fact, these benefactors are often a part of the women's lives already or soon become a part of it. "Sugar friendships with sexual benefits" is more unstructured. In some cases, benefactors pay for all living expenses for the women, including rent, cell phone bills, clothing, cars and vacations.

Finally, Scull found that some of these relationships involved two people

who hoped to end up together, with the woman taken care of for the rest of her life, in a category she named "pragmatic love."

"When we lump [sugar](#) relationships together as [prostitution](#), it deviantizes and criminalizes these relationships," said Scull. "We were missing how they are often organic and involve genuine, emotional connection. Many of the women didn't intend on having a benefactor. They just happened to meet someone at work or during a catering gig who wanted to take care of them. These relationships can last decades."

More information: Maren T. Scull, "It's Its Own Thing": A Typology of Interpersonal Sugar Relationship Scripts, *Sociological Perspectives* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0731121419875115](https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121419875115)

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