



Yasmine Ghania & Tim Kitz

"Iris Janis" has used a website called SeekingArrangement (SA) on and off for two years. It is a transactional dating site that describes itself as delivering "a new way for relationships to form and grow. Sugar Babies and Sugar Daddies or Mommas both get what they want, when they want it."

A photograph of a bathroom sink area. A chrome faucet with two handles is centered. To the left, a person wearing black underwear is partially visible. In the foreground, a black hairbrush and a small perfume bottle are on the sink. A colorful, rainbow-colored palette with the text 'eyes lips & bright eyeshadow' is also visible. Various toiletries are on the counter in the background.



I was 24 and I remember my friend at work telling me about it. Her sister was apparently making a ton of super-easy money. I was going through a period of depression and I felt as though I had nothing to lose. I wanted to jumpstart my life, get some excitement back, you know? And at that time I didn't know I'd actually be doing sex work—I think I looked at it more like... getting paid to go on dates.

The first time I did it, it was out of boredom and depression — in hindsight, entirely wrong reasons. I was tired of feeling numb and I wanted to *feel something* again. And why not make a few hundred dollars?

That was the only time I felt shame from doing sex work, I guess just because it was so new and I had a lot of unpacking to do. After a bunch of research and support from friends I was able to realize the shame was completely unnecessary.

I remember being quite secretive about it the first time. My sister told some of our mutual friends as she was very worried about me – and I was so angry with her. It wasn't her thing to share – and I hadn't really figured it out for myself, you know? I didn't know how to feel about the experience – I was trying to push away the self-judgement and shame – and I was worried that others would judge me too.

It has caused some grief in my romantic relationships though. I'm polyamorous and at the time I was dating someone who was quite encouraging of me doing sex work. The problem was that his *other* partner was not. She didn't want a sex worker involved in her life, even in the periphery, and that hurt me.

My other experiences were far more empowering. On SA dates I'd become this entirely different person – wearing makeup, heels, short skirts – and I'd have fun getting into the role of whoever I needed to be for that specific person. I remember leaving dates thinking to myself "that guy just spent a shit ton of money to have sex with you. You're on fire!"

After my first SA experience, I quickly learned that going on dates required me to be on my mental health game. To this day I won't use the site unless I know I've got my depression and anxiety in check, because doing sex work will fuck with your mind if you're not entirely confident that it's what you want to be doing.

My clients were all probably between 50 and 65 – and they were all quite wealthy. Professors, business owners, that kind of thing.

Without fail though, every date involved the guy telling me about past relationships, which led me to believe that a lot of the men on SA were lonely. That's why I found the sex work that I did to be empowering — it was me creating this intimacy that they might not have got otherwise.

No, sometimes they just wanted someone to talk to. A lot of the time they wanted to be in a "mentor" role, guiding women to realize their "full potential." Ugh. I think it's an ego thing. I felt that vibe on most of the dates I went on.

Yes, entirely. It's all performative. On SA I was someone else, I was whoever the john wanted me to be in that moment. I'd gauge what the man was like and what he was in to, and I would adjust my persona accordingly. When using OkCupid/ Tinder/PlentyOfFish, I'm always myself. I won't put on a facade or act. Sex work is a transaction, right? So I was providing the other party with what he was looking for.

The conversation would usually start with "so have you had any past arrangements...?" and go from there. I'd set the price and if they weren't ok with it, that'd be fine, we'd both move along.

It depended on the person. Some only wanted a one night kind of arrangement, while others were looking for something more long-term. One guy I had sex with told me a few weeks later that he'd made a mistake and felt too weird paying for intimacy. It's good he was able to read himself like that. I hope he's found what he's been looking for.

Yes, I always let someone know where I was going and who the john was.

Well – there was this one time. Me and the client had agreed beforehand that we were going to use protection for oral sex, as I always use it. But as things were getting hot, he changed his mind and tried to convince me to forget about protection. In the moment I was handcuffed to the bed so I couldn't do anything other than keep telling him "no." He could have raped me and he actually told me that afterwards. That was really scary.

Yeah, I do. I've heard horror stories from women I know who have done it for survival. Mine was quite the opposite – I did it for extra cash. I used sex work to buy a flight to San Francisco.

 I've asked for between \$300-600 per sexual encounter, depending on the circumstances.

I currently work at a cafe and honestly there are so many similarities. When it comes down to it, both are customer service. You have to make the client happy, whether it's preparing their latte exactly the way they want it, or fulfilling their submission fantasy.

Sex work felt far more personal than my other jobs. I was entering these men's lives (sometimes homes) and learning *a* lot about them, likely stuff they wouldn't share with just anyone. I felt like I was giving to this intimate and important experience that almost everyone craves at such a base level. I don't feel that way behind the counter slinging coffee.

I love that question. Knowing I could provide the johns with some intimacy and connection if only for a brief time made it feel far more rewarding than I've ever felt in other customer service environments. In contrast to working minimum wage doing something you hate... this was amazing money for something I felt was important and primal. Honestly I'm appalled that there's stigma attached to sex work. What the hell is wrong with our society?

No. I wouldn't want to be dependant on it for income. If I was tight for cash, I would hold off on using SA because I wouldn't let myself use sex work to pay bills. I was so privileged to be able to step back from it when I chose to.

I want to emphasize that I did it very much on the side. Someone who once taught their neighbour some piano wouldn't be a piano teacher. I tried out sex work but I am by no means a sex worker – I can't take that kind of credit.

Given my curiosity I likely would have found another site involving sex work (like Backpage or Craigslist) but SA was the first one I'd heard about. I wouldn't be selling sex on the street but the popularity, honesty and straightforwardness of SA drew me in.

In my experience a lot of the men on SA felt as though they were the ones who held the power in the transaction and relationship. A lot of them wanted to be "mentors" of sorts to younger women – they felt as though they could impart this wisdom and help us reach our dreams and goals.

Sure their age and financial means played into the dynamic, but I wouldn't enter an arrangement unless I felt like I had the upper hand. They were the ones being physically and emotionally vulnerable with me, and I was the one setting the price.

That's exactly what it was — a mutually beneficial relationship where both parties were getting what they wanted. That's a huge part of why I felt the need to put on this SA persona — my physicality isn't what society might define as classically feminine or sexual. Most of the men on SA were looking for a barely-legal hypersexual dreamgirl — and I'm an androgynous lanky queer woman with short hair and glasses. I wanted to make sure we were both getting what we were looking for — which is why during arrangements, for lack of better words, I would become someone else.

It's funny though — in my experience both sides of the arrangement believed they were holding the more valuable commodity. The guy usually knew I was a broke student, and I knew he was horny as hell! Negotiating the price of sex — what a funny dance.



BRANDON WADE,
Founder of SeekingArrangement

1993 Graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Wade opts to stay in the U.S., breaking his scholarship agreement with the Singapore Public Service Commission — and leaving his parents to pay \$300,000 in damages. Wade later describes his “Aha” moment to *Forbes* as coming when his mother tells him, as a “shy MIT nerd who was never kissed until 21,” that “one day when you’re successful and generous, the girls will come.”

2006 After working as a tech consultant for Booz Allen and General Electric, Wade founds SeekingArrangement.com. Wade later tells CNN, "I finally had the tools to succeed with women, but lacked the confidence to approach them in public. So I created my first dating website to meet women who I knew would be interested in a relationship with someone like me. And yes, to offer the financial incentive to give myself, and others like me, a fighting chance."

2007 Wade launches sister site WhatsYourPrice.com, where "the generous" can bid on dates with "the attractive."

2009 SeekingArrangement adds premium memberships. Sugar Babies who register with their university email address automatically qualify for premium membership status.

2011 Wade publishes the book *Connecting with the 'IN' Crowd: How to Network, Hang Out, and Play with Millionaires Online*.

2011-13 Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner is brought down by a sexting scandal. One of the six women he sexted — not the 15-year old — met Weiner through SeekingArrangement.

012 The Republican National Convention in Tampa Bay bumps regional SA traffic by 25.9 per cent.

2013 Google executive Forrest Hayes dies of a heroin overdose. SeekingArrangement Sugar Baby Alix Tichelman is later charged with manslaughter (and prostitution) for shooting him up.

014 In an essay for CNN, Wade writes that "Love is a concept invented by poor people."

2017 The SeekingArrangement "Terms of Use" state that posting anything to the site gives them "irrevocable, perpetual" right to use this information (Section 8c). They may release this information if they believe the disclosure is "reasonable" (13c).