COLLEGE WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS FOR SUGAR DATING

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College Women's Motivations for Sugar Dating

The increased usage of dating websites to find romantic partners has paved the way for a number of nontraditional dating trends to take hold (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012). Such is the case with so-called "sugar dating," a specific form of dating that blurs the line between romance and prostitution and typically consists of older, wealthier men (known as sugar daddies) who are financially supporting younger and less financially secure women (known as sugar babies) in return for companionship and sexual intimacy (known as an "arrangement") (Nayar, 2016). Sugar dating typically occurs through the matching of a sugar daddy with a sugar baby via a sugar dating website. Currently, there are approximately 20 of these websites, with SeekingArrangement.com and SugarDaddie.com among the most well-known (Cordero, 2015; Motyl, 2012).

This trend is particularly prevalent among college females—ostensibly as a means of eschewing formidable student loan debt brought about by the rising costs of tuition (Morris, 2016). Although there has been an increase in media attention devoted to student sugar babies, the literature suggests that there may be motivations other than tuition debt behind the decision of some college women to engage in sugar dating (Bernstein, 2007; Cordero, 2015; Nayar, 2017).

This study aimed to explore the factors that motivate sugar dating among college women. This study also examined the demographic and personality characteristics of these women and assessed how they compare to non-sugar dating women. The mental health correlates associated with sugar dating and moderating variables were also explored, as were sexual risk behaviors.

The Nature of Sugar Dating

Although sugar-dating arrangements are like traditional romantic relationships in many ways, there are notable differences. For example, in sugar dating, each party explicitly states their requests and what they are willing to offer in return within the relationship parameters at the outset. At the beginning stages of the arrangement, sugar babies and sugar daddies negotiate a regularly occurring amount, termed an "allowance," to be provided for ongoing companionship (Nayar, 2016). As of 2017, the average allowance for sugar babies who were members of SeekingArrangement.com was $2,200 per month (SeekingArrangement.com, 2017.).

Sugar dating is surrounded by controversy in both academic circles and within the general population. The main concern is whether or not sugar dating is simply a guise for prostitution (Motyl, 2012). Categorizing sugar babies as either sex workers or simply as women engaging in a modern dating trend is difficult because the lines are blurred; however, the roles of sugar babies closely resemble those of call girls (Nayar, 2016). In particular, the role of sugar babies embodies "the girlfriend experience" within the escorting culture (Bernstein, 2007). This role consists of engaging in deep conversations and providing physical contact that goes beyond sex (e.g. kissing, hugging, non-sexual massages), thus providing a sense of intimacy not typical in most other avenues of sex work (Bernstein, 2007; Weitzer, 2012). Additionally, aspects of sugar dating are similar to that of the working environment of call girls, who work independently from home with a higher class of regular, wealthier clients who also supply them with lavish gifts and vacations (Cordero, 2015; Bernstein, 2007; Perkins & Lovejoy, 1996).

The traits that sugar daters find appealing in one another also echo those cited by call girls and their clientele. In one study conducted by Bernstein, (2007), call girls reported that middle class, educated women appeal to a professional and elite class of men, who like to have someone they can have intelligent conversations with about a range of topics.

Sites like SeekingArrangent.com seem to be aware of these preferences and offer special membership perks to sugar babies that register using a university email address. They also advertise the dating service as a means of dealing with mounting student loan debt while also emphasizing the potential for finding lasting love. According to the site, over 1.2 million of their members are currently university students looking for a way out of debt (SeekingArrangement.com, 2017). Whether or not this is accurate, scholars in other Western countries have taken note of the coinciding rising cost of tuition and increases in student sex workers (Betzer, Köhler & Schlemm, 2015; Roberts et al., 2013).

Results from previous research indicate that the percentage of college students who are involved in sex work—or willing to become involved— has been steadily increasing over the past decade (Betzer et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2013). Despite these increases, the literature also suggests that only a small percentage of individuals consider sex work, including sugar dating, to be an acceptable means of supporting oneself (Reed, 2015; Roberts et al., 2013).

Research examining the financial circumstances of student sex workers has yielded mixed findings as to how—or whether—they differ from that of non-sex working students (Betzer et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2013). Betzer et al. (2015) found that student sex workers received less financial support than non-sex working students and were more likely to be in debt, while Roberts (2013) found that student sex workers reported higher earnings than other students and were *not* significantly more likely to be in debt. The students did not differ significantly in difficulty paying bills or in the amount of time anticipated to pay off any current debt. Overall, these findings suggest that, although there may be some differences in financial circumstances between students who choose to engage in sex work and those who do not, they are not dramatic

differences. These findings also suggest that there are potentially other reasons why some students seek arrangements with sugar daddies, such as desiring fewer work hours, for fun and excitement, or to reject mainstream values and gender roles, all of which would be consistent with the findings from broader research that has examined the motivations of women who choose careers selling sex (Bilardi, 2010; Bernstein, 2007; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Lucas, 2005; Rössler et al., 2010).

Bernstein (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with several educated, middle class call girls who, like sugar babies, preferred clients who were older, educated, and elite. These women often cited that what they valued most about their work was the autonomy, opportunities for intimacy their work afforded, and a sense of authenticity that allows the sexual dynamics taking place to feel less transactional. Bernstein argues that this class of women embraced the values of "fun, pleasure, and freedom as ideals worthy of strenuous pursuit," and that such values were what these women sought to differentiate themselves from the working class, in contrast to the hard work ethic and restraint cherished by previous generations (p. 477).

While motivations have not been assessed empirically in a sample of sugar babies, it is expected that their motivations for pursuing an arrangement with a sugar daddy would likely also be varied and complex— particularly because student sugar babies presumably have some form of capital in which to secure other means of employment, if desired.

Personality Characteristics of Sex Workers

One psychological aspect that may help to explain motivations to engage in sugar dating is personality. Specifically, the five-factor model (FFM) of personality, which has previously been linked to both career and sexual interests (Larson, Rottinghaus, & Borgen, 2002; Schmitt, 2004), may be particularly relevant here. The FFM, also known as the Big-Five, includes the

traits of extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness (McCRae & Costa, 1992).

The trait of extraversion, which is typically associated with the enjoyment of being around other people and seeking stimulation, has been linked to sexual variety seeking, a preference for short term mating, infidelity, and sexual sensation seeking (Schmitt, 2004). Openness to experience, which refers to being intelligent, curious, and open-minded, has been found to be associated with lower sexual anxiety and fantasizing about sex more frequently (Heaven, Fitzpatrick, Craig, Kelly, & Sebar, 2000; Moyano & Sierra, 2013). Neuroticism, which has been linked to anxiousness and depression, has also been associated with promiscuity and sexual curiosity. Previous research has also indicated that low agreeableness and conscientiousness, which are traits associated with being cooperative and having a propensity for order, respectively, are also associated with permissive sexuality (Schmitt, 2004). On the basis of these findings, it seems plausible to predict that this personality profile (i.e., high extraversion openness, and neuroticism, but low agreeableness and conscientiousness) might be more common among persons engaging in transactional sex.

No quantitative studies yet exist using the FFM to examine the personality traits of sugar babies, and a review of the extant literature revealed a paucity of research examining personality traits in sex workers more broadly. O'Sullivan, Zuckerman, and Kraft (1996) found that the personalities of call girls were indistinguishable from non-sex working women; however, personality was assessed with the MMPI instead of the FFM in this study. In addition, while the findings from Betzer and colleagues (2015) indicated that student sex workers were lower than their non-sex working counterparts in the trait of agreeableness, no mention was made of the other Big-Five traits. As a result, we lack data to draw definitive conclusions about the nature of

the Big-Five personality traits among sugar dating women, not to mention sex working women more broadly.

Beyond the Big-Five, other personality traits have the potential to explain willingness to sugar date. The domain-specific trait of sensation seeking is associated with the Big-Five traits of extraversion and openness and could also partly contribute to sugar dating willingness (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995; McCrae & Costa, 1992). This trait is linked to seeking out new, exciting experiences and risky sexual encounters and can be assessed in regard to both sexual experiences and non-sexual experiences (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995). While sexual sensation seeking pertains explicitly to sexual behaviors, it is also closely associated with general sensation seeking traits—including a lack of concern when it comes to avoiding socially frowned upon behavior (Gaither & Sellbom, 2003; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000). Because sugar dating is considered a socially undesirable activity, involves sexually risky behavior, and excitement has been cited as motivation for pursuing escorting careers in samples of demographically similar women, this suggests the possibility that sugar babies will possess higher levels of both sexual and general sensation seeking traits (Bernstein, 2005; Reed, 2015).

Another personality factor that could potentially contribute to the willingness of some students to engage in sugar dating is sociosexual orientation. A restricted orientation describes the tendency to only have sexual relationships in emotionally close and committed relationships, while an unrestricted orientation would be consistent with someone who has a greater tendency to engage in sexual relationships without commitment or investment (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). Although sugar dating occurs within the pretense of building a lasting arrangement, there are still elements of casual sex present within a noncommitted relationship, along with the fact that many sugar daddies are married, and some sugar babies have more than one arrangement or other

relationships that do not constitute sugar dating (Cordero, 2015). This suggests that the sociosexual orientation of sugar babies may be less restrictive than that of non-sugar dating female students.

Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being of Sex Working Women

Beyond motivations for engaging in sugar dating, the present research also explored the mental health correlates of sugar babies and the degree to which these correlates may be similar or different to the mental health correlates of women who engage in other forms of sex work. As other researchers have noted, (e.g., Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Rössler et al., 2010; Weitzer, 2013), much of the current literature on sex work and psychological characteristics of sex workers has focused primarily on street prostitution. This is problematic because women who engage in street prostitution tend to have a higher prevalence of drug addiction and backgrounds marred with experiences of abuse and childhood poverty (Benoit, Smith, Jansson, Magnus, Flagg, & Maurice, 2017; Harcourt & Donavan, 2005). This obviously presents several confounds. As such, although sex work has pretty consistently been linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and personality disorders (particularly in cultures where sex work is illegal), it is difficult to discern how involvement in sex work itself is the cause (Brody, Potterat, Muth, & Woodhouse, 2005).

Additionally, research that has looked at mental-health in sex workers typically finds that there are several factors that moderate the association between sex work and negative mental-health symptoms, such as the desire to exit work in the sex industry, whether the primary motivator to engage in sex work is financial, and whether the perception of stigma exists (Benoit et al., 2017b; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Rössler et al., 2010).

The stigma associated with sex work has often been linked to negative outcomes in sex workers, such as anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem/self-worth (Bellhouse, 2015;

Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Liu, Srikrishnan, Zelaya, Solomon, Celentano & Sherman, 2011; Sanders, 2004; Weitzer, 2017). For example, Benoit et al. (2017), found that sex workers who perceived themselves as marginalized were more likely to say that sex work had a negative impact on their sense of self-worth. Likewise, Bellhouse (2015) found that the stigma of sex work had a negative impact on the relationships and personal well-being of sex workers.

However, the findings from previous research also suggest that many sex workers do not experience negative mental health outcomes, either by utilizing coping strategies to buffer the effects of stigma or by not having the perception of being devalued in the first place (Benoit et al., 2017b; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016). Additionally, independent call girls—who as previously mentioned, appear to share several characteristics with sugar babies—typically demonstrate higher self-esteem than women working in any other avenue of prostitution. Research examining the self-esteem of sex workers has also found that women who report lower levels of stigmatization also report that sex work has actually *increased* their sense of self-worth (Benoit et al., 2017b; Bernstein, 2007; Hubbard & Prior, 2013).

Research exploring self-esteem and the effects of stigma in student sex workers also suggests that women's psychological well-being may not necessarily suffer when they engage in transactional sex. Roberts et al. (2013) found that student sex-workers did not differ significantly from non-sex workers in terms of self-esteem; likewise, a study that examined how students who worked as exotic dancers managed stigma found that many buffered the consequences by asserting their positive identities as students (Trautner, & Collett, 2010).

At the same time, however, Cordero (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with sugar babies in which many expressed feelings of being trapped in their current arrangement as well as anxiety over the knowledge that sugar babies have a "shelf life" after which they will no longer

be able to utilize arrangements as a primary means of income (e.g., when they reach a certain age and/or their attractiveness to sugar daddies lessens). While such feelings could potentially lead to higher rates of depression and low self-esteem, this study did not measure these variables. Taken together, these mixed findings demonstrate the need to assess mental health correlates, such as self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress in the student sugar baby population and examine how factors such as the perception of stigma contribute.

Sexual Health Risk Behaviors

A final area where sugar baby students may differ from both other students and sex workers is that of sexual risk behaviors. Whereas many sex workers report consistently using condoms with clients, some findings suggest that condom use within the context of romantic relationships or casual sex may be at a lesser rate (Lucas, 2005). Prior research has also indicated that within the call girl culture, clients will often pressure workers to forgo condom use by offering substantially more money or utilize their status as regular clients to persuade them (Hubbard & Prior, 2013; Perkins & Lovejoy,1996; Sanders, 2004). Betzer (2015) found that student sex workers were more likely than non-sex working students to have had a sexually transmitted infection (STI). As with mental health correlates, sexual health behaviors have important implications for public health on college campuses, and therefore are an area worth examining.

In sum, the aim of this study was to examine the motivations and characteristics of women who are currently (or have previously) engaged in sugar dating while pursuing higher education. Along with motivations for pursuing and continuing arrangements, personality traits, mental health correlates, and sexual risk behaviors were assessed. These factors were compared between sugar dating and demographically similar non-sugar dating college females with the

goal of gaining insight into the similarities and differences in circumstances and traits that might motivate some young women to support themselves through this form of sex work.

Research Questions

1. What are sugar babies' primary motivations for engaging in sugar dating?

2. Will sugar babies report a higher prevalence of negative mental health outcomes (i.e. higher scores for depression and lower scores for self-esteem) relative to non-sugar dating women?

3. Will sugar babies exhibit riskier sexual behaviors than the comparison sample, such as less frequent condom usage and a higher prevalence of STIs? Will sugar babies also have a higher likelihood of having been tested for STIs?

Hypotheses

1. In terms of the Big-Five personality traits, it was expected that sugar babies would score higher than the comparison sample on the traits of extraversion and neuroticism, both of which have been linked to sexual permissiveness (Claxton & Dulmen, 2013; Schmitt, 2004). It is also expected that sugar babies will score higher than the comparison sample in openness to experience. The general trait of openness has been linked to a preference for novel experiences, and the activities sugar babies engage in with their sugar daddies (e.g., dates, vacations) can be viewed as a form of novelty (Cordero, 2015). It was also predicted that Sugar babies would be lower in the traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness, given that lower levels of these traits have been linked to engaging in more short-term mating behaviors (Schmitt, 2004).

2. Because sugar dating has the potential to involve many of the components associated with sensation seeking —both sexually and otherwise—it was predicted that sugar babies would score higher than the student comparison sample on measures of both sexual and non-sexual sensation seeking.

3. Because engaging in casual sexual relationships where commitment and emotional attachment are not prerequisites is consistent with an unrestricted sociosexual orientation, it was expected that sugar babies would exhibit higher scores on the revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory than the non-sugar dating sample (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008).

4. In accordance with findings from previous research that has examined negative mental health outcomes in sex workers (e.g. Benoit et al., 2017, Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016), it was expected that negative mental health correlates (symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and lower self-esteem) would be associated with the perception of stigma, the desire to continue engaging in sex work, and confidence in finding alternative work, such that higher perceptions of stigma and less desire to continue and confidence in finding alternative work would predict higher severity of depression, anxiety, and stress and lower self-esteem.

Method

Participants

Two subsamples were recruited for this study, both of which focused on college students due to the prevalence of sugar dating among college women. Although men may also seek arrangements with sugar mommies and/or daddies, the focus of this study was limited to female sugar babies who had/have arrangements with sugar daddies (again, because this is thought to be the most prevalent form of sugar dating). The sample was open to women of any sexual orientation, given that some women who identify as non-heterosexual engage in sex with men for financial purposes (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). The sugar baby subsample consisted of women who currently or have previously engaged in sugar dating during their postsecondary education, while the comparison sample consisted of non-sugar dating women in the same age group.

The final sample consisted of 206 women in total. Initially, 370 women provided consent for the study, of whom 248 provided a response to an item inquiring whether they had ever sugar dated. Out of those who answered this question, 59 (23.8%) said yes, 182 (73.4%) said no, and 7 (1.9%) said not sure. To ensure interpretability of results, those who indicated "*not sure*" were excluded from further analyses. Fourteen women in the sugar dating sample who reported not being enrolled in college full or part time at the time of sugar dating were also excluded from further analyses. Two additional women reported their highest education level as not having graduated high school and were therefore excluded. Because the highest level of education reported in the sugar dating sample was *"*master's degree", three additional women with "doctoral or advanced professional degrees" were excluded in an effort to ensure education level between the two groups of women were demographically similar. Two women failed an attention check requiring them to click on a designated response option and one woman in the non-sugar dating sample was an outlier on age (56 years old); these participants were excluded, too. Lastly, nine of the non-sugar dating women who filled out demographic information did not provide responses to any of the items used for analysis; as a result, their demographic information is not reported. Subsequently, demographics for 162 non-sugar dating women (M_{age} = 24.3 years, age range: 18-46 years), and 44 sugar dating women (M_{age} = 24.9 years, age range: 18 - 40 years), were examined. Demographic information including sexual orientation, relationship status, education level, current student status, student visa status and age was obtained for each subsample and is reported in Table 1.

To assess whether the subsamples were demographically similar for each of the analyses performed in this study, chi-square tests of association were performed on each of the demographic categories for the two samples. For the analyses, relationship status, education

status, and sexual orientation were recoded into two categories each. Relationship status was recoded into those in a relationship vs. single, education level was recoded into those who had a bachelor's degree and those who did not, and sexual orientation was recoded into those who were heterosexual or mostly heterosexual versus all nonheterosexual categories. Chi-square analyses were also performed on current student status and student visa status, and an independent samples t-test was used to assess mean differences in age between the sugar dating and non-sugar dating subsamples. The demographic percentages for each subsample are available in Table 2.

Procedure

Subsequent to ethics approval from Ball State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited online and asked to take part in a study examining college women's personality traits and experiences with non-traditional forms of dating. The solicitation notice was posted on several websites promoting online research, such as Reddit, the Social Psychology Network, Survey Circle, Online Psychology Research, and Craigslist. Initially, recruitment approaches utilized in previous research on sugar babies (e.g. Cordero, 2015; Daly, 2017) were attempted but were not successful; instead, Craigslist was used as the primary means of recruiting sugar babies in the present study given the site's popularity among younger adults (Jones, 2009). All solicitation post titles on the Craigslist website specifically called for participants who had experiences with sugar dating in an effort to acquire a sufficient number of sugar dating participants. All solicitation notices were posted to the "volunteers" section of the website's "community" category. The body of the solicitation notice was the same across all sites and provided participants with a brief description of the study, informed them that they must be 18 or over and identify as female to participate, and provided a link to the survey through Qualtrics. Participants who chose to partake in the study where then presented with

further information regarding the study's purpose and were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants who provided consent were then required to provide their age and a response to an item inquiring whether they identified as female. Those who indicated that they were younger than 18 or did not identify as female were advanced to the end of the survey and their data were not included in analyses. Those who met the criteria for age and gender were directed to the main survey where they provided basic demographic information including highest education level attained, current student status, student visa status, relationship status, and sexual orientation. All participants then responded to items assessing involvement in sugar dating, mental health status, various personality characteristics, and sexual risk behaviors. Women who reported involvement in sugar dating also responded to additional items regarding details of their arrangements and perception of stigma. Composite scores for each scale and subscale used in analyses were computed and items were reversed keyed as needed. All measures used in the study are described below.

Measures

Sugar dating. Sugar dating status was assessed with an item adapted from previous research assessing perceptions of sugar dating (e.g. Reed, 2015; Roberts, 2010): "*Have you ever engaged in a sexual relationship with older men in exchange for money and goods, in the type of relationship where the man is commonly referred to as a sugar daddy (also known as sugar dating)?*" Participants who responded "*yes*," then reported whether the sugar dating occurred while they were simultaneously furthering their education (either college or trade/professional school) by providing a "*yes*" or "*no*" response. Participants also responded to a multiple-choice item inquiring about how long, in total, they had been sugar dating and whether the duration was less than three months, up to 6 months, up to one year, or over one year. Participants also reported their current number of arrangements and the total number of arrangements with sugar

daddies they have had to date. Sugar babies reported the frequency of sexual contact with sugar daddies in response to the question, "*How often do you and your sugar daddy have sexual contact?*" This item was assessed on a 5-point scale where 1 represented "*once or twice ever*," 2 represented "once per month or less, " 3 was *"two to four times per month,*" 4 represented "*two to three times per week*," and 5 was "four or more times *per week."* The relative percentage of engagement in sexual activity versus other activities with sugar daddies was assessed with a question which read, "*Considering how much time you spend with your sugar daddy, approximately what percentage of time is spent engaging in sexual activity*?" Responses were assessed on a 4-point scale where 1 represented, "*0-25%*" and 4 represented, "*76-100%*."

Sugar babies then indicated their reasons for sugar dating by rating the importance of 20 items that had been used in previous research on sex worker's motivations or had been cited as benefits of sugar dating (Cordero, 2015; Bernstein, 2007; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; Prostitution Law Review Committee [PLRC], 2008; Roberts et al., 2013). Using a 7-point scale where 1 represented "*not important at all*" and 7 represented "*very important*," participants responded to a series of items that began, "*In terms of your reasons for sugar dating, please indicate how important the following options are to you*," and ended with one of 20 stems, including "*paying for education*," "*shopping sprees*," and "*thought it looked exciting*." Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the 20 items, which yielded a five-factor solution that accounted for 75.4% of the variability in the items (rotated factor loadings presented in Table 3), with the loadings for each factor ranging .53 to 89, aside from one item, "*support for alcohol or other drugs*," which had a loading of .26. Factor 1 was labeled "*financial motivations*," and was comprised of five items that included paying off debt, student loans, and household expenses. Factor 2 was labeled "*luxury motivations*" and consisted of six items that included fine dining

opportunities, paying for social life, and preferable to having an hourly wage job. Factor 3 was labeled *"sensuality motivations*," and included items such as finding a long-term romantic partner, exploring sexuality, and sugar daddy as a source of knowledge. Factor 4 was labeled "*extended circle motivations*," and consisted of two items, which were supporting children/family and networking opportunities. Lastly, factor 5 was labeled "*outside influence motivations*," and was comprised of the two items, including a friend was doing it and support for alcohol or other drug use. Overall, the 20-item scale demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .812.

Sugar baby participants then responded to an item asking how much they would like to continue sugar dating on a 7-point scale, where 1 represented ''*I don't want to continue at all*', and 7 represented ''*I completely want to continue*." Participants also indicated their level of confidence in finding alternative means of sustaining their current lifestyle on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 "*not confident at all*" to 7 "*very confident*," followed by a response to an item asking whether sugar dating is their primary source of income using a "*yes"* or *"no"* response. Sugar babies also reported on whether any current romantic partners had knowledge that they were sugar dating and if so, how accepting they were of it on a 7-point scale where 1 represented "*not accepting at all*," and 7 represented "*completely accepting*."

Perceived stigma. The perception of stigma was assessed with six items adapted from the Sex Worker Stigma Index (Liu et al., 2011) to pertain to sugar dating. The scale assessed the perception of stigma from peers and from family with items such as, "*I feel that if I disclosed having a sugar daddy to my peers, they would not talk to me anymore*," and "*I feel that if I disclosed having a sugar daddy to my peers, they would treat me differently*." Participants responded to these items on a 5-point scale ranging from "*strongly disagree*" to "*strongly*

agree." Reliability for the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and was determined to be good with an alpha of .933.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed with the 10-item Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RES), which includes items such as: "*On the whole, I am satisfied with myself*," and "*I feel that I have a number of good qualities* "(Rosenberg, 1965). Responses were assessed on a 4-point scale from "*strongly disagree*" to "*strongly agree*." Cronbach's alpha for the RES demonstrated good reliability in this study (α = .929).

Mental health. Mental health was assessed with the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), which is a shortened version of the original 42-item DASS. The DASS-21 consists of three 7-item subscales (depression, anxiety, and stress) that assess severity of symptoms experienced during the past week on a 4-point scale with 0 being, "*did not apply to me at all,*" and 3 being, "*applied to me very much, or most of the time.*" Items include *"I felt that life was meaningless"* and "*I found myself getting agitated."* (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Scores for each scale rank participants' symptoms as "normal," "mild," "moderate," "severe," or "extremely severe." The scales for depression, anxiety, and stress were all found to demonstrate good internal consistency in the current study (α = .923, α = .840, α = .820, respectively).

Personality traits. To assess the Big 5 Personality Traits of extraversion, openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, the 10-item short-form test of the Big Five personality traits (BFI-10) was used (Rammstedt & John, 2007), which is a shortened version of the 44 item BFI and is often utilized in surveys where time and survey fatigue are a concern. Items were assessed on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 "*strongly disagree*" to 5 "*strongly agree.*" To assess reliability for each subscale, bivariate correlations were performed between the two items comprising each subscale and revealed weak to moderate correlations

between item pairs. Intercorrelations for the extraversion subscale were strongest, (r = .574); followed by neuroticism, (r = .533); agreeableness, (r = .335); conscientiousness, (r = .311); and openness to experience (r = .301), suggesting that overall reliability for the BFI-10 was low.

Sociosexual orientation. Sociosexuality was measured with a revised version of the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R), which assesses three components of sociosexual orientation: behavior, attitude, and desire with nine items (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). Items such as "*sex without love is ok*," and "*I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying 'casual' sex with different partner*s" were assessed on a 9-point scale. Items 1 through 3 have multiple choice options that pertain to numbers of sexual partners; items 4 through 6 required participants to indicate their level of agreement from "*strongly disagree*" to "*strongly agree*"; and items 7-9 required participants to indicate frequencies ranging from "*never*" to "*nearly every day.*" Cronbach's alpha suggested good internal consistency in the present study (α = .866).

Sensation seeking. The 11-item Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) was used to assess sexual sensation seeking with items such as, *"I am interested in trying out new sexual experiences*" and "*I feel like exploring my sexuality*." All items were assessed on a 4-point scale where 1 represents "*not at all like me*" and 4 represents "*very much like me.*"

The 11-item non-sexual experiences scale (NES) was used to assess sensation seeking propensities in the broader sense (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995). Items included, "*I see myself seeking pleasure around the world with 'exciting' people*" and "*I get bored seeing the same old faces*." Both the SSS (α = .884) and the NES (α = .867) were found to demonstrate good reliability in the current study.

Sexual health-risk behaviors. All participants reported on their condom use frequency during sexual intercourse with romantic and casual sexual partners. The percentage of the time

condoms were used was assessed individually for each sexual partner type on a sliding scale ranging from 1 to 100. Additionally, the sugar dating subsample indicated their percentage of condom use during intercourse with their sugar daddies. Participants also provided "*yes*" or "*no*" responses to an item that read: "*Have you ever been tested for having a sexually transmitted infection or disease? "*and *"Have you ever been diagnosed as having a sexually transmitted infection or disease?"* Those who responded "yes," were then directed to an item asking them to indicate which sexually transmitted infections/diseases (STI/STD) they had been diagnosed with. Response options included herpes, gonorrhea, chlamydia, human papillomavirus (HPV), syphilis, trichinosis, and HIV.

Results

Demographics

The results of chi-square tests of association (for dichotomous variables) and t-tests (for continuous variables) revealed that the demographics of sugar baby participants (n = 33) and non-sugar dating women (n = 162) who provided responses to the measures used to test the hypothesis did not differ significantly in terms of education χ^2 (1) = .863, p=.353; relationship status, χ^2 (1) = 2.86, p =.091; current student status, χ^2 (1) = .114, p = .735; sexual orientation, χ^2 (1) = 1.86, p = .194; student visa status χ^2 (1) = .188, p = .664; or age, t(193) = .48, p = .632. The two subsamples differed significantly only in terms of relationship status χ^2(1) = 11.2, p = .001, such that the percentage of sugar babies who were single (63.6%) significantly differed from the percentage of single non-sugar dating women (35.4%) who responded to the questions regarding sexual behaviors. Otherwise, the results of the chi-square tests indicated that the two samples were demographically similar. The demographic variable percentages for each subsample are presented in Table 2.

Women's Motivations for Sugar Dating

To assess women's motivations for engaging in sugar dating, the means and standard deviations were obtained for each of the 20 motivations assessed. The results revealed that sugar babies rated items belonging to the financial motivations factor, such as paying household expenses and paying for education as most important in terms of their reasons for sugar dating. Items comprising the luxury motivations factor, such as going out, shopping sprees, and fine dining opportunities were also rated as high importance, while finding a long-term romantic partner, supporting children/family, and support for alcohol or other drug use were rated as being of relatively little importance. All of the means and standard deviations for each of the 20 items are available in Table 4.

Means and standard deviations for items assessing the characteristics of the arrangements that sugar babies had with their sugar daddies were also examined. These results revealed that, on average, sugar babies reported currently having arrangements with two sugar daddies (M = 2.07, SD = 1.19), had arrangements with approximately four (M = 4.25, SD = 3.78) sugar daddies to date, and had been sugar dating for over one year (M = 4.09, SD = 1.31), which had been measured on a 4-point scale where 1 represented less than three months and 4 represented over one year. Means indicated that sugar babies had sexual contact with their sugar daddies an average of two to four times per month (M = 3.11 on 4-point scale, SD = 1.21) and spent approximately 25% to 50% of the total time spent with their sugar daddies (M = 2.25 on 4-point scale, SD = 1.14) engaging in sexual activity.

Sugar babies were split on whether sugar dating was their primary source of income, with 54.5% (n = 24) reporting that it was. On average, they were somewhat confident they could find alternative work that would allow them to sustain their current lifestyle if they were to stop sugar dating, (M = 4.05, SD = 2.32), and leaned slightly towards wanting to continue sugar dating (M =

4.89, *SD* = 1.96). Of the sugar babies who reported currently being in a relationship outside of the sugar dating context, 46.7% (*n* = 7) reported that their partner had knowledge of the arrangement and were overall, somewhat accepting (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 2.37). More sugar babies felt that they held the majority of the power in their arrangements (*n* = 13, 39.4%), followed by having equal amounts of power (*n* = 11, 33.3%), and feeling as though their sugar daddy did (*n* = 9, 27.3%).

When asked whether they would ever consider sugar dating to financially support themselves while furthering their education, just over half of non-sugar dating women (*n* = 91, 53.2%) said no, while 45 (26.3%) said yes, and 35 indicated that they weren't sure (20.5%).

Mental Health Correlates

To examine whether sugar babies and non-sugar dating women differed in mental health, a one-way MANOVA was conducted with scores for the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales of the DASS-21 and RES scores as the dependent variables and sugar dating status as the independent variables. Box's M (*M* = 16.59) was nonsignificant, suggesting equality of covariances had been met, *F* (10, 14560) = 1.58, *p* = .105. However, Mardia's test for multivariate normality indicated the presence of multivariate skew (skew = 24.8, N(b1p) = 0.76, *p* < .001) suggesting a violation of the assumption of multivariate normality. Using Pillai's trace, the multivariate results were statistically non-significant, *V* = .030, *F*(4, 190) = 1.39, *p* = .207, indicating that sugar dating women's mean scores for depression, anxiety, stress, or self-esteem did not differ significantly from those of non-sugar dating women (all means presented in Table 5).

Sexual Risk Behaviors

To assess whether sugar babies differed from non-sugar dating women in frequency of STI testing and diagnoses, Chi-square tests were performed on those who reported having been

tested and diagnosed versus those who reported never having been tested for each subsample. Because the relationship status for the subsamples of participants who provided responses to the items assessing sexual risk behaviors significantly differed and could therefore potentially confound the results, analyses were performed separately for single participants versus those in a relationship.

The analysis for STI testing for single participants was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 11.6$, $p = .001$, with the odds ratio revealing that single sugar babies were 10.6 times more likely than single non-sugar dating women to have been tested for an STI, and 2.4 times more likely to have been diagnosed with an STI, $\chi^2(1) = 6.31$ $p = .012$. The analysis for STI testing and diagnosis for partnered participant revealed no statistically difference in the likelihood of having been tested, $\chi^2(1) = .777$ $p = .378$, or for having been diagnosed, $\chi^2(1) = .288$ $p = .591$. All percentages and frequencies are available in Table 6.

Of those that reported having been diagnosed with an STI, 15 women overall (5 of whom were sugar daters) had been diagnosed with Chlamydia, 8 (2 of whom were sugar daters) with herpes, 7 with the human papilloma virus or HPV (2 of whom were sugar daters), and one woman in the sugar dating sample reported having been diagnosed with gonorrhea.

To assess whether statistically significant mean differences in frequency of condom use during sexual intercourse existed, independent samples t-tests were performed with condom use frequency on a scale of 0 to 100 as the dependent variables and sugar dating status as the independent variables. Overall, both sugar dating and non-sugar dating women reported condom use to be highest with casual sexual partners, however the results indicated that this difference was statistically non-significant overall, $t(171) = .008$, $p = .994$; and when run separately for single participants , $t(70) = -.78$, $p = .859$, and partnered participants, $t\ (98) = -.722$, $p = .472$.

Reported mean percentages of condom use with romantic partners was substantially lower for both sugar dating women and non-sugar dating women; however, this difference was statistically nonsignificant between the two subsamples overall, $t(168) = .243$, $p = .808$, as well as when assessed by relationship status of single, $t(70) = -1.04$, $p = .304$, and partnered, $t(12.7) = -1.45$, $p = .17$. Lastly, sugar babies' mean percentage of reported condom use frequency during intercourse with their sugar daddies was in between percentages they reported for intercourse with romantic and casual sexual partners at 62.45 ($SD = 45.15$). Means used for comparisons are available in Table 7.

Big 5 Personality Traits

To test the hypothesis that sugar babies would be higher in neuroticism, openness, and extraversion, while lower in conscientiousness and agreeableness, a one-way MANOVA was performed with all five personality traits as the dependent variable and sugar dating status as the independent variable. Assumptions for equality of multivariate covariance and normality were assessed with Box's M and Mardia's test, which were both nonsignificant, suggesting that the assumptions had been met. The multivariate test was statistically significant, indicating that sugar dating and non-sugar dating women differed on the set of personality traits, $\Lambda = .073$ (5, 189) = 2.98, $p = .013$, $n_p^2 = .073$. After applying a Bonferroni correction to account for multiple tests (.05/5=.001), only the mean difference for the trait of neuroticism was statistically significant, $F(1, 193) = 11.67$, $p = .001$. $n^2 = .057$, with sugar babies exhibiting lower mean levels of the trait ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.94$), than non-sugar dating women ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.96$). The eta squared statistic for this analysis indicated that the effect size was small, with sugar dating status accounting for 5.70 % of the variability in neuroticism. See all means in Table 8.

Sensation Seeking and Sociosexual Orientation

To test the hypothesis that sugar babies would be higher than non-sugar dating women in the traits of sexual and nonsexual sensation seeking, and have higher scores on the SOI-R, indicating a more unrestricted sociosexual orientation than the comparison sample, a MANCOVA was performed with sociosexual orientation, sexual sensation seeking, and nonsexual experience seeking as the dependent variables. Age was included as a covariate, given that it is has been shown to be correlated with the dependent variables (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008; Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978). Box's M (M = 2.27) was nonsignificant, suggesting equality of covariances had been met, $F(6, 18856)=.364$, $p=.902$. Normality of the dependent variables was assessed with Mardia's tests of multivariate skew and kurtosis, which revealed statistically significant multivariate skew, $b1p=0.7$, $skew=22.6$, $p=.012$.

Using Pillai's trace, the multivariate results revealed a statistically significant main effect for sugar dating status, indicating that there were mean differences in the set of dependent variables between women who sugar date and the non-sugar dating comparison sample, $V = 222$, $F(3, 190) = 18.05$, $p < .001$. $n_p^2 = .222$, with univariate results revealing statistically significant main effects for sociosexual orientation, $F(1, 193) = 48.98$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .203$; sexual sensation seeking, $F(1, 193) = 32.12$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .143$; and nonsexual experience seeking, $F(1, 193) = 16.04$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .077$. The eta squared statistic indicated large effects for sociosexual orientation and sexual sensation seeking, and a moderate effect for nonsexual experience seeking. Age was shown to be significantly and negatively associated with nonsexual experience seeking, such that participants higher in the trait were younger, $\beta = -.052$, $t = -3.07$, $p = .002$. The MANCOVA was followed up with discriminant analysis to determine how the three traits could be differentiated between the two groups of women based on sugar dating status, which

revealed one discriminant function, canonical $R^2 = .472$, that significantly differentiated the two groups of women, $\Lambda = .78$, $\chi^2(3) = 48.26$, $p < .001$. The structure matrix revealed that sociosexual orientation ($r = .943$) was most important in terms of discriminating between sugar dating women and non-sugar dating women; however, sexual sensation seeking ($r = .767$) and nonsexual experience seeking ($r = .514$) were important as well. On average, sugar babies were higher in sociosexual orientation ($M = 6.15$, $SD = 1.49$) than non-sugar dating women ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.66$). The sugar dating women also had higher mean scores for sexual sensation seeking ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.35$) than non-sugar dating women ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.26$). Lastly, sugar dating women were also higher, on average, in the trait of nonsexual experience seeking ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.39$), than women who did not sugar date ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.37$).

Predictors of Negative Mental Health Correlates

To examine whether negative mental health correlates (depression, anxiety, and stress subscales of the DASS-21 and RSES) in the sugar baby sample were associated with the perception of stigma, the desire to continue sugar dating, and confidence in being able to find alternative work, mean scores for items were first obtained and bivariate correlations performed.

Overall, mean scores indicated that the perception of stigma due to sugar dating was higher for family than for peers, with a combined mean of 3.56 ($SD = 1.15$), indicating that the perception of stigma due to sugar dating was slightly higher than neutral (All means and standard deviations for mental health correlates are presented in Table 5). Bivariate correlations further revealed that the degree to which sugar babies desired to continue sugar dating or their confidence in finding alternative work was not significantly related to any of the other variables (see all correlations in Table 9). The depression, anxiety, and stress subscales were shown to have moderate to strong, positive correlations with one another and significant negative correlations with RSES scores. Additionally, the perception of stigma had a significant positive

association with depression , $r(33) = .36$, $p < .005$, and a significant negative relationship with self-esteem, $r(33) = -.37$, $p < .005$. The results of regression analyses revealed that the perception of stigma was a significant predictor of depression ($\beta = 4.31$, $p = .042$), explaining about 12.6 percent of the variance, and a significant predictor of self-esteem ($\beta = -2.64$, $p = .037$), explaining 13.3 percent of the variance.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that motivate college women to pursue sugar dating. The findings from the first research question revealed that, similar to motivations cited by other sex workers (including student sex workers), sugar babies rated financial reasons as most important reason to sugar date (Benoit et al., 2017a; Bilardi et al., 2010; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016; PLRC, 2008; Roberts et al., 2013; Sinacore et al., 2014). Paying for household expenses was rated as most important, followed by paying for education. The fact that paying for education was rated higher than paying off student loans appears to support previous research in which students have cited the ability to reduce the amount of student loans required to pay for their education as a key benefit to engaging in sex work (Daly, 2017; Sinacore, Jaghori, & Rezazadeh, 2014; Reed, 2015; Roberts et al., 2010). Preference to having a standard wage job was also rated as being of high importance, which supports recent findings in which students cited the ability of being able to work fewer hours while earning more money as a primary motivation for entering the sex industry, in addition to finding the prospects of hourly wage jobs demeaning and nonsensical (Daly, 2017; Sinacore et al., 2014). These findings indicated that, on average, sugar babies engaged in sex with their sugar daddies two to four times a month, which comprised about 25 percent of the total time spent with sugar daddies. This further suggests that earning money through sugar dating affords women fewer, more flexible work hours. This flexibility appears to be particularly enticing to students in terms of adjusting

their work schedules to study for exams and other academic endeavors. On average, sugar babies were somewhat confident of being able to support their current lifestyle through alternative means and leaned toward wanting to continue sugar dating , indicating some ambivalence, but overall supporting similar findings indicating that women engaged in sex work generally prefer their work to other alternatives (Bilardi et al., 2010; Bernstein, 2007; Krumrei- Mancuso, 2016; Lucas, 2005; Rössler et al., 2010). Sugar babies also rated many of the items belonging to the luxury motivations factor, such as fine dining opportunities, paying for a social life, and shopping sprees as being important, which is consistent with previous research where sex workers have cited the ability to attain a nicer lifestyle as a key motivator (Bernstein, 2007; Cordero, 2015; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016). Social motivating factors, such as feeling valued/special, and sugar daddy as a mentor/source of knowledge were rated as being slightly higher than average, suggesting that they are also perceived as benefits of sugar dating. Finding a long-term romantic partner was rated as being of relatively little importance, suggesting that contrary to marketing solicitation by sugar dating websites, sugar babies are not as concerned with the traditional romantic-like characteristics of arrangements. This could be due to the increased age at which first marriages typically occur, which is currently a median age of 27.4 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Consequently, women may be delaying interest in finding a long-term partner until after graduating from college. Sugar dating women also indicated that supporting children/family were of little importance in terms of their motivations; however, this study did not inquire whether the women had dependents to support, which means we cannot draw conclusions about this. Support for alcohol or other drug use had the lowest importance rating, which is consistent with findings from previous research regarding non-street-based sex

work (e.g. PLRC, 2008), and further contradicts the stereotypes that women who sell sex are primarily motivated to do so due to drug addiction (Roberts et al., 2013).

The results of this study also revealed that about half (54.5%) of sugar babies used sugar dating as a primary source of income, suggesting that many women may utilize sugar dating as a means to supplement additional income while working jobs that allow them to build skills and perhaps deflect attention from the fact that they sugar date. This may also partially explain why women were somewhat confident that they could find alternative work to sustain their current lifestyle; however, this study did not inquire into the allowances that sugar babies receive from sugar daddies, which could have shed more light on the matter.

Similar to previous research indicating a rise in the willingness of students to engage in sex work, about half of non-sugar dating women stated that they would not consider doing (Betzer et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2013). Twenty-six percent of non-sugar dating women in this study were willing to consider sugar dating, with another 20 % reporting that they weren't sure, which is an increase in the percentages cited by previous research. Betzer et al. (2015) found that only 5% of students could imagine engaging in sex work—with another 28% imagining doing so given certain circumstances—and Roberts et al., (2010) found that 16.5% of students were willing to work in the sex industry, suggesting that the notion of utilizing sex to pay for the high cost of tuition is becoming more socially acceptable among students. However, because this study was advertised as a study examining women's experiences with nontraditional forms of dating, these results cannot be taken as representative of all college women.

The results of this study also provide insight into the sexual risk behaviors of sugar dating women and how they compared to non-sugar dating women. Although these findings revealed

no significant mean differences between the two subsamples in the reported percentage of time condoms were utilized in sexual intercourse with romantic or casual sexual partners, overall patterns of use were revealed, which indicated condom use with romantic partners was about half that of with casual partners (approximately 40% vs 80%). This pattern is consistent with previous research indicating that overall use is less with romantic partners, in part due to the belief that being in a committed relationship negates the threat of HIV or STI infection (Fehr, Vidourek, & King, 2014; Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2014). Percentages of condom use with sugar daddies reported by sugar dating women fell in between that of use with romantic and casual sexual partners. This finding makes sense given that arrangements themselves appear to fall somewhere in between that of romantic relationships and casual encounters (Motyl, 2012; Nayar, 2016). There are a couple of different explanations as to why sugar daters may forgo condom use to a greater extent when it comes to sex with sugar daddies. One explanation, which has been cited by sex workers as being a frequent burden with their clients, is that sugar daddies are pressuring sugar babies into sex without condoms (Hubbard & Prior, 2013; Lucas, 2005; Perkins & Lovejoy, 1996; Sanders, 2004). The findings from other research indicate that power differentials have been shown to affect condom usage, with the person in the higher power position typically deciding whether condoms are used during sex (Pulerwitz, Amaro, Jong, Gortmaker, & Rudd, 2002; Woolf & Maisto, 2008). Although fewer women in this study reported feeling as though their sugar daddy held the power in the relationship, it is possible that sugar daddies negotiated not using condoms as a term to their arrangement.

Overall, sugar babies reported engaging in sugar dating for more than one year and leaned towards wanting to continue, suggesting that these women are generally satisfied with their arrangements and even feel a sense of commitment with their sugar daddies, both of which

may also decrease condom use. (Cooper, 2010; Fehr et al., 2014; Lehmiller et al., 2014). As noted by Harcourt and Donovan (2005), arrangements potentially pose greater public and personal health risks than more direct forms of prostitution due to this false sense of security. That the average reported condom use with sugar daddies was less than two-thirds is concerning given that STI diagnoses among both young and older Americans are on the rise (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). This study did not inquire whether sugar babies communicated with their sugar daddies about condom use or STD testing, however, which is an area future research should explore. Future research would also do well to explore potential condom resistance strategies used by sugar daddies. The findings of this study did indicate that sugar babies were about twice as likely to report having been diagnosed with an STI/STD compared to the comparison sample; however, this is likely due to the fact that they were over 10 times more likely to have been tested, therefore increasing the odds of being diagnosed. Given that for the year of 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 1.5 million cases of chlamydia and more than 468, 000 cases of gonorrhea (both of which often have no symptoms and can cause serious complications if left untreated), it is concerning that so many women in the non-sugar dating sample had not been not tested. One explanation for this difference is that sugar dating women may be more aware of the risk of contracting an STI/STD, and non-sugar dating women may perceive their sexual behaviors as being lower risk, and therefore don't feel the need to be tested. This suggests a need for college campuses to better promote the importance of STI/STD testing to all students. Given that recent research suggests that individuals within consensually nonmonogamous (CNM) relationships are more likely than those in monogamous relationships to engage in safer sexual practices, assessing how the sexual practices of sugar dating women who have romantic partners compare to those of women in

other types of CNM relationships is another area that future research should explore (Lehmiller, 2015).

The findings from this study also provided further insight to the mental health correlates of women involved in sex work and revealed that sugar dating women did not significantly differ from non-sugar dating women on any of the measures. Mean RSES scores for sugar babies and non-sugar dating women were both in the range for normal self-esteem, where low self-esteem is considered to be a score of less than 15 (Rosenberg, 1965). This finding contradicts the stereotype that women who work in the sex industry have poorer self-image and lends further support to findings indicating that student sex workers often exhibit similar—if not higher—levels of self-esteem as their non-sex working counterparts (Benoit et al., 2017b; Bernstein, 2007; Griffith, Hayworth, Adams, Mitchell, & Hart, 2013; Trautner & Collett, 2004). Although the women in this study exhibited healthy levels of self-esteem, mean scores for depression in both sugar dating and non-sugar dating women indicated moderate depression. In fact, less than half (40.5%) of the overall sample had scores that qualified them as normal on the depression measure and nearly a quarter of women (24.1%) had depressive symptoms considered severe. Similarly, mean scores on the anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 also indicated moderate severity of anxiety in both subsamples, and less than half of all women in the study (46.7%) had scores that qualified them in the normal range and close to a quarter (23.1%) exhibited severe symptoms (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). These findings appear to support recent findings regarding the rise in anxiety and depression in the United States, particularly among college students, where about 1 in 5 students are affected (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2017). According to a survey report by the American College Health Association (ACHA), nearly 40% of college students reported depressive symptoms so severe within the past year that it impacted

their ability to function, and over 60% reported overwhelming anxiety during the same time frame (2017). According to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2017), depression is the number one reason that students seek counseling, suggesting this finding represents a broader issue taking place, not a consequence of sugar dating.

Interestingly, the desire to stop sugar dating and lack of confidence in the ability to support oneself through alternative work were not associated with negative mental health correlates, as was the case in previous research on sex workers (e.g. Krumrei-Mancuso, 2016). One explanation for the lack of association seen in this study is that this study focused on college women, who may be less likely to feel financially dependent on their arrangements. The perception of stigma was revealed to significantly predict both depression and lower self-esteem in sugar dating women and explained about 13% of the variance in each. Given the well documented findings regarding the negative effects of perceived discrimination on well-being, these findings are not surprising (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). In previous research, sex workers—including students working in the sex industry— have reported fearing being revealed to others more than being victimized on the job, demonstrating how detrimental perceived stigma can be for young women (Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010 Sanders, 2004; Trautner & Collett, 2010). Because positive mental health is an important component to academic success, these findings have important implications for college counselors and suggest that outreach provided to help college women cope with the stigma and/or secrecy of working in the sex industry, may be beneficial (Daly, 2017; Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2010).

The hypothesis that sugar babies would differ significantly from non-sugar dating women on the Big-Five traits was not supported. Although statistically significant mean differences were found for the trait of neuroticism, these results were in the opposite direction relative to

predictions, with means being lower for sugar babies than for the comparison sample. This was an unexpected finding given the association between short-term mating behavior and higher levels of neuroticism (Schmitt, 2004). The partial eta squared statistic (an indicator of effect size) revealed this effect to be small, however. Additionally, reliability for the neuroticism subscale was found to be somewhat low, given that the items were only moderately correlated. None of the other Big-Five traits were found to differ between the two groups of women, which could also be attributed to the poor internal consistency of the measure used given that many of the intercorrelations between item pairs were weakly correlated. Alternatively, there may be no association between these traits and a willingness to engage in sugar dating. As a result of the lower reliability of the BFI-10 in this study, it is recommended that future research examines personality traits in populations of sugar daters and student sex-workers more broadly.

However, the results of this study did suggest that the more domain specific personality traits affiliated with riskier social and sexual practices are influential in who decides to engage in nontraditional and controversial practices, like sugar dating. As hypothesized, sugar dating women were found to be significantly higher in both sexual and nonsexual experience sensation seeking and have sociosexual orientations that were less restricted that their non-sugar dating counterparts. Discriminant analysis revealed that each of the traits were important in terms of differentiating between women who sugar date and those who didn't, suggesting that individual personality characteristics do play a role. Given that personality traits have long since been implicated as factors in determining what types of careers individuals pursue and are most satisfied in, it makes sense that sex work should be no different (McCrae & Costa, 1992). This finding fits with the existing literature in that sensation seeking and an unrestricted sociosexuality are associated with engaging in sexual activity with a variety of casual sexual

partners—an element that sugar dating possesses, as evidenced by the fact that sugar babies had concurrent arrangements with more than one sugar daddy, and about a third were simultaneously in a romantic relationship (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995). Although sensation seeking is often associated with a predilection to engaging in sexually risky behavior the findings from this study did not suggest that sugar babies were any more likely than non-sugar dating women (who were lower in the trait) to do so (Gaither & Sellbom, 2003; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000). However, as noted, responses from both subsamples of women indicated engagement in some risker sexual behavior.

In sum, the findings from this study shed light on college women's motivations for sugar dating, which were primarily financial but did not appear to be financial desperation per se. The findings also suggest that domain specific traits, such as sensation seeking and sociosexual orientation, are associated with engagement in sugar dating; however, due to the extremely poor internal consistency demonstrated by the measurement used to assess the Big-Five traits, it is still unknown how they may contribute. The results of this study also provided insight into the mental health of both sugar dating and non-sugar dating women. Although the findings indicated that they did not differ on any of the measures assessed, they suggest that the women in this study had slightly higher levels of anxiety and depression than normal. Additionally, it was found that the perception of stigma in sugar dating women predicted lower levels of self-esteem and higher severity of depressive symptoms, demonstrating cause for university counseling centers to do outreach to populations of sex working student. Lastly, the results of this study also shed light on sexual health risk behaviors of both samples of women. The findings indicated that sugar dating women are more likely to have been diagnosed with having an STI or STD—most likely as a result an increased likelihood of being tested. Additionally, condom use was inconsistent in both

samples across all sexual partner types assessed, further demonstrating the need for increased awareness about taking precautionary measures with all sexual partners and increasing access to sexual health services at universities.

Strengths and Limitations

There were several limitations to note in the current study. First, because the study was advertised as a study examining personality and nontraditional forms of dating, respondents who filled out the survey were potentially quite different in the areas assessed than the average college woman due to selection effects.

Second, as noted in the Methods section, widely used sugar dating websites, such as Seeking Arrangement, prohibited recruitment of participants through their site using the solicitation methods detailed by previous researchers (e.g. Cordero, 2015; Daly, 2017; Reed, 2015). As a result, solicitation notices were posted to the Volunteer section of Craigslist. Consequently, sugar baby participants recruited through Craigslist might have utilized sugar dating websites that differed from those used by the majority of college sugar dating women, which could potentially indicate that the participants differed in other ways as well. In addition to Craigslist and social media sites, the study was also posted on a variety of research-promoting sites that are utilized by a variety of college students to increase the probability of obtaining a diverse sample. However, because this study did not collect information regarding which specific website(s) participants were referred by, it remains unclear whether participants from different sites differed on any of the measures administered. Therefore, it is possible that sugar dating women recruited from Craigslist differed in unknown ways from both sugar dating and non-sugar dating women recruited from social media or research promoting websites, which could have potentially impacted the results.

The results of chi-square tests of association revealed nonsignificant differences in demographics between the two subsamples, aside from the analyses for sexual risk behaviors, which were run separately for single versus non-single women to compensate for differences. That said, it is unknown whether race of participants differed across samples because race was not assessed in the demographics section of the questionnaire. Another sample-related limitation is the overall smaller size of the sugar baby sample relative to the non-sugar dating group, which was brought about by the difficulty in recruiting sugar dating participants.

Another limitation was the poor internal consistency of the measure used to assess the Big-Five personality traits. Because survey length was a concern and the BFI-10 had demonstrated acceptable reliability in previous work (e.g. Rammstedt & John, 2007), it was expected that the measure would be satisfactory in the present work. As a result, it is suggested that future research assess general personality traits with an alternative full-length scale. Additionally, the results of this study were contingent upon participants providing honest responses, which cannot be guaranteed. Many of the items assessed sensitive topics that may be prone to social desirability in responding; however, administering the survey online and informing participants that their responses were completely anonymous is likely to have minimized this risk.

Despite these limitations, this study contributed to the literature by providing insight into the motivations for sugar dating women and the characteristics of their arrangements with sugar daddies. To date, this is the first known study to assess these factors quantitatively, given that previous studies have consisted of qualitative designs and with smaller sample sizes. Furthermore, few studies have utilized comparison samples when making inferences about special populations as this study has.

Overall, the results of this study provide insight into differences and similarities between women who are willing to support themselves through sex work and those who are not; these results also have important implications for mental and sexual health services on college campuses. Based on these findings, it is recommended that future research further examine condom negotiation self-efficacy and resistance strategies among college sugar dating women and the effects of perceived stigma on their psychological well-being.

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Tables

Table 1. Demographics for sugar dating and non-sugar dating samples.

		Sugar dating		Non-sugar dating	
		N = 44		*N* = 162	
Demographic variables		*n*	%	*n*	%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual/mostly heterosexual	23	52.3%	103	63.6%
	Lesbian/mostly lesbian	2	4.5%	14	8.6%
	Bisexual	11	25%	25	15.4%
	Other	8	18.2%	20	12.3%
Relationship Status	Single	16	48.5%	56	34.8%
	Dating	13	39.4%	85	52.5%
	Married	3	9.1%	19	11.8%
	Divorced	0	0%	1	.6%
	Widowed	1	3%	0	0%
Education Level	High-school/GED	9	20.5%	18	11.1%
	Some college/no degree	17	38.6%	67	41.4%
	Associate degree	6	13.6%	14	8.6%
	Bachelor's degree	11	25%	48	29.6%
	Master's degree	1	2.3%	15	9.3%
Currently enrolled as full or par-time student		28	63.6%	108	66.7%
Currently studying in U.S from abroad (visa)		4	9.1%	7	4.3%
Average age in years		24.93	(5.63)	24.27	(5.59)

Note. Standard deviations for age appear in parentheses. The sugar baby sample (n = 44) reflects demographics for those whose data was analyzed for the research question assessing sugar dating motivations and characteristics only.

Table 2. Results of Chi-square tests of association for demographic differences between subsamples.

	Subsample percentages			
Demographic variable	Sugar dating	Non-sugar dating	χ^2	p
	(*n* = 33)	(*n* = 162)	Value	Value
Heterosexual/non-heterosexual%	51.5% / 48.5%	63.6 % / 36.4%	1.69	.194
Single/ non-single %	51.5% / 48.5%	35.8% / 64.2%	2.86	.091
Student/non-student %	69.7% / 30.3%	66.7 %/ 33.3%	.114	.735
Student visa yes/ no %	6.1% / 93.9%	4.3% / 95.7%	.188	.664
No 4-year degree/ 4-year degree %	69.7%/ 30.3%	61.1%/ 38.9%	.863	.353

Note. The subsamples did not differ significantly in any of these demographic characteristics except for with the analyses assessing sexual risk behaviors. For these analyses, relationship status differed significantly, χ^2 (1) = 11.17, p = .001, with the percentage of sugar babies that were single/non-single (63.6% / 36.4%) being significantly higher than for non-sugar dating women (35.4%/64.6%). These demographics reflect those of the 33 sugar babies that were used in the analyses comparing the two subsamples, and not the demographics for the 44 presented in Table 1.

Table 3. Factor loadings for rotated factor matrix.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
	Financial	Luxury	Sensuality	Extended circle	Outside influence
1. Pay for education	.89	.11	-.06	.10	.02
2. Paying off student loans	.88	.12	-.11	.01	.23
3. Paying off debt other than student loans	.79	.03	-.21	.13	-.07
4. Pay household expenses (e.g. rent/bills)	.76	.39	.00	-.04	.04
5. Saving up	.66	.30	.04	.09	-.44
6. Shopping sprees	.12	.92	-.01	.03	-.19
7. Pay for social life/going	.09	.77	.14	.04	.30
8. Fine dining opportunities	.50	.74	.19	-.06	-.08
9. Get to travel to exotic places	.03	.66	. 54	.16	-.08
10. Preferable to having an hourly wage job	.25	.66	-.13	-.03	.09
11. Thought it looked exciting/glamorous	-.10	.53	.32	.31	.29
12. Finding a long-term romantic partner	-.12	.07	.78	-.15	-.25
13. Exploring sexuality	-.11	.09	.74	.08	.29
14. Feeling special/valued	-.45	.39	.68	.17	.16
15. Sugar daddy is a source of knowledge	-.11	-.10	.66	.59	.26
16. Curiosity	.32	.19	.52	-.07	.52
17. Support children/family	.03	.05	-.15	.84	.14
18. Networking opportunities	.28	.10	.23	.82	-.21
19. Friend was doing it	-.03	.07	.03	.08	.89
20. Support for alcohol or other drug use	-.53	.35	-.54	-.02	.26

Note. Extraction method used was Principal Component Analysis, the rotation method used was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, and rotation converged in 7 iterations. Factor 1 consisted of items 1-5; Factor 2 of items 6-11; Factor 3 of items 12-16; Factor 4 of items 17-18; and Factor 5 of items 19-20.

Table 4. Mean ratings of importance for motivations for sugar dating.

	Sugar dating $N = 33$		
Items	*M*	*SD*	95% CI
1. Pay household expenses (e.g. rent/bills)	6.00	1.73	[5.39, 6.61]
2. Pay for education	5.91	1.65	[5.33, 6.49]
3. Preferable to having an hourly wage job	5.66	2.10	[4.90, 6.41]
4. Paying off student loans	5.63	1.88	[4.95, 6.30]
5. Paying off debt other than student loans	5.30	2.19	[4.53, 6.08]
6. Pay for social life/going out/luxuries	5.22	1.96	[4.51, 5.93]
7. Fine dining opportunities	5.03	2.39	[4.18, 5.88]
8. Shopping sprees	5.03	2.36	[4.17, 5.89]
9. Saving up	4.91	2.35	[4.06, 5.75]
10. Exploring sexuality	4.71	2.41	[3.83, 5.59]
11. Curiosity	4.56	2.05	[3.82, 5.30]
12. Feeling special/valued	4.44	2.54	[3.52, 5.35]
13. Sugar daddy is a source of knowledge/mentor	4.34	2.51	[3.44, 5.25]
14. Get to travel to exotic places	4.31	2.15	[3.54, 5.09]
15. Networking opportunities	4.19	2.26	[3.37, 5.00]
16. Thought it looked exciting/glamorous	3.52	2.32	[2.66, 4.37]
17. Finding a long-term romantic partner	2.84	2.18	[2.04, 3.64]
18. Support children/family	2.34	2.27	[1.53, 3.16]
19. Friend was doing it	2.12	2.04	[1.40, 2.85]
20. Support for alcohol or other drug use	2.00	1.97	[1.30, 2.70]

Note. Items were assessed on a 7-point scale, where 1 represented "*not important at all*" and 7 represented "*very important."* Items 1, 2, 4, 5, and 9 belong to Factor 1; Items 3, 6 - 8, 14 and 16 belong to Factor 2; Items 10-13, and 17 belong to Factor 3; Items 15 and 18 belong to Factor 4; Items 19 and 20 belong to Factor 5; however, item 20 only had a factor loading of .26.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for mental health correlates.

Mental health correlates	Sugar dating		Non-sugar dating	
	n = 33		*n* = 162	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Depression subscale	15.82	13.96	14.25	11.04
Anxiety subscale	10.42	10.51	10.42	8.81
Stress subscale	15.15	10.78	15.47	8.92
Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale	19.24	8.38	17.83	6.49
Perceived stigma-family	3.77	1.25		
Perceived stigma-peers	3.37	1.27		
Perceived stigma total	3.56	1.15		

Note. Means and standard deviations reflected for each of the DASS-21 subscales have been multiped by two, as per scoring manual for DASS

Table 6. Frequencies and percentages of STI/STD testing and diagnosis for single and partnered participants.

		Sugar dating		Non-sugar dating	
Have you ever been tested for an STI/STD?		*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Single participants	Yes	15	88.2%	24	41.4%
Partnered participants	Yes	14	87.5%	81	77.9%
Have you ever been diagnosed with an STI/STD?		*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Single participants	Yes	5	29.4%	4	6.9%
Partnered participants	Yes	1	6.3%	11	10.6%

Note. Frequencies and percentages were obtained with chi-square analyses. Counts for participants who indicated they had never been tested or diagnosed are not reported in the table; however, total percentages for "yes" and "no" responses equaled 100 percent.

Table 7. Frequencies and percentages of condom use broken down by relationship status.

	Sugar dating			Non-sugar dating		
Condom use frequency with romantic partners	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Overall	30	43.30	44.03	140	41.21	42.38
Single	21	55.81	43.34	51	66.88	39.44
Non-single	9	14.11	22.76	89	26.51	36.77
Condom use frequency with casual partners	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Overall	35	80.06	31.78	138	80.01	32.91
Single	23	86.56	26.01	50	87.36	25.56
Non-single	12	67.58	38.85	88	75.63	35.82

Note. Frequency was assessed by asking participants to indicate the percentage of time they use condoms during sexual intercourse on a scale of 0 to 100.

Table 8. Means and standard deviations for BFI-10 personality traits.

Personality trait	Sugar dating status	*M*	*SD*	95% CI
Extraversion	Sugar dating (*n* = 33)	3.30	1.11	[2.91, 3.69]
	Non-sugar dating (*n* = 162)	2.85	1.14	[2.67, 3.02]
Agreeableness	Sugar dating	3.41	1.14	[3.08, 3.74]
	Non-sugar dating	3.27	1.09	[3.12, 3.42]
Neuroticism	Sugar dating	2.80	0.94	[2.44, 3.17]
	Non-sugar dating	3.50	0.96	[3.33, 3.66]
Openness	Sugar dating	3.95	1.30	[3.62, 4.29]
	Non-sugar dating	3.72	1.01	[3.57, 3.87]
Conscientiousness	Sugar dating	3.73	1.09	[3.43, 4.03]
	Non-sugar dating	3.41	1.08	[3.27, 3.55]

Note. Personality traits were assessed on a 4-point scale where 1 represented "*strongly disagree*" and 4 represented "*strongly agree*." Group differences were examined with a one-way MANOVA, with the dependent variable comprised of the five traits.

Table 9. Correlations among mental health measures.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Desire to continue	-						
2. Alternative work	-.096	-					
3. Perceived stigma	-.204	-.047	-				
4. Depression subscale	-.295	.013	.355*	-			
5. Stress subscale	-.029	.094	.218	.693**	-		
6. Anxiety subscale	.076	.325	.002	.560**	.785**	-	
7. Self-esteem	.230	.176	-.362*	-.801**	-.696**	-.406*	-

Note. These correlations are based on figures for sugar babies and do not include non-sugar dating women

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).