

Compensated Dating in Denmark

Report from the research- and development project
'Sugardating among marginalized young people'



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Preface

This report presents the qualitative research findings of the project 'Sugar dating amongst marginalized youth - developing a new field of research and practice', funded by the VELUX FOUNDATIONS' HUMpraxis programme. The report also presents the main findings of the quantitative section of the research study (hereafter referred to as Dahl and Østergaard 2021), conducted in cooperation with VIVE - the National Research Centre for Welfare. A key aim of the project was also to develop initiatives and tools to support the work of helping young people who experience problems as a result of sugar dating. Accordingly, the report also includes a section from Reden Ung on their efforts to develop initiatives.

The research team consists of Associate Professor Christian Groes (RUC), Postdoc Marie Højlund Bræmer (AU) and Associate Professor Jeanett Bjønness (AU). The project team also includes staff from Reden Ung in Copenhagen: team leader Mads Andersen Høg, and youth and volunteer coordinator Julie Jochims Engelbrechtsen, (and, in the early phase of the project, Marie Erkmann and Christina Wind). The project steering committee consists of project manager Christian Groes, and the heads of Reden Ung Copenhagen, Kira West and Mads Andersen Høg, together with Jeanett Bjønness in the role of observer. The project group worked closely with researchers from VIVE and a number of practice partners: Børns Vilkår, U-turn København, SSP Ballerup, Headspace and De Unges Hus in Copenhagen. Two monitoring groups were also attached to the project: a practitioner follow-up group consisting of Kompetencecenter Prostitution, DFPA, LivaRehab, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in the Capital Region and a research follow-up group consisting of Marlene Spanger (AAU), Charlotta Holmström (Malmö University) and Isabel Crowhurst (University of Essex).

The research section of the report describes and analyses young people's motives for exchanging sex or intimacy for material and immaterial benefits, their social backgrounds and the experiences, both positive and negative, they have in the context of such exchanges. In order to illustrate the complex motives and experiences of young people, we present four cases, which paint a picture of the various types of young people we met during the project. The qualitative research section concludes with a section on the main discussions and future perspectives that the project generated. To provide an overview, the end of this section features a summary of the qualitative results.

The project is both a research and development project. That is why it is paramount for the research to contribute to the efforts Reden Ung and other institutions working with young people to (further) develop and qualify social and educational initiatives. Consequently, the report includes a section on the thoughts of Reden Ung about the development of social services and initiatives, and a review of the various practical tools developed in the project.

The report concludes with a summary of VIVE's quantitative results from the report, 'Young people's exchange of intimacy for material benefits', published as part of the project in 2021.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the project. Firstly, of course, all the young people who told us about their lives, experiences and attitudes, but also all the others who contributed in various ways: The project team, VIVE and our other partners. Our special thanks go to Mads Andersen Høg and Julie Jochims Engelbrechtsen from Reden Ung, and to Else Marie Elmholdt from the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research for their constructive feedback on the report. Finally, a big thank you to the VELUX FOUNDATIONS' HUMpraxis programme for giving us this unique opportunity to collate young people's stories, quantitative surveys and practical experiences in a single project.

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e-ISBN: 978-87-973976-4-0

Layout: Hedda Bank

Cover Illustration: Kristin Torp

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The background, approach and terminology of the project

In recent years, the phenomenon of sugar dating has received increasing attention in Denmark. The number of profiles on sugar dating websites has increased dramatically since the website *sugar daters.dk* was created in 2013 (DR 2014; *Berlingske* 2017), while, at the same time, the phenomenon has received a lot of attention in the Danish media. During the same period, Reden Ung and other social services have seen an increase in the number of young people reporting sugar dating-related problems (Reden Ung 2017; LivaRehab 2017).

Despite this large amount of attention, there was no research-based knowledge on sugar dating and similar phenomena such as ‘youth prostitution’, and young people’s exchange and sale of sex in Denmark. Often, the role of young people in commercial sexual activities was only mentioned parenthetically and, when mentioned, young people’s exchanges were defined as ‘youth prostitution’ or ‘selling sex’. Questions turned mainly to sex for money rather than other forms of exchange relationships. As in previous studies of prostitution, the focus was on explicit *commercial relationships*, in which a person *sells* sexual services to another person who wants to *buy* them, and in many cases, both parties regard prostitution as a profession or occupation. In prostitution or sex work, the services sold are often specified in terms of ‘blowjobs’ or various forms of sexual intercourse, with a price list for each service and duration, in which the sex worker often views the other party as a customer rather than a date or sex partner (see, e.g., Järvinen 1993).

In recent years, however, there has been increasing awareness of certain new forms of exchange relationships, which cannot necessarily be defined as prostitution. For example, people began to talk about ‘sex for mobile phones’ or ‘sex for a burger’ (Christensen 2003), giving rise to new concepts such as ‘prostitution-like relationships’, ‘grey area prostitution’ and ‘paid sexual exploitation of minors’ (Lautrop 2003, Rasmussen 2007, The Social Services Administration 2007, Sørensen & Nørlykke 2006, Thomsen 2004).

On that background, in 2013, when *sugar daters.dk* (now *sugar daters.com*) became a fact of life in Denmark, it became part of a pertinent discussion on how a social system should understand young people’s exchanges in a rapidly changing reality – particularly in the light of the growing influence of the media. Since then, there has been lively discussion among the Danish public. Does sugardating, as the owners of the website claim, amount to something completely new, or is it a form of prostitution or grey- area prostitution in a new guise?

This project aims to give such discussions a basis in research by: (1) Gleaning knowledge about young people’s motives for sugar dating and the problems they experience; (2) Generating knowledge about the backgrounds of the young people engaged in such activities, including gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social

background; and (3) Gleaning knowledge about young people's experiences of existing social initiatives and what they would like to see in terms of future initiatives; and (4) Helping improve and develop help for young people with issues related to sugar dating.

The term 'sugar dating' derives from the term 'sugar daddy', which until now had been used mainly in North America and a number of African countries, to refer to men who support a younger woman and offer her material goods in return for companionship, intimacy and, in many cases, sex (Daly 2017; Nayar 2017; Hunter 2002; Hoss and Blokland 2018). In a Danish context, the term has become more current as a result of media coverage of the *sugardaters.com* website and accounts by young 'sugar daters': for example, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) documentary, *Gina Jaqueline - En sugardaters fortælling* (Gina Jaqueline – The Story of a Sugar Dater) about the 'sugar babe', Gina Jaqueline and her 'sugar daddies' (DR 2017).

Some of the research literature question whether the terms 'prostitution' or 'sugar dating' adequately encapsulate sexual or intimate relationships between a younger, less well-off woman or man and an older, economically better-off man or woman (Stoebenau et al 2016; Dunckle et al 2010; Choudhry et al 2014; Wamoyi et al 2019). A number of researchers have proposed using the term 'transactional sex'¹, which can encompass not only regular dating with more personal interactions and unresolved boundaries - what is colloquially known as 'sugar dating' – but also what is known as 'escort prostitution', which differs from sugar dating by having clearer boundaries, including agreements regarding prices and duration (Groes-Gren 2013; Stoebenau et al 2016; Daly 2017; Nayar 2017; Hoefinger 2013).

Although the term 'transactional sex' may thus cover a broader spectrum than the term 'sugar dating', in this report and in our qualitative analyses, we chose to introduce a new common term. In their report, Dahl & Østergaard (2021) use the term "young people's exchange of intimacy for goods". We also discussed using this. However, we finally decided to use the term 'compensated dating' (Danish: *Bytteating*), which, apart from being short and easy to use, has a number of significant advantages. By using the term 'compensated dating', we emphasise the project's focus on young people's own experiences. Indeed, far from all the young people in our study describe their practice as sugar dating, although the vast majority of young people used sugar dating websites as the basis for their exchanges. 'Compensated dating' can thus encompass the whole spectrum of young people's experiences vis-à-vis exchanging sex or intimacy for money, gifts or recognition, and thus what young people describe as dating, sugar dating and prostitution. The term can encompass the reality we see, where sex or money is not always involved in young people's exchange relationships. Some exchange only company, while others only exchange pictures or hold web-based conversations, and do not always receive anything material in return.

The term 'compensated dating' can thus encompass the vast majority of exchanges of intimacy and sex for tangible and intangible benefits, including those *not* mediated by sugar dating websites.

¹ Most studies of transactional sex focus on exchanges between older men and younger women in heterosexual relationships or between older and younger men in same-sex relationships (Choudhry et al 2014; Daly 2017; Cole 2010; Berg et. al. 2015; Groes-Green 2013; Stoebenau et al. 2016; Hoefinger 2013). These can be either long-term relationships or one-off meetings and dates, in which it is agreed beforehand or in the process that the parties will exchange something sexual or intimate for something material.

The concept can also include circumstances that arise more spontaneously in social situations, in which a young person exchanges sex or intimacy for food, money, drugs, attention or recognition, or situations in which there is a more explicit agreement to exchange sex for money. There may also be situations in which young people are invited to send a picture of themselves in exchange for a certain amount of money. Such situations are not usually regarded as dating, but rather a kind of digital encounter, in which something is exchanged. Nevertheless, we believe that 'compensated dating' is the best and most concise way to express the many different phenomena that young people experience.

Another argument for using the term 'compensated dating' is the fact that it is value-neutral and can, therefore, encapsulate the complexity of young people's experiences and the nuances of their stories, even when they contain both positive and negative experiences. Previous studies in Denmark mainly used the terms 'grey zone prostitution', 'youth prostitution' or 'youth sex work', approaching the experiences of young people on the basis of the experiences of practitioners with young people (Bjønness & Jensen 2019). Thus, there was a huge focus on socially vulnerable young people who exchange sex for money or gifts, and less focus on young people's own accounts of their experiences and of what they have gained from dating (Weiskopf 2015; RedenUng 2017; Abellsson & Hulusjö 2008; Thomsen 2004). The term 'sugar dating', on the other hand, plays on the 'sugar' that some young people experience from exchanging sex or intimacy. Nevertheless, we still choose to use the term 'compensated dating', given that it can encompass both 'risk' and 'sugar', and thus the *various* types of relationships and encounters mentioned by young people, on a spectrum or continuum, ranging from exchanges similar to regular dating and online dating to exchanges that are more similar to prostitution and sex work. It encapsulates not only those exchanges that are more of a barter agreement, but also those in which the trade aspect is more prominent. All cases, however, involve something-for-something, in which company or sexual services, including photos, are compensated in varying degrees.

The term 'compensated dating' can take in the fact that young people engage in complex relationships and, in addition to the material aspects, also seek excitement, adventure, visibility and recognition. The prostitution or sugar categorisation does not sufficiently capture the contradictory conglomeration of necessity, passion, pragmatism, cultural logic, and sexual and political economy that young people's narratives reveal.

Target groups, methodology and recruitment

This report is based on interviews with sixty young people, all of who have some form of experience of compensated dating. The majority of the young people are between 18 and 30 years old; a few are in their early 30s. The average age at the time of the interview was 24.9 years. Of those interviewed, 6 are men, 5 of whom identify as gay, and one as heterosexual. In addition, there are two women who identify as lesbian, 10 who identify as bisexual, and 2 who identify as transgender. 9 of the interviewees have an ethnic background other than Danish. The remainder of the young people are heterosexual women with a Danish background. The study represents many different geographical parts of Denmark, but about half of those interviewed lived in the Copenhagen metropolitan area at the time of the interview.

From the outset we were aware that compensated dating is a very complex phenomenon, and that it was important to recruit from as many youth environments and as wide a geographical range as possible. The recruitment of interviewees thus took place via a huge range of different platforms. We distributed postcards and posters at educational institutions, libraries, cafés and to other partners in the study, and we set up a Facebook page and postings on Grindr. Since we knew that sugar daters.com and Tinder were very popular amongst young people, we tried to promote our research there. Our posts, however, were immediately removed by the administrators. We also got in touch with numerous services for young people, such as Headspace, Pigegruppen (Girl Group), U-turn, Sex & Samfund (The Danish Family Planning Association), Kvisten (a therapy organisation for sexual abuse) Reden Ung (Young People's Nest), Rederne nationwide and Liva- Rehab, and a number of residential centres for young people. However, it soon became apparent that in most places it was extremely difficult to get our message across. We wrote to, and called more than 30 residential and youth institutions, but very few replied. Moreover, in the few places where we made contact, the professionals usually thought either that compensated dating was not something they witnessed amongst their young people, or that the young people in this particular institution were so vulnerable that the staff did not want to burden them further by talking about the issue. However, as the study progressed, and as we interviewed professionals and made presentations in various contexts, we gained a clear sense that exchanging sex and intimacy for money, gifts, and attention is something that seems to be a growing trend in vulnerable youth environments. Thus, it is our assessment that further research is needed in the future to identify what is happening in these youth groups.

There were some recruitment constraints, but overall we managed to amass a very diverse group of young people to talk with us. This meant that we gained extensive information, but also that we did not interview young people from all social or cultural environments – for example from other ethnic backgrounds. In our interviews, we talked to young people about a range of issues and experiences related to exchanging intimacy or sex for material and immaterial goods, and about their family background, upbringing, schooling, health, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, dating life, and their youth life in general. The interviews included, for example, detailed questions about why and how they started exchanging sex or intimacy for money or gifts, which platforms they

used, how the meetings with sugar daddies² came about, what the men they met were like, and what material and non-material benefits they received.

We also asked the interviewees about good and bad experiences of compensated dating, and in particular about the problems they experienced in making contact with sugar daddies, both online via sugar dating websites and offline in face-to-face encounters – e.g. in pubs and clubs etc. – and how these experiences have since affected their lives.

Another theme of the survey is how young people distinguish between regular dating, sugar dating³ and prostitution, and whether they have experienced stigma and prejudice in the context of their exchanges. Finally, we asked the young people about their relationships with adults – parents, teachers, educators, doctors etc. – and whether and how they wished these relationships might have been different. At the end of the interview, we invited the interviewees to suggest initiatives and actions that would lead to better understanding of vulnerable young people and those with experience of compensated dating and provide them with more qualified help.

Interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face by the project researchers. However, some groups were very difficult to recruit for interviews. According to staff at youth services and institutions, they were very reluctant to be interviewed by the researchers themselves. In some cases, we trained young people with experience of compensated dating in interview techniques and our question guide, and afterwards they conducted the interviews themselves. Such interviews are known as peer-to-peer interviews or 'peer ethnography' (Hawkins et al 2009). In other cases, where staff deemed that the young people were vulnerable or reluctant, the young people agreed to be interviewed by professionals: For example, in Reden Ung and LivaRehab. We would like to thank the young people and professionals who took the time to help with interviews.

As our recruitment experience shows, compensated daters are a difficult target group to reach, and we cannot, of course, guarantee that our interviews are representative. What we can guarantee, however, is that our numerous physical encounters with this diverse group of young people provided us with a good understanding of what characterises their essential motives, experiences and dilemmas. Together with the figures from Dahl & Østergaard's (2021) quantitative studies, we hope and believe that our results provide a thorough and complex understanding of compensated dating as a phenomenon in contemporary Denmark, which can be used by professionals, parents, politicians, and opinion makers in general. We also hope that some of the young people themselves will read the report and that find that it gives them some sort of a voice, which many of them said they were lacking.

Diversity amongst young people who engage in compensated dating

The young people who take part in compensated dating come from very different social backgrounds. They also have very varied motives for, and varying experiences of and attitudes towards compensated dating. With regard to social background, it is difficult to say anything unequivocal, as the quality of the data we have on young people's backgrounds is very variable (for quantitative data see Dahl & Østergaard 2021, or the Summary on page 71 of this report). Some of the young people, especially those who

² We have, for lack of a better term, chosen to keep the terms sugar daddy/daddy and sugar mamma/mommy, although we do not use the term sugar dating.

³ Please note that we use the term sugar dating here, as we decided to introduce the term compensated dating only *after* we had completed most of the interviews.

do not regard their dating as problematic, were not particularly interested in discussing their own backgrounds. Others, often those who belong to the group of more immediately vulnerable young people, were more open to talking and wanted to establish clear links between their own backgrounds and the possible failures and abuse they experienced in their upbringing, and their current situation.

There are individuals in the material who say they come from 'a normal nuclear family' and say they have not felt that anything was missing in their upbringing. Emilie (23) says:

Well, I come from a typical nuclear family - mum and dad are still together. I have had the best upbringing in terms of stigma and all that kind of thing. Yes, I went to high school. I am studying to be a nurse now.

However, as the quantitative results also show, young individuals in Denmark with experience of compensated dating are more likely than other young people to come from families that have experienced challenges. Subject to the variable quantity and quality of data on young people's upbringing, well over half of those on whom we have good data say they had somewhat unstable childhoods. A large proportion experienced mental illness, problematic substance use or domestic violence. Some were also sexually abused as children. Many of them tell us that their parents' changing partners and numerous changes of school created a feeling of insecurity and disconnection, and that they felt different or excluded in some way during their school years. Furthermore a high proportion of them say they were bullied.

Nadja (22) changed school many times - 9 in total - and attended both regular primary school and special classes. She states:

I was bullied for being cross-eyed, for being fat, for not wearing the right clothes, for being... Nobody bothered to hang out with me, so I was always just by myself, sitting at home playing computer games every day, and my parents kept telling me: "Aren't you going to have fun and hang out with the other kids" and stuff like that, and I said: "Just leave me alone, I'm fine in front of my computer". And they kept on asking, so I found a friend called Sofie, who had nice long, blond hair, was into make-up and was the pretty girl at school. And we started smoking some cigarettes and some joints, smoking some hash, and you know, it... Yeah, then it got wilder and wilder (...) So it was never easy. Back then you had pimples and you know, didn't care if you had the coolest pair of jeans on or whatever, you were just told that you were fat and ugly and didn't fit in, and then when you started to make something of yourself, you were just told that you were just some cheap fat slut, and that you weren't worth anything.

So there's never ever... I've never ever had that peace, you know, balance, where I could just sit down somewhere and just feel that I am comfortable here. I've never really had any true joy.

We can see in the quote above that Nadja tried to do what she thought was expected of her, but that, no matter what she did, it did not solve her problems.

Conversely, other young people who also felt left out dealt with the situation with anger and resistance. Liv (28) says that things changed a lot for her in the 7th and 8th forms:

I'm intelligent enough, but I always had a hard time at home, and I never really had much structure or a very good framework, and it was very chaotic etc. And as soon as I hit puberty, I also became very introverted – a very, very angry young girl. In the end, I think both the school and my parents and everyone, they sort of gave up on me... Well, that's how I was, I was always like smoking cigarettes all the time and stealing... I stole vodka and drank it in the toilets at school and stuff like that... And I threw wild parties, I was always at a party at the weekend, and I became more and more distant from my classmates, my peers and stuff like that. Well, that's how I started dating. I got a boyfriend when I was 14, I think, who was 18 at the time, and that's quite a difference anyway, especially at that age, isn't it? And he did drugs and partied a lot and had a... He was a criminal and stuff, right?

It is evident in the quotes how these young people associate not being seen or being bullied with losing interest in school and turning to other young people with similar experiences. In particular, some of the young people who have an ethnic background other than Danish or a gender identity other than heterosexual state how it was difficult and how they sought to leave both their home and family relatively early.

It is striking that many of our interviewees talk about not feeling safe or at home in their childhood home, or about not having felt seen or valued in their family. Some report that their parents had so many challenges, physically or often psychologically, that they became carers (too) early, for themselves, for their siblings, as well as for their parents. Cassandra (27) talks about coming from a family where she herself became the 'adult' at an early age:

When I was a kid, I went to a really bad child psychologist for like 2 seconds. But generally I always had to take care of myself because I come from a family where my brother had huge problems, so the focus was on him instead of us – me and my sister. So it was such a, well... well, there wasn't really any focus on giving me help (...) My mother had really bad back problems. And that also meant that I was a kind of mother to many of my siblings.

In addition to the numerous reports by young people of family deprivation, around a quarter of them were placed in institutions, foster families or with family members for varying periods during their childhood. They indicate that the reason for their removal was neglect, their parents' mental illness or sexual abuse.

Consequently, the majority of the individuals interviewed feel that they were left out in some way in their upbringing and schooling. They describe numerous changes of school, the feeling of being different and lonely and, in many cases, outright bullying.

The current social situation of the interviewees

At the time of the interview, most of the interviewees had a lower level of education than the average young person of their age in Denmark. Many were unemployed, some were in various types of traineeship or resource programmes, and several were on sick leave or in a psychological programme. Some of them were students – at HF (Higher Preparatory) level, production schools or technical colleges – and a few said they were studying or had studied at university.

The housing situation is quite insecure for some, and many say that they have moved around a lot and have sometimes been in poor financial situations. Quite a few of them state that it was their poor financial situation or lack of housing that led them either to begin compensated dating or to start again after stopping for a period.

A relatively large proportion have psychiatric issues and are seeing or have seen psychiatrists. A smaller group is completely abstinent from drugs and/or alcohol, while others use drugs and/or alcohol as a form of self-medication. One group also reports that they have or have had a problem with the use of drugs and/or alcohol.

At the time of the interview, a relatively large number of the young people said that they had a weak social network, and for many, contact with their own family is sporadic. However, a relatively large group also say they have friends and family they can turn to for support in a tough situation or crisis, even if those relationships have also sometimes been problematic.

Compensated dating – how young people get into it

The majority of the young people we interviewed have experience of online dating. Most have used online dating extensively, and for many it was also their main entry point into compensated dating relationships. However, many find contacts at one of the Danish sugar dating websites, such as sugardaters.dk (later sugardaters.com) or on the US-based website, seekingarrangement.com. Other sites the interviewees mentioned include: Tinder, scor.dk, Boyfriend, [fetLife](http://fetLife.com), [annoncelight](http://annoncelight.com), Facebook, Grindr, Badoo, Oeagle, Flirty, Escort5 and sugarfar.dk. The most frequently used site in Denmark is sugardaters.com, of which almost all the young people have experience. Like Mia in the next section, they create a profile. They write a profile text describing what they are looking for, usually including photos of themselves. Creating a profile is free for young people, while daddies/mummies pay a fee.

Once the profile is posted, people who have created profiles as sugar daddies (or sometimes as mummies) contact the potential 'sugarbaby' or 'boytoy'. Some of the young people say they receive many requests, while others feel there is not much to choose from, or they feel the requests they receive are different nature from what they had expected. The chapter on boundaries (Page 25) addresses this issue in more detail.

Online and offline dating

When young people describe how they got into compensated dating, there are very different accounts and very diverse experiences. Some view their start as a kind of coincidence: For example, they receive an unsolicited request on an online platform, often on Tinder or Facebook, or they see a programme on TV, read an article, or hear about sugar dating from an acquaintance and think it sounds exciting. In some cases, a male stranger online or in nightlife offers the young woman (or man), for example, DKK 500 (approx. EUR 67) for a blowjob. In other cases, they may offer the young person DKK 200 (approx. EUR 27 Euro) for a photo. This was the case for Mia (21):

My friend and I were on Badoo and this guy wrote to her asking if we could take photos of our butts and he would transfer DKK 200. And then we were just like yeah, laughing about it. And then we thought, well, we'll just do it - and then he sent us DKK 200. And then he wrote, well can you just pat each other on the bum, and then you'll get DKK 400. So we were kind of amused, and it was actually kind of fun, so it was easy. So we did and ended up with DKK 600, which we then shared, because two of us were doing it. So I earned DKK 300 for 2 photos. So it was quick and easy, and then one night I was really, really low on money and I'd been bin diving, and I thought, this simply can't be right. So, I went in and created a profile, and then I thought, now we'll see.

The introduction to compensated dating can also happen offline via a chance meeting in nightlife, in a café or through mutual friends/acquaintances. When she was 22, Fayar (29) was approached by a 37-year-old man while sitting in a café with her friends:

Then an older man comes up to me and gives me his business card and says: "I think you look really nice. If you'd like to have a cup of coffee, feel free to call." And then I kind of pick up my sunglasses and look at the business card, and there are two addresses. There's one in New York and one in Barcelona, and then I'm like: "Where do you actually live?" And then he says: "Mostly in New York," and then he spins around and kind of puts on his Ray-Bans and looks over his shoulder, and me and my friend we're sitting like this... (laughs)... totally in shock... like this is out of a film... yeah, and then I called him and like... and then we sort of started a relationship. But it was pretty clear that he sort of had the upper hand... also because he didn't have a permanent base in Copenhagen, so it was usually something like checking into various hotels and stuff.

As Dahl & Østergaard (2021) also show, the above description proves that the path into compensated dating is not always planned, but rather something that occurs by chance, playfully and gradually. However, although entry may be random, most young people later come into contact with daddies as a result of a more deliberate search, via either dating websites or sugar dating websites.

How do young people relate to daddies on sugar dating websites?

Online sites such as sugardaters.com are for meeting, selecting and possibly maintaining contact with daddies. Many of the young people try to assess the credibility, personality, age, appearance and finances of the men before choosing which men they will respond to and ultimately meet. Before a meeting is arranged, some of them also negotiate the amount of money or the size of the gift with the potential daddy.

Our interviews reveal that, in most cases, the sugar daddies the young people meet are quite a bit older than themselves. Some of the young women explain that they reject men who they consider too old. However, the significance of the age difference varies hugely from one young person to another. A small group believe that the difference contributes to a good dynamic that also accords with classic gender roles, in which the man and the older person pays, while others regard the age difference as more of a necessary evil: It is the older men who have the money and who want what the young people can offer.

The young people's experiences of online platforms vary widely, and some receive more requests than others. Many of them describe how, for example, they were introduced to the site sugar.daters.dk, and were subsequently surprised by how many men who approached them and how easy it was to find someone to exchange with. Maria (27) says:

I created a profile in there on sugardates.dk. Well, in a month, there were already two hundred men who had written, and I sat and thought: "Is this a joke?" Because they were really, well I was thinking, well... everything you're asking and dreaming about, it's crazy. Then there were a very few like, I think, out of the two hundred... I probably wrote to two.

We can see that Maria thinks that there are lots of strange requests and that she is very selective about who she wants to meet. She perceives many of the men on sugar daters.com as not attractive in terms of meeting them: *"Yeah, well I have some wild stories where I sit and think, these men are clearly mentally ill. Err, where you think: 'What on earth?!'".*

Like Maria, a lot of young people, want to avoid men who have sexual desires they do not share or who seem too insistent or unpleasant. They say there has to be 'chemistry' with the man for them to want to meet him.

Others feel differently. Take Malou (29), for example, who says she chose to meet all of the first thirty men who contacted her: *"I was amazingly popular. I suddenly had thirty messages in my sugardaters inbox, and I decided I simply had to meet them all. So I did."*

A few of the young people say that they look for men they can also talk to. Sine (26) says:

You can ditch nine out of ten messages, because the men write about sex for money, right? Well, then there's maybe a tenth of the messages left where they might give the impression that they may be looking for something a little deeper. Well... I guess I've always been kind of turned on by the idea of someone who also has a brain.

However, many of the young people who use sugardaters.com compare the site to a prostitution site and describe how transactions take place that are obviously about sex-for-money. Some, like Anne (24), think it is a positive thing that you can easily see what it is all about, and believe that the rules are clearer than on Tinder, for example. Others, however, are intimidated by the direct tone. As Maria (27) explains:

And then there were a lot of men who wrote messages about sex for a fee, where I also ended up writing in my profile that I wasn't looking for that (...) There has to be chemistry, otherwise I'm not interested, then they might as well go to a prostitute. There were also many men who kept calling me boring, and then I said no.

Summing up, we can see that young people use online dating in very different ways. Some appreciate that it is very clearly about sex for money, while others look for chemistry, caring or good conversation, thus assessing potential dates based on the basis of completely different criteria. The following section looks at the motives and backgrounds of the young people involved in compensated dating.

Young people's motives for compensated dating

The motives of young people who turn to compensated dating must be understood in the light of both their social background and their current social situation. As we have seen in the description of our interviewees, and as is also evident from the cases we describe towards the end of the report, young people who take part in compensated dating are a very diverse group. They come from very different backgrounds, belong to different socio-economic segments and vary both in ethnicity and gender identification. However, with a few exceptions, most of them share one motive for exchanging sex or intimacy: Money. That said, motives other than money also exist in parallel: For example gifts, dinners, travel, transport, drugs and/or alcohol, hotel stays, and attention and excitement. But in most cases these motives occur together with money.

The following chapter first illustrates how young people articulate their motives with money as the clear driving force, and then demonstrates how various other motives occur simultaneously with the financial ones.

Financial motives

There are many different reasons why young people specify money as a motive for compensated dating. Some of them are in difficult financial situations. They may be homeless or need money to pay for their drugs and/or alcohol. Most, however, are motivated by the need for money for everyday things such as rent, food, clothes, and perhaps a trip to the cinema. Mostly it is not about luxury, but about not having to worry about finances. Sine (25) tells us how she was inspired to make some “quick” money:

After Fie Laursen [a Danish reality star, ed.] wrote this post and talked about it [sugar dating, ed.], I thought I could actually see myself in this, plus I could use some financial help. Because I thought, okay, well, if I can actually find someone who's not too creepy. Well then, I thought, I could just earn some quick money.

For other young people, the financial motive is about needing money for drugs. Miriam (22) says that it was the hunt for cannabis that made her start exchanging sex when she was very young. She and her friend found older men on dating sites:

I thought there's weed here for sure, so that's great, whether or not I have to do something I don't want to do, this is what I'm going to do. I had a friend who had gone through many of the same things as me. We were really good friends and we did everything together. We found guys online who promised us weed. We went to their flat and put ourselves in very dangerous situations to get some weed... Well we've both seen people get beaten up until they bled all

over the place and we once escaped from a flat with seven men who were almost on the verge of gang raping us, and we were thirteen and fourteen years old...

In addition to descriptions such as those above, about support for a pressured domestic situation or quick cash for drugs, some find that the money from compensated dating allows them, for example, to buy things which they could not otherwise afford. In this way, money also becomes a motive to continue compensated dating, because you become used to a certain lifestyle. Betina (24) talks about how it felt suddenly to be able to afford expensive, branded goods:

It's suddenly being able to afford the bags that all your friends also had, and then you're not left out. Or you could afford all the bags that the famous people you see have, and who have all these things. And the things that bloggers have, and then you could afford it, and then you were suddenly in.

Anita (24) describes how she also started compensated dating to pay bills and even to save a bit of money:

So, I didn't need to take out student loans. I can pay my rent, and I've also got some savings. And then I might want to buy my own flat at some point, because I'm tired of constantly moving around. That's basically why I do it [compensated dating, ed.].

In other words, it is clear that the young people's motives are very different, and that some regard the money as necessary to cope with an outright financial emergency or to obtain drugs and/or alcohol, while others view it more as a pleasant supplement or an 'everyday luxury'.

However, the financial motive is rarely the sole one and, as we shall see below, for many young people it is combined, especially initially, with more non-material motives, such as a desire for excitement, affirmation, control or the exploration of boundaries.

Non-material motives: The search for confirmation, attention and excitement

Young people who engage in compensated dating tend to describe a lack of positive social contact throughout their upbringing. They experienced that adults neither took notice of them nor listened to them, and refer to absent parents, unsympathetic teachers at school or unappreciative boyfriends. Compensated dating may appear to offer a way in which they can gain attention and acknowledgement and many describe it as an attempt to gain the recognition they feel they have been lacking in their lives, it. Nadja (22) explains it as follows:

When I did it back then - I didn't really care. I didn't care about anything: I didn't care about my family, I didn't care about my friends, I just cared about myself, and money. But I think I also started doing it because I was always told that I wasn't good at anything. I wasn't good at anything, I was useless, and I didn't pass exams. I didn't have a job, and I was always told by my boyfriend that I was some cheap bitch and I wasn't good for anything, and the only thing I was good at was giving blowjobs and fucking. So I think that's why I started doing it, because I thought: "Well, I'm good at that, I'll try it". And it paid very well.

So, as we can see, Nadja started compensated dating because she hoped it would give her a sense of accomplishment and a sense of worth. Similarly, Malou (29) says that she first got into compensated dating because she was lonely and lacked something she was good at. She explains:

You have to sort of look at why do I need this, and I know perfectly well why I need it. It's because I can't stand being alone. Because I need the confirmation. I need to be something and know that I'm damn good at it. But there's always something behind it. If you have like 100% self-respect, right, have a good foundation and, you know, you have your feet planted firmly on the ground and however else you might put it... if you have self-respect and you have your self-esteem, I don't think you would ever choose to do what I do.

Malou identifies fundamental inferiority as her motive, while others justify their compensated dating with a search for recognition of the value of their body. This motive is often the basis both for beginning and for continuing to engage in compensated dating. For Betina (23), it means a lot that her sugar daddies tell her she has a nice body:

Well, I think it's fun, so I don't just do it for the money, but because I think, in addition to the financial part and such, I also get compliments about my body, and I never got that.

For Fayar (29), it is also about confirming that she is attractive and beautiful. *"I just wanted to have it confirmed that I was a... or that I was attractive or that I... that I looked good or that I was good in bed and stuff like that."*

In addition to the attraction of money and the search for attention and recognition, a common motive for embarking upon compensated dating is the excitement of doing something new and unknown, which society also regards as forbidden. For example, Sofie (26) states:

I was on this site [sugardaters.com, ed.], not to get a relationship, but to have a little excitement, a little adventure, try something new, plus it's a bit forbidden. I usually say, well this is a bit forbidden and dirty - that's why it's exciting.

Some of these young people, then, hope that compensated dating will give them the opportunity to challenge and explore their boundaries. They want to explore their own sexual boundaries. However, for some of them it is also about challenging the boundaries of society. Several, like Veronika (20), associate the excitement of meeting older men with a personal tendency to push boundaries:

I have a wild side to my personality. And I like to push my boundaries. Also with drugs and things like that. Not that I've done it much. But I like to challenge those notions of what's okay and what's not okay.

A relatively large number of the very young talk about an inner "wildness" and about pushing boundaries, not only in relation to compensated dating, but also in relation to various forms of intoxication. Anne (24) seeks a state through compensated dating that she otherwise only experienced by using drugs and/or alcohol:

I've done coke and amphetamines, and it's [compensated dating] like being pissed one night and just having a laugh, really having a good time, or just doing a line or doing some amphetamines or just doing some "Emma" [MDMA, ed.] or whatever.

In other words, excitement and pushing boundaries are important for some young people, and for many both excitement and affirmation are linked to the financial aspect, as Trine (27) exemplifies:

I went to college and I had a grant. I got a boyfriend after M., who I didn't really want to be with at first, and then we ended up together anyway. And then I really wanted to be serious with him, but then he wouldn't really be serious with me. And it hit me really, really hard that he didn't want to. That he didn't want anything serious. So we broke up. And I remember I had this thought that there must be some men who want to be with me. They want to be with me so much that they will actually pay quite a lot of money to be with me. And that, I thought, was a pretty cool idea, while also helping me financially, right? And then just because it was exciting. I thought it was really naughty. Being able to have sex with some strange man is a real turn-on.

In summary, one can say that these young people in general have been missing something that they feel others have – something they hope and believe that compensated dating will be able to offer them too. For most of them it was about their finances, but very rarely *only* about their economy. The next chapter describes what young people actually exchange and whether and how they actually get what they wanted out of compensated dating.

What do young people exchange and what do they get out of it?

As we saw in the above chapter on motives, young people generally say that their most important motive for exchanging sex or companionship is money. Most of them do get something material from their exchange of sex and companionship, often in the form of payments via payment apps, or in the form of cash. Some initially meet with a sugar daddy for a so called 'chemistry meeting', during which both parties check each other out and assess whether they should meet again. In most cases, however, they have sex on the same night that they meet the older man, and it usually takes place in private at the man's or the young woman's home, in a car, or in a hotel, and the compensation is money. Rikke (29) says she could earn a lot of money:

So, some weeks I made just about over thirty thousand, because it's just, you know, it's just going smoothly... and money... I'm not sorry to say that. I can understand that you also do it for the money... 100,000 in one month, like that, boom, you know, it just goes like that, you know. It's a lot of money (...) But I didn't want to go on a trip with anyone... So no, it's always... for me it's only been about money. I wasn't interested in a bag or anything like that.

The sums of money Rikke refers to are not common, but even if the amounts were smaller, money was also the most important thing for Susanne (27):

He also said on the date that he was ready to see me again with the extra agreement that we would have sex, and then it was 5,000 for each date. That was an extra 10,000 a month, right? At the time, when I was studying, that was twice my income. Maybe it was three times as much, right?

Some do it just for money, and they do not experience getting anything out of it except money. However, the majority of the young people received both money and other material items such as a dinner, a gift or a hotel stay, while many also report receiving both money and non-material benefits, such as affirmation, adrenaline rushes and the feeling of being valued. When they talk about what they actually get out of compensated dating, they talk about these non-material benefits in many different ways.

Although the vast majority of the young people have sex with their sugar daddies, there are also some who do not. The latter say they do not want to have sex with a sugar daddy, or that the men are happy to see photos of them, look at their bodies on screen or simply talk to them. Even in those relationships where sex is not involved, there is, in some cases, financial compensation from the man in return for the woman's time or company. Maria (27), for example, had a sugar daddy she talked to on the phone every day, but whom she never met:

The plan was like for me and him to meet, but he's always working and when he has time, I don't have time. Um, but he helps me a lot financially. Because yes, it's really great fun. I mean I've never really met the man, but he gives me money.

The man compensated her for her attention, but it was clear that Maria also liked talking to him, so she got something out of it other than money. However, there are only a very few cases of financial compensation where the young person only meets the man online or talks to him on the phone in order to gain attention and recognition.

Next, we describe some of the forms of non-material benefits that young people gain from compensated dating alongside the financial aspect.

Confirmation, kicks, indulgence, conversation, role play and control

Quite a few of the young people say that compensated dating, at least temporarily, gives them a sense of worth. Osessa (25) says that the fact that so many daddies respond to her ad it gives her confidence. When asked why she continues to date in this way, Anne (24) replies:

Well, it's because I like it. Well, I like the dating thing, the being waited on and being seen thing... That's why I do it (...) I feel like, you know, okay, someone actually wants to pay money to be in my company. I think that's amazing.

Some of the young people get a kick out of the thrill of challenging their own limits. Anne compares it to taking amphetamines or MDMA, and she describes the feeling she has when she leaves a sugar date as follows:

Sometimes I feel like someone has put something strange in my drink, that's how I feel... Then you get this adrenaline rush, or if I just, you know, walk into someone's place and I see there's some money lying around and he's like, it's for you, like. Then there's 3,000 in cash, and then it's like, everything's like okay - so that moves boundaries.

The excitement and the experience of a kind of intoxication by 'doing it' is thus significant. Malou (29), a former self-harmer, adds to this perspective: *"It gave me a kick. It gave me a big kick. Actually it's almost like when I used to cut myself."*

Some of the women also talk about the rewards of the good conversation, life experience, and the company of their sugar daddies, and how they are more exciting than their peers. Freya (22), for example, says that one of the things she gets out of compensated dating is a kind of care or consideration:

Social activity. Adult contact. Whatever you want to call it (laughs). Some of them started asking how my homework was going and how I was and... Some of them, they sent me emails asking how things were going and if I had had a good holiday.

Some, like Tania (20), established a kind of friendship with their sugar daddies. Tania describes how nice it was to be treated to the likes of cigarettes, wine and sushi. She says:

In fact, we became friends. Well, we became quite close and talked about really many different things. I also thought it was great to be with him. And so I can say that, when I came by, he had bought me 3-4 packs of cigarettes and a bottle of wine to take with me when I left, and then he gave me around DKK 1,000 in cash, because that was what he had available. And at the same time he paid DKK 1,000 for sushi. So it suddenly becomes a lot of money. At the same time, I thought he was really cute.

Malou (29) also says that it was nice to receive compliments, especially in the beginning:

It gave me confirmation. That I was good at all that sugar dating stuff... well I felt almost like such a princess/queen, right? I was just so good at that shit... I could just seduce them.

Malou's experience was that, at a time in her life when she was relatively young, this kind of affirmation was just what she needed:

There was someone to look after me. There was someone who could give me what I needed, that support. He would be my master, he said, and I would be his girl, and I was just sold. There was nothing that was more appropriate than that in my world at the time.

Several of the women say that, for them, it is not so much about sex as about the feeling of being in good company. Galina (28) says: "No, for me sex doesn't mean that much. I just want, first of all, to experience things and have people who care about me. In other words, good company and yes, just get something out of it." Galina also says that she sometimes feels a kind of love and that it is nice "to be allowed to be a woman" in what might be perceived as a more traditional way. She says: "I get to be a woman. I get to feel feminine without having to feel guilty about accepting a drink."

A few women also feel that they learned something from their sugar daddies, and that they miss it now after they stopped to engage in compensated dating. Liv (28) explains:

I think it's great to make myself look desirable, and to hook with a man who just really desires me, or I can get to do a bit of role play and a play a bit, like (...) So it's about letting yourself... Yes, just get carried away... Assume another role. I miss that sometimes. I miss all the sex, too. Well, now I'm also a bit... I work a lot on myself, and I'm a bit sex addicted and stuff, so that's the way it is. I really try not to have too much sex. But I kind of miss that thing of just meeting people, and then jumping straight in.

Liv also finds that she has gained knowledge that she does not think she would have got otherwise.

I got to know a lot of men who taught me all sorts of things (...) Dealing with people from all walks of life, just so many different people. It also taught me to adapt very quickly, but also that I have a lot; I know a little about a lot, don't I? (...) But also that thing about behaving, I got to know myself much better. And I got very good at reading the people around me; picking up on signals, body language.

A few of the young people interviewed also find that compensated dating facilitates a kind of role-playing, in which they can be someone different from who they are in everyday life, as Anita (23) describes here:

It's very exciting that there's money involved because you have to perform. You're some kind of commodity that men pay for... But you're not a commodity in that way, because I don't feel like a commodity, I feel like myself, but it's really exciting that you also have to dress up in some way. I also found it exciting that I could be someone other than who I might be if I just met some random guy. Step outside. Because then something else was at stake. It was a performance, and it was something outside of myself, and it was role play with money involved.

Similarly, Miriam (22) also finds this kind of role-play extremely exciting:

I kind of created this alias for myself, I called myself Monique, and I was totally into it... I mean I was really into it. That attention-seeking side of me was caught up in the excitement of doing something forbidden and wrong and now my life was kind of like a film and now I was going to be called Monique and I was going to wear heels and my makeup and... I was kind of directing it somehow.

Some, like Anita (23), also feel that compensated dating provides an opportunity to be in control as a woman in a male-dominated world:

I found some kind of very special feminist and feminine power in myself. I really like that feeling. I feel in control and enormously empowered when I do it. Some think that sugar dating is a good alternative to regular dating, as dating is already coloured by experiences of sexism.

It is evident that some associate getting money for sex or companionship with a sense of control. For example, they connect the fact that someone will pay to be with them to the feeling of having power over them. This was the case for Michala (22):

Well, I really like the financial benefits I get from it, because it means I don't live so frugally. It allows me to actually feel great. And I like this kind of power. I'm not at all dominant, but I just love that I can say, well, this is how it should be, and then they [the men] obey.

The feeling of being in control of the situation is thus linked to the fact that what is exchanged is often agreed on in advance, so that the young people who exchange sex have a clear expectation of what will happen and can control it.

As the above demonstrates, our interviewees have varied experiences of compensated dating and get different things from it. The vast majority point out that money is what matters, but for many it is about various forms of what we call non-material benefits. For an often limited period of time, some young people find that compensated dating fulfils their desire for care, someone to talk to or affirmation. Others describe an intoxicating feeling of being alive and exceeding their own boundaries or, conversely, of feeling powerful or in control.

Many of the young people, especially in the beginning of their engagement with compensated dating, feel that they are in control and have power, and that they get something out of it besides money. However, as we will see below, many of them find it hard to maintain this feeling. Over time, the majority find that the sense of power is either superficial or unsustainable, because they learn that it is ultimately about sex - where the man is in charge. Maria (27) explains:

Yes, for a short time you feel you have the power because you are paid to do something you like to do. You like going to hotels. You like going on wellness weekends. You like going to the cinema. You like eating good food and you get paid for it, so you say to yourself: "Yes, I have the power. I get paid to do something I love, and it's a famous person. He wants me." The problem is, when it develops and ultimately he only wants sex, it feels like he's taking it all away from you in one go. Ripping off the Bandaid.

The next chapter elaborates on how the desired consequences and experiences described above, often also have a downside or simply do not last. Many young people eventually have their expectations of compensated dating dashed. For example, the sense of power can be difficult to maintain over time, and there appear to be dynamics that result in young people doing something they did not initially want to. Consequently, for many of them, their compensated dating leaves them feeling that they are transgressing both personal and societal boundaries.

Boundaries, lack of boundaries and exploitation

Although, as shown above, many of the young people, at least for a short period, find that they get what they want from their exchange relationships, be it money, gifts, excitement, attention or control, these benefits tend to become less satisfying over time, and they experience a sense of ambivalence and a shift in their boundaries.

Liv (28) is one of those who stress that there is a flip side to the coin. Liv believes she learned a lot from compensated dating, but she describes how it also comes at a price she cannot afford:

On my greyer days, I don't feel there's anything good about the things I did. I just think the consequences are too hard to cope with. But today, with the sun shining and stuff, I think it was a lot of fun.

Miriam (22) also says that, for her, compensated dating was a form of resistance, which provided an instant kick, but which she simultaneously associates with something destructive and unrestricted: *"I felt that... I think I enjoyed fucking up my own life in some way. I liked to see my own life cracking... getting smashed."*

The young people we interviewed refer to boundaries in a variety of ways. A lot of them talk about how important it is to take care of themselves and to dare to set boundaries before meeting their date. When writing to men on sugardaters.com, for example, most become aware of which men they want to meet and which ones seem desperate, dangerous, unattractive or 'perverted'. Several of the young people also stress that you should take care of yourself and not just go straight home or to a hotel with a daddy, but check him out first on a 'chemistry date' in a bar or restaurant. For example, Anne (24) says:

It's not like you have to make up your mind as soon as you see them. You can be there for half an hour and say: "I don't feel the chemistry is there" or "I don't really want to do that anyway", or you can say you'll just have to think about it and see them another day.

In general, there are certain services the young people will not provide: For example, golden showers, bestiality, violent sex, anal sex or kissing on the mouth. Some will kiss, but say there are other services they reserve for their boyfriends. Aleksandra (26) states:

There are parts of myself that I save for loving relationships, like anal sex. I only do it with my boyfriends, and would never do it with sugar daddies. So I save it for something a little more private, you know, so only my boyfriend has access to that ass (laughs). Yes, I believe that giving yourself away one hundred percent is a little bit slutty.

Some of the young people interviewed say it can be difficult when a daddy's personal hygiene is not up to scratch, or when he looks less attractive in real life than on sugardaters.com, for example. A few also report that daddies will talk about things that they find uncomfortable, for example about sexual relationships with own parents. Tania (20) explains:

It's a real fetish sometimes. I remember the last one, that was why I simply couldn't cope with this, that was why I stopped. I was talking to a man on the phone who wanted me to talk about my relationship with my father in a sexual way. I thought that was just too weird. He suddenly asked if I would like to see a video of his real daughter sucking his cock. And then I just panicked and hung up. And I was like, no, no, no. And then he blocked me.

Here, we can see that Tania said no in the situation. However, although many of the young people talk about services that they do not provide as a *rule*, there are a lot of stories about how they find it hard to adhere to these, how they transgress them and how they end up doing things they had not agreed to or that they did not want to do. Sometimes, they find themselves overstepping their boundaries under pressure from daddies, because they dare not speak up or because they feel they cannot sense where their own boundaries are. It may be that the daddy is urging them to provide a different type of service than that which was agreed to, that he is tempting them with the promise of more money if they do a certain thing, or that he is threatening not to pay if, for example, they do not want to provide a certain service. Many find it hard to say no in these situations, and this can lead to a feeling of having overstepped their boundaries. This is how Sarah (29) puts it:

I say no, but the problem is that when I've said no ten times but they keep going on and keep telling me: "It's unacceptable to say no", then eventually I give in because I get scared. I become afraid that they will leave me or that they will become violent and aggressive, which I have experienced several times. So I give in and let them.

So, for Sarah, it is about not feeling she has the right to say no, or being afraid of being a disappointment to her daddy, while others describe overstepping their boundaries as they initially did not sense what they wanted to do and also that they were unsure how to actually say no in specific situations. For example, Sandra (21) says that at first she was not good at saying no, and that the money made her do things she did not really want to do:

I could feel that it was not really something I really wanted to do. But then he drove me home, and I got the money and then... As soon as I was away from it, and I had that money, I thought that it really gave me a bit of a rush, somehow, or a bit of a kick. And then I thought, that's a bit wild, and I could actually do that again.

Sandra went on to explain that initially she loved the fancy hotels and dinners, even if it all felt a bit out of her comfort zone, but that this changed and soon the relationship was just about sex. Here she talks about how hard it was to say no:

It felt like you were being degraded, that you were becoming a thing. Suddenly you weren't the pretty one, now you were the sexy, naughty girl. Ideally, you should look as slutty as possible, like a prostitute. It became increasingly about:

"Now I'd like to have sex that way" or... "I have this sex fantasy. Can't you be part of it?" It became more and more about that. They started writing sex fantasies to me. Wouldn't you like to do this with me? I can pay you a certain amount for it. The problem was that when I then started to tell C [her 'boyfriend', ed.] that I couldn't have sex with him if it was just sex, he started to tie me up and force me to do it. So I felt my boundaries were getting more and more exceeded. And that's why it became clearer and clearer to me that this was over the top. Way out of hand.

So, we can see how, over time, Sandra lost control, increasingly exceeding her own boundaries and being exploited.

Many report incidents where they feel they were cheated, or where they experienced outright abuse or even rape. Liv (28), who has been raped several times in her life, explains:

I've had experiences, for example, of an S&M session where there's a bit more... A bit of violent sex, where people transgress boundaries, don't listen to code words, for example, or where you say: "Don't hit me in the head" and then, before you know it, you sit there and you've had a hard slap that just really smarts. I've never let myself be tied up by people I don't know, because I know men well enough in general to know that I wouldn't do that. But the feeling of when, you know, that they are aware that this is unpleasant for me, but they keep on. It can quickly feel like, not rape, but certainly an assault. Extreme violation. Yes, when they just turn into animals. Then I often get to the point where I just think: "I'm not going to fight". Because I've dealt with too many men to know that if you're with an angry, horny man, you're nothing but a very scared little girl. So that's kind of the thing. Just freeze, let them do their thing, and then simply get out of there in just about one whole piece, if you can.

Thus, although Liv, as we described above, feels that compensated dating has given her a lot, she has also experienced great humiliation.

A few of the young people find that the potential daddies they communicate with start 'stalking' them if they reject them. Tine (24) says:

I was stalked for I don't know how long. It took me over a year to get rid of him, it was a bit crazy really, but I think he just managed in a very short time to sense all kinds of things that I wasn't into at all... neither emotionally nor physically, and I think that surprised him a bit, but I just wasn't there... probably because he didn't turn me on.

So, in several of these situations, compensated dating led to crossing boundaries, even when the young person initially felt some form of control or power.

A small group of the interviewees say they did not have problems to set boundaries. Several of these stress that they acquired skills from life, including a hard upbringing, that enable them to maintain the boundaries they have set for themselves. Sonja (21) explains:

I think it's because I've had a bit of a hard time and experienced certain things that taught me to know my boundaries, so I'm comfortable. I think it's because the more you experience, the more you find out about yourself and

what you want to be a part of. You learn a lot if you have been exposed to some things during your childhood. You find out about yourself (...) the more you experience, the easier it is to know yourself.

Others, like Anne-Mette (24), link the fact that they experienced boundary violations in childhood to the fact that they have difficulty setting or maintaining their own boundaries in compensated dating, and that compensated dating can actually be a learning process in relation to boundaries:

I think somehow I couldn't have done without it, because I just think my history maybe makes me open to some other things, and easier to flatter with attention, gifts and such things than other women. I also think I've had some boundaries that have been broken down in some way. It's such a learning process for me, this thing of setting boundaries, and setting them in a good way, so I've become really good at setting boundaries.

As we can see, Anne-Mette views the fact that she has learned to maintain boundaries along the way as a something positive. Most, however, do not have this experience and, like Liv above, say they have been subjected to various breaches of agreement and even outright abuse.

This chapter has demonstrated how a number of the young people we interviewed, because of their experiences of having their boundaries exceeded in their upbringing, find it difficult to feel and maintain their personal boundaries as adults. Some regard this as a problem in relation to compensated dating, while others see this kind of dating as an opportunity to experiment and play with their own boundaries and thus become better at sensing them. However, most of the interviewees find that, in compensated dating relationships, their boundaries are, at some point, challenged and exceeded in ways they neither want nor have control of.

Perceptions of the relationship between ordinary dating, sugar dating and prostitution

In the interviews, we asked our interviewees how they distinguish between regular dating, sugar dating,⁴ and prostitution. In this chapter, we describe what they think about the exchanges they make, and whether they perceive them as regular dating, sugar dating or prostitution.

Similarities and differences between regular dating and sugar dating

For some of the young people in our material, sugar dating is like ordinary dating, while others see them as two very different phenomena. Below, we outline how these young people experience both differences and similarities and how they evaluate their experience of both types of relationships.

Many of the interviewees are increasingly frustrated with so-called 'regular' dating on online dating apps such as Tinder, Happn, Badoo, Scor.dk, or Boyfriend and Grindr for young gay men.

Several of them have dated through various dating apps, such as Tinder, and many express frustration that they are not 'getting anything out of it'. Emilie (23) says: *"I'd actually rather have a meeting on sugardating where I get something out of it than meeting someone on Tinder and just have sex."* Anna (21) feels the same way:

But... then the thing about Tinder is that about half or maybe even more of the guys on there look for hook-ups and one-night stands and sexual experiences, and then it's socially acceptable that we go to your place afterwards and have some sex, and I'm dead tired of that. It was like... I don't really want to do that anymore.

Anne (24) also says that she finds this kind of dating as lacking clear expectations and frameworks, and that it is hard to find a boyfriend because *"it's all about sex anyway"*, so she prefers sugar dating:

That's what I think is great about sugar dating: Compared to Tinder for example - now I've just joined Tinder - on sugardating there are some rules of the game somehow. I like that there are some clearly defined boundaries, because then I can't be - of course I can be disappointed, well I can be - but there are some boundaries.

⁴ In this chapter we use the term 'sugar dating', because during the interview period we had not yet begun to use the term 'compensated dating'.

In this example, sugar dating comes across as almost liberating, because here, unlike in regular dating, there are clearer rules about what the relationship should entail and thus less emotional 'mud'.

In addition to finding regular dating sites uninteresting, what many of the young people who start using dating sites like sugardating.com as an alternative to Tinder, for example, have in common is the fact that they hope sugar dating will provide a greater degree of affirmation, either sexually, socially or financially. Several of the young women say they get nothing back from the men they date on Tinder, emotionally or otherwise, and therefore they might as well sugar date "at least to get something out of it." For example, Amira (23) says:

I just don't want to feel exploited, and I feel that I also get something out of it when I get money... They are so inviting, and write things like: "I'd like to invite you out for dinner" and things like that. And you know... It's quite sexy - and a lot of them are cute and stuff, and when I want to be with them, I'll think, it's just smart to get something out of it for me too. So I feel I'm still into it, and I don't feel exploited... so yeah, it's just a win-win situation... they use my body, I spend their money.

As we see, many young people hope, and some also find that sugar dating provides an opportunity to get something different and more out of dating than just being together.

Cash settlement and absence of emotion

For many of our interviewees, the main difference between dating and sugar dating is that the latter includes some form of agreed compensation for companionship and sex. Whereas they describe regular dating and the relationships it sometimes leads to as based more on feelings and intimacy, they view sugar dating as a no-nonsense exchange relationship, in which there is an upfront agreement to exchange sexual services for money. Maria (27), for example, answers the question about the difference between sugar dating and regular dating: "There is the emotion of loving the person, of really loving with your heart. [In sugar dating, ed.] we can turn things off". She goes on: "You'd never say to your boyfriend: 'Well, you can have sex, and you can give me DKK 1,500.'"

Many of the interviewees also describe sugar dating as a relationship where it does not really matter what you think of your daddy, as long as you are compensated for the time you spend with him. This contrasts with their idea of regular dating, where they are more willing to invest themselves emotionally, and there is a mutual awareness of what you think of each other. Rikke (29) presents this difference as follows:

On a date... you just knew it wasn't about sex or money. When I've been on the other (sugar dates), I've always had the thought, "I'm making money out of this for fuck's sake... and I'm not going to see you again if I don't want to see you again tomorrow... I'm not interested in who you really are as a person.

I can just sit and smile and think, "you're so stupid to listen to"... where over here [in couple relationships, ed.] you have to make an effort, and I do that here, too, but here I'm more charming in a different way and don't just think about what he thinks of my body. I would also think about what he thinks of me as a person. I don't think that when sugar dating.

Many of the young people interviewed regard the fact that sugar dating is 'only' about sex and company for compensation, as a positive and, as mentioned, even a liberating factor, in which the expectation of sex and the sex itself are more transparent. As Anna (21) explains:

So if we just meet to hook up, then the conversation is completely different, then for me it's very much about finding someone I feel I could have some fun chemistry with, where you could, if you wanted to, challenge sexual boundaries. It's about finding something within your own preferences, so it's really about, what do you want, what do I want, what have you tried, what's your fantasy?

While the above shows that, for some young people, there can be a strong contrast between regular dating and sugar dating, other interviewees felt that the difference was more a matter of degree. Sandra (21) feels that the two are very similar. She thinks that sugar dating relationships can easily resemble more ordinary relationships, given that, alongside payment, there is also mutual interest in each other as human beings. She explains:

You must play his girlfriend for X number of hours, minutes, days, whatever he wants. And then you get money for it, clothes for it, food for it. Depending on what you do. He spoils you during your time together. You go to the cinema, you go out to dinner, you hold hands and pretend to be lovers, and everyone thinks you are his date. And only the two of you know you're getting paid for it. So at first I would see it as a... a flirtation, where you can say that you give a man who has difficulty finding a girlfriend or does not have time to find a girlfriend, a girlfriend experience, in exchange for a salary. So somehow you're working as a girlfriend.

Vigga (21) feels that the difference is mainly that she gets more expensive dinners when she sugar dates:

I actually think the two things are very similar. It's also why I think it's funny when people try to understand what it's like to sugar date, because it's so similar to what people normally do, except the dinner is slightly more expensive.

For the young people who regarded regular dating and sugar dating as more or less the same, being validated and pampered was a major factor. However, several of them described how this could be difficult to achieve, because they did not always find the men who were willing to pay for their company attractive, or because most men were, in fact, more interested in paying for sex.

Control and boundaries

Some of the young people see the difference between regular dating and sugar dating as a question of control and boundaries. Whereas some of them (as described above) viewed the clear boundaries of sugar dating as positive, others found it difficult to say no and set boundaries in a paid relationship. Rosa (26) describes the dilemma as follows:

It's that you're allowed to say no. You can also do that with sugar dating, but it just makes it harder, and it's their needs that are the focus, not yours (...) He has certain expectations. I have promised him sex, and he has the money for it, so he feels he has bought a product, whereas when you go on an ordinary date, you have usually not agreed to have sex.

For Rosa, the sugar dating relationship has implicit expectations of sex, which is why she finds it difficult to say no in this situation.

Overall, young people's comparisons show that disappointments and unpleasant experiences can occur both when using sugar dating websites and ordinary online dating apps. Many of the young people we spoke to see benefits in the fact that sugar dating is a commercial relationship – sex for money. They do not feel exploited to the same extent as when using regular dating apps, where it is often just 'about sex' anyway and they do not get anything in return.

As we will demonstrate, it is important for exchange relationships to involve control and voluntariness. These issues lead them to categorise a relationship as sugar dating and not prostitution.

Similarities and differences between sugar dating and prostitution

One of the central questions in the debate on sugar dating in recent years is whether and (if so) how sugar dating differs from prostitution. This is also an important issue for many of our interviewees and here again there are big differences between young people's experiences and attitudes.

Some of the young people describe their relationships and exchanges as dates or meetings, and regard their exchange of 'goods' as very different from prostitution, while others see clear prostitution-like elements in sugar dating. Some categorise what they do as a form of prostitution, even when using sugar dating websites or Tinder. These young people say that they have no problem with fixed agreements regarding services and amounts, as it makes them more comfortable with what to expect than what they experience, for example, on Tinder.

A third group of young people regard the equation between prostitution and sugar dating as both incorrect and problematic, even though they themselves see clear parallels. A number of them highlight a major problem in meeting men on sugar dating websites: They find that some of the men they write to on *sugardaters.com*, for example, have a different expectation of the relationship than they have. Others find that the 'daddy' approach them with an explicit desire to buy/exchange sexual services for money or, in some cases, gifts. Many of them do not like this, as it makes them feel they are viewed as 'prostitutes'.

When young women reject men who are too explicit, it is either because they find the tone disrespectful or because the men are asking for services that they do not want to give them. Although many of the young people end up making concrete agreements to have sex with sugar daddies in return for payment, it seems to be important for them that the initial conversation online has a tone of respect and of a mutual desire to find out whether there is a basis for meeting. In their view, such a conversation makes it different from prostitution.

In what follows, we elaborate on some of the points of view and reasoning from the young young people's reflections about their perception of the differences and inequalities between prostitution and sugar dating.

Prostitution and sugar dating - the same thing?

A relatively large proportion of the young people interviewed believe that sugar dating and prostitution are the same thing. Malou (29) says:

In my world, I would say that sugar dating is also a form of prostitution, actually. Because you make yourself a commodity. You exchange. So you trade yourself to get a bag or to get DKK 1,500, maybe even more (...) so you get something for it.

Malou thinks that when the rationale is 'something for something' it is prostitution. Lotte (25) also believes that agreeing on a price for a service makes it prostitution:

I agree that sugar dating is, to a great extent, a grey area. Because if you're paying... What I mean is when sex = a Gucci bag. When it's agreed like that, it's the same for me." I won't meet you or have sex with you until you give me a Gucci bag." That's the same as saying DKK 10,000. I don't think that's okay either, because as soon as you agree... When you put a price on yourself, to me that is prostitution.

One of the main points that the young people make is that when a fixed payment for a certain service is agreed upon before or at the beginning of the encounter, then it is prostitution.

"Then you can go to a prostitute"

Another group of young people say they think there is a big difference between what goes on in prostitution/sex work, and their own dates with sugar daddies. Sofie (26) says:

And then there were a lot of people who sent messages about sex for a fee, where I also ended up writing in my profile that I'm not looking for that and absolutely not in a 'chemistry' meeting (...) there has to be a chemistry in all this, because otherwise I don't want to, and then you can go to a prostitute.

For Sofie, it is important to stress that for her there can be no sex involved in sugar dating unless there is chemistry. If you exchange without wanting to, THAT is prostitution in her eyes. It is the same for Trine (27), who associates sugar dating with desire and the possibility of choice:

And also the fact that I can choose. I have this idea that when you're a prostitute, it's the man who comes and chooses you, and then you go out and have sex. Where she does not have the option to say: "Oh, I think you're disgusting. I don't find you attractive, so I don't want to be with you".

Since a number of young women find it uncomfortable when men write directly asking for sex for money, or when they seem desperate and ask 'what it costs', some are also careful to discard or reject the sugar daddies who seek quick, prostitution-like exchange relationships, as Marie (24) describes here:

Already in the first messages, you can pretty quickly sense if it's someone who is just desperate for sex... Either they have written a message saying: "Why don't you answer, beautiful?" Far too desperate. That's a no, and then I don't answer it, and then there are those who write a message such as: "DKK 2,000, - now at my place." That is also a no.

Marie has decided that she doesn't want that kind of relationship and that she needs to know who the men are and that she can trust them. She does not imagine that prostitution is like that.

In sugar dating, there is more freedom and voluntariness

However, for most of the young people we interviewed, it is not so easy to distinguish between prostitution and sugar dating. One important factor for many of them is whether the exchange is voluntary, and how large the financial compulsion may be. It can also be about whether the currency is cash or gifts, or also how explicit the agreement on 'price' is. Some of them believe that the difference between the two is the fact that prostitution is a job where both timeframe and compensation are agreed upon, whereas in sugar dating the agreements are less fixed. In sugar dating, one is not as committed in terms of what the meeting/relationship should entail.

Many of the interviewees who are concerned with a degree of control and voluntariness thus distinguish between situations where the exchange is perceived as a free choice and where they are in control of what happens, and situations where they feel forced to exchange because of financial problems. Nanna (19) makes the following distinction:

I think sugar dating is about getting something extra out of everyday life. Not because you lack things, but "I can have sex to get some extra money". But with prostitution, it's because you can't do anything else. Whereas I think with sugar dating, you can have your education or work on the side while doing it as an extra thing. In prostitution, I don't think you have any options.

So, we can see that Nanna has an idea that prostitution is an expression of a compelling necessity, while sugar dating is more voluntary. This distinction is common amongst the young people interviewed, and it is particularly important for some individuals who experience stigma and for whom it is important to be seen as something other than sex workers. Sofie (26) puts it this way:

Where prostitution is, I feel, 'need to have', and then there's some money on top of that that's 'nice to have', where you can buy ordinary things like other people (...) But where with sugar dating, there it's very much this, 'nice to have'. That's great, I can buy a bag or I can buy one exclusive dress or another, I can buy a nice trip to Paris, or whatever. It's more these things that you don't necessarily need.

Similarly, Miriam (22) says that, in principle, she thinks that sugar dating and prostitution are different:

Well, basically, prostitution is a job where when you're at work, then you get time off and then you go home to yourself, right... Meanwhile, sugar dating is something that you take into your life, into your private life, and it's something much more personal, where it's... the point of sugar dating is that you should somehow have a relationship with someone, where you then get some money out of it. So obviously, it's a lifestyle, but for me it was the same. The same feeling anyway.

However, as we see in the quote, Miriam, after having tried both, finds that the feeling, for her, is the same.

The examples show that, in principle, the young people we interviewed believe that there is both more voluntariness and personal involvement in sugar dating than in prostitution (see also Dyrvig et al., 2020), but that a problem may arise in sugar dating, in that it may nevertheless be difficult to distinguish between the two in practice.

The difficult distinction in practice

As we also demonstrated in the chapter on boundaries, some of the young people find that they do not get what they imagine out of exchanging, and/or that the boundaries of what they want to be involved in shift in unwanted ways, both in the individual relationship and as, over time, they enter into an increasing number of relationships. A number of young people find that the boundaries are blurred and that the exchanges they thought would differ significantly from their image of prostitution eventually become increasingly similar to this image: The regular sale of sex for money.

Indications are, then, that although a relatively large number of the young people in the interviews talk about expecting sugar dating to be more personal and voluntary than prostitution, many find that when they use the *sugardaters.com* site or sugar date via Tinder or a meeting in town, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. Some of them feel that the benefits they initially associated with sugar dating - voluntariness, control, excitement, attention and, for some, intimacy - eventually disappear and the relationship becomes more like what they associate with prostitution. This is how Sarah (21) describes it:

So, at first I would see it as a... a flirtation, where you can say that you give a man who has difficulty finding a girlfriend or does not have time to find a girlfriend, a girlfriend experience, in exchange for a wage. So you're actually at work as a girlfriend (laughs). But, then when you're with these men, the longer you're with them, the more they just want to have sex with you.

More and more, they ask you, can't you just meet for half an hour? Then we can just have sex. The more you are with them, the more they stop offering food. And stop offering all the luxuries. And some men, for example, offer you to rent a house from them in exchange for paying them some money, and then you can have as many men as possible in one day. And that's where the line between sugar dating and prostitution lies.

Sarah is thus describing a shift from sugar dating to prostitution, and on to actual abuse. She continues:

I think it changes when a man only wants sex. As long as he wants a girlfriend because he doesn't have time for a girlfriend or has a hard time finding a girlfriend - he wants a hot girlfriend who will eat out with him, go to the cinema with him and do fun things. Then, in my view, you can call it sugar dating. But as soon as they switch to only having time for sex, that's prostitution. Although they call it sugar dating, in my view it is prostitution. And I haven't met a single man on sugar dating sites who doesn't eventually just want sex. So, as far as I'm concerned, they're all fucking pigs, and I know I'm not supposed to say that.

This chapter has shown that the young people we interviewed have very different views on the similarities and differences between regular dating, sugar dating and prostitution. A few think they can distinguish, both in theory and in practice. However, there is a clear trend in the data that, over time, even many of the young people who initially believe that sugar dating is different from prostitution may find it very difficult to maintain the experience of an informal, rewarding dating relationship or a 'boyfriend experience'. They explain, as we have seen, that their initial notions of sugar dating begin to slip, and that after a meeting or two, sex and money become the more prominent aspects of the relationships. The examples show that, in principle, young people believe that there is both more voluntariness and personal involvement in sugar dating than in prostitution, but that in sugar dating a problem can arise in that it can, anyway, still be difficult to distinguish between them in practice.

Discontinuation and reasons to stop compensated dating

In this chapter, we focus on the young people who state in the interviews that they have stopped their compensated dating, and why they did so. For some, the cessation is the result of a long period of reflection, while for others it is more spontaneous - due to a bad experience, for instance. A few explain that they stop compensated dating because of illness. Some mention venereal diseases, but most stop because of psychological discomfort. They experience self-esteem problems or feel in other ways that it is not good for them to date in this way. Others get boyfriends and do not think that this is compatible with compensated dating. A few also say they are bored of compensated dating and need to “get on with their lives”. Finally, some state directly that they need to stop compensated dating in order to maintain their self-respect, re-establish their own desire, or restore a capacity for intimacy that they feel compensated dating has destroyed. Finally, several of them refer to stigma, shame and taboo as reasons for quitting. We discuss this in the chapter on stigma, shame, and taboo (Page 39).

Physical and mental illness

Several young people mentioned illness as a direct reason for stopping compensated dating. For a few, it was venereal diseases. So, for these young people there was a direct causal relationship between compensated dating and the condition of their health. Sarah (29), for example, explains:

I'm with them because I can make some good money out of it and have a good experience: you get good food, you get good hotels (...) The one who put it in my head (that this was how to sugar date) was Andreas (daddy). Every time I contradicted him and said I didn't want to do it, he said, well, it doesn't bother you, you make good money, you get good food and so on. He almost brainwashed me, because he repeated it, repeated it, repeated it. Finally I believed it. For a long time. It was only when I was away from him that I didn't believe it. In 2018, I was away from him for a period because I got so sick with chlamydia, and because I hadn't been treated, it spread to my body, and my immune system was so weak that I was on a penicillin drip (...) And when I was away from him during that period, I started to feel that I didn't like it.

For Sarah, it is the combination of physical illness and getting away from the psychological influence, which she calls brainwashing, that results in her stopping compensated dating. Similarly, Sandra (21) says that a depression made her quit:

Yes, but I felt that when you could just be used in that way, when people just saw you in that way, then I might as well get something out of it (...) Then I got into all this, where I just became extremely depressed and yes (...)

But I think that was also good in a way, because that was what brought me back to reality. I just felt so bad about everything all of a sudden. I think everything just kind of collapsed and then... yeah.

Our interviews reveal that it is common for the young people to associate compensated dating with mental challenges and mental disorders. Many of them linked the feeling of being exploited, used, and having their boundaries crossed to these emerging or recurring psychological challenges.

Girl/boyfriends and couple relationships

Several of the young people stopped compensated dating when they found a girl/boyfriend. At some point, some of them perceived compensated dating as being the opposite of “real” relationships or of genuine interest in a person. Vigga (21) explains here how she experienced getting “real” feelings:

It was actually quite funny; I was on a date with these two people I was seeing and we were out to dinner, and I just felt that I wanted to be with this guy I saw there more than I wanted to be with them, and that's kind of where things changed for me... I think it's cooler to be with this guy that I have an interest in than with these people that I've also had a relationship with, but that has been about something else, right? They were more superficial, or constructed differently than the relationships I have built up naturally with someone that I like. So for me it was 100% just that.

Although Vigga later describes how she misses the financial element that came with compensated dating and sometimes finds it difficult to make ends meet, it was the above realisation that made her stop and not resume her compensated dating. Osessa (25) has a similar story:

Yes, and then I also got a boyfriend, then it was like that I got one of those downs with it, where I withdrew from it, and then it was just so serious, where I felt... I remember that I was on my way to Jens (a daddy) and I was sitting on the floor with my back to the bed and I think I was talking on the phone with my boyfriend. I just couldn't bring myself to do it (exchange date), just couldn't be bothered.

So, we can see that for some of the young people we interviewed it is emotionally difficult to combine compensated dating with having a boy/girlfriend, while for others the cessation is more a consequence of the new boy/girlfriend's reaction, or the inability to keep things separate. For example, when asked why she stopped compensated dating, Anne-Mette (24) replies: “One (sugar dating) relationship stopped because I got a girlfriend, and the other one stopped because I didn't want to be her (sugar mummy's) girlfriend. She couldn't accept that.” In general, the young people find it very difficult to combine having a girl/boyfriend with compensated dating.

Worth better

Just as several young people explained that they generally had no problem with compensated dating, several of them also began experiencing a creeping discomfort, which for many was about the longer-term consequences of being reduced to “something sexual”. They had an experience of losing some self-respect. This is what Cassandra (27), for example, says prompted her decision to stop compensated dating:

I know what it's like to feel like you're not worth more than your sexuality. I know what it's like to be dependent on one thing or another. I know what it's like to have low self-esteem. Well, I know all these things because I've tried it myself, so I might have a better knowledge and understanding of these people,

but at the same time it's not something I want to offer to others. I don't think people should have that feeling, so of course you can... well, there are things you regret, but you could say, I see it more as an experience. Even if it was a bad thing, it was an experience.

For Miriam (22), the fact that a male friend treated her as an equal after several violent and transgressive incidents with men made her think about her situation:

And then I had a really good friend, and he took me to a hotel, and then he paid for three nights, and then he left, and I really expected that I would probably have to do something or other, but he left again, and I don't know if that did anything for me, but after that I moved to a crisis shelter for ten months, where I also worked through some of the violence with my dad and all these things, and then after those ten months, I decided that now I'm going to move out to the countryside to my aunt's house and get a new life. And then I got a little flat, and I went to detox, and rehab and got clean and lost 20-30 kilos, and got completely out of that environment. I removed everything and was actually... I felt completely free and relaxed again. Got an education. All that stuff.

For Miriam, it was a specific experience that triggered a desire for change, while for others, compensated dating stopped less suddenly. For example, Karina (27) says that the activities became increasingly fewer, that she felt the need dwindling, or that it just "slipped away":

And so that's how we met in a bar, we met by mistake, or it was like we agreed not to meet, then we met on 25 December, where I was in town with some of my friends and stuff, and it was just, we weren't supposed to meet at all, it felt completely wrong. And then yes, I just didn't bother anymore. I remember, it just slipped away somehow. It wasn't a decision like: "Now I'm going to delete my profile".

For Karina, the end of compensated dating was not so much the result of an active choice, but something that just happened. Several of the young people in the interviews describe a similar undramatic cessation. Trine (27) puts it this way: *"The only thing that pops into my head is: I just didn't want to anymore. I thought it was boring. Or not boring. I think it took too much energy. It wasn't worth it".*

In this chapter we outlined the most common reasons for stopping compensated dating. Another issue in the young people's lives that may also lead them to stop is their sense of shame, taboo and stigma. The next chapter looks at these issues.

Young people's experiences of stigma, taboo and shame

In this chapter, we explore young people's experiences of stigma and taboo in relation to compensated dating. It is well known from research on prostitution that people who sell sex may experience stigma and shame (Bjønness, Nencel & Skilbrei 2022). Studies of young people who exchange sex and intimacy for money and gifts show that the experience of stigma also affects them (Nayar 2017). In our interviews with young people, stigma often appears as a sense of not being able to share experiences with friends, family, boy/girlfriends and the outside world, or a sense that society generally condemns and looks down on 'sugar dating' and prostitution. However, the extent to which the young people we interviewed experience stigma, taboo and shame varies greatly, as do their reactions to it. For many, the sense of stigma and shame leads to regret, while others use it deliberately to try to address and even break down existing prejudices and taboos.

Silence and taboo

Overall, very few of our interviewees feel that they can talk freely about compensated dating. Cassandra (27) waited two years to tell her boyfriend that she formerly had engaged in compensated dating, because she was afraid of his reaction:

I felt like I would rather be a murderer... because I thought that was more acceptable than saying that I once sold sex, because it's looked down on so much that, as a woman, you've done that.

For the same reason, many of the young people do not tell anyone, while others only tell a few close friends. Anita (23) finds compensated dating a lonely experience:

The fact of the matter is that you're all on your own. It's actually a fucking stigma. You can't even talk to your friends about it. So there is no community, there is no online forum where you can read about it.

Rulle (26) feels the same way:

I can easily talk to my friends about my sex life and I also tell them about the encounters I have with men, but they don't know it's through sugar dating and that's where I feel there's a taboo. The fact that it's sugar dating, that there's money or gifts or... because I'm afraid they'll think it's prostitution.

Young people thus ascribe their lack of openness towards friends to the outside world's view of compensated dating. When asked whom she has spoken to about her exchange dates, Maria (27) explains:

Well, I'm pretty open with certain people I know I can trust. I just don't tell everyone under the sun. I think there's six or seven people who know that I do this (...) It would be nice not to have a taboo, it's very taboo. It would be nice if you could say, yes, I'm a sugar dater, I'm proud of it.

We see in the quote that Maria, although not ashamed herself, feels that engaging in compensated dating is taboo. The taboo makes it difficult for her to be honest about how she earns her money, so only a few close friends are privy to her secret. Nadja (22) feels the same way:

No, no, no, it was only my best friend who knew, and then I remember, I was totally out of it and drunk, and we sat and talked about it, and I might have bought drinks or cocaine, or I might have just sat and flaunted my money because I thought it was kind of cool that I had a lot of money, so they might have put two-and-two together. But I never ever told. Never.

When the young people we interviewed talk about hiding their compensated dating, many are particularly concerned that their family would be very sad if they found out. Sandra (21) explains how it feels to have to lie to her mother: *"My mother has often asked: 'Now, that's not the kind of thing you do, is it?' because she suspected that I did it, and I have lied about it a lot. So it hasn't been so good".*

Even some of those who do not have a problem with compensated dating and who wish it was no longer a taboo do not want their parents to know. They feel that the societal norm that portrays exchanging sex or intimacy for material goods as wrong is so strong that it would be difficult for their parents to accept it. These young people want to spare their parents, and some also mention that they would be sorry if their parents changed their view of them because of their engagement in compensated dating. Badur (25) explains his rationale here:

Well, it's not something you shout out loud about, unless to your very close friends. Also, because I have a very old-fashioned relationship with my parents. If I hadn't had a daughter, they'd still think that I was a virgin or something like that. We never talk about sex or anything like that, so it would also be unnatural to talk about it here. It wouldn't fit in normally.

A few say that they might not have started compensated dating at all if, from the beginning, they had known that it was such a taboo issue. These young people imagine what consequences exchanging sex for material benefits could have for future romantic relationships. For Sille (25), this is a dilemma:

If I get a partner and I want to tell him about this, and this is a part of me, I want to tell him about what I've actually experienced and done, but I don't think I can, because I don't think very many people will understand it, and I don't think they'll forgive me for it. I could imagine that there were some men who would leave me because of it. Not all men think it's particularly sexy that girls have been paid money for sex.

Clara (23), who was one of the few to tell her boyfriend about her compensated dating, experienced major consequences, including guilt and shame:

For a long time I've felt a lot of guilt, been very, very sad about it, and especially now that I'm in a relationship and constantly being reminded of it. I've certainly had many conflicts, and I'm constantly being reminded, oh you've done it, how can you have done this, and constantly being attacked for what I've done.

For some of the interviewees with an ethnic background other than Danish, the taboo surrounding compensated dating is particularly intense. We will elaborate upon this subject in the chapter about sexuality and ethnicity below.

Would the taboo disappear if we talked more about compensated dating?

Even though many of our interviewees experience a strong taboo, some think that both compensated dating and prostitution might become less taboo if people actually talked more about them. According to Sofie (24), this would also make it easier to help those who want to get out:

For me, it's a thing. It will always be there, and therefore I think we should not make it even more taboo than it already is. I feel that if we are going to try and help, we need to provide some resources. Some help for those who want to get out of it. And they can get help for, maybe, the challenges they have in terms of finding a job, education, psychological things.

Several of our participants thus tried to use the taboo attached to compensated dating constructively by challenging it. Susanne (27), for example, believed that it was the very taboo around compensated dating that made her feel bad about it, and Vigga (21) had similar thoughts and refuses to let it be a secret:

I have deliberately refused to make it a taboo to myself. I didn't want to keep it a secret. So I'm making up a story, if I'm in some hotel or other, I don't fucking care, so I've just actively chosen to try to normalise things a bit, saying that this is okay.

However, most of the young people we interviewed feel that they have to hide their compensated dating to some extent. For Lotte (25), it relates to her future working life:

I can't go out and say I've been sugar dating, because I know I'm a marketing manager. If I'm in an agency and it's written somewhere that I've been sugar dating, I'll be neglected and put in a box, and then I won't be taken seriously.

A few of them, however, feel they have nothing to lose. It may be that, like Vigga for example, they are in an environment where compensated dating is acceptable and therefore cannot be pressured into something by the prospect of being 'found out'. Or it could be like Rikke (29), who was in a relationship with a sugar daddy who threatened to write to her mother and employer, who also did not feel threatened. Her mother knew everything, and she found that the owner of the shop where she worked was "fucked up" herself, and therefore would not react negatively to the information.

This chapter has shown that the extent to which young people experience and relate to taboo, shame and stigma varies greatly, but that most of them do relate to it. The next chapter looks at two groups for whom stigma is particularly important: young people whose sexuality is different from what they experience as the norm; and young people with an ethnic background other than Danish.

Sexuality and ethnicity

Specific issues amongst gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people

In this study of young people who have exchanged intimacy and material goods, in addition to a large group of heterosexual women, we also interviewed 5 young men who identify as gay, 1 who is heterosexual, 2 young women who identify as lesbian, 10 young women who identify as bisexual, and 2 young people who identify as transgender. There is great diversity amongst these young people, whom we will call the LGBT group, in terms of motives and experiences. The quantitative study by Dahl and Østergaard (2021) shows that exchanges of intimacy and sex and material goods are more common amongst young gay men and young bisexual women than amongst other young people in Denmark. It is particularly amongst young gay men that we find issues that differ from the main group, so this section deals primarily with this group.

There are some specific issues that characterise the upbringing of young gay men, young lesbian women and young transgender people, as well as their experiences of compensated dating. Because of their sexuality and gender identity, they experienced stigma and marginalisation from an early age and often at school. From an early age, they felt 'outside' and different, and often experienced bullying and a lack of understanding from parents and teachers. Later in life, they also experienced a stigma linked to their compensated dating. After starting to engage in compensated dating, they experienced a 'double stigma', where both their sexuality and the exchanges they have had with older men separate them from the norm. This stigma is reflected, for example, in the fact that it can be difficult for them to talk about their sex life and in a feeling of shame about their experience of exchanging. This double stigma occurs particularly in the encounter with heterosexual norms, whereas according to the young people we interviewed, the experience of stigma is less common within the LGBT community.

Like many of the young people in the main group, the young people in the LGBT group describe a difficult upbringing in a provincial town, marked by parental or school failure and experiences of bullying from their peers because of their sexuality or gender identity. There is a general feeling of 'being left out' or of having been lonely during their childhood and adolescence.

A high proportion of young gay men had their first sexual experience earlier than other young people. Some started having sex as early as 13 years old. The majority of those we spoke to had moved to a larger city relatively early in their youth and had become part of LGBT communities, in which they felt more at home. This made it easier for them to live out their sexuality or gender identity, because they felt more included. However, the feeling of shame often persisted and most of them say that a double stigma affects their lives.

In terms of motives for starting with compensational dating with older men, gay young men, like young people who engage in compensated dating in general, mention money, excitement, loneliness, attention and age difference. For Henrik (22), loneliness and lack of money were key motives:

Well, I think it was a mixture of the fact that I was very alone, so sometimes I just missed some company, and at other times, I think it was also that I lived alone and earned DKK 74 an hour and worked in a supermarket, right? So, I think it was a mixture of many things, that I needed some company, and perhaps that I needed the money.

Young gay men mainly meet daddies through online dating apps like Grindr, Boyfriend, Hornet.com, Sugardaters.com or Seekingarrangement.com. On the latter two apps, which specifically mediate sugar dating relationships, the young men registered as so-called *toyboys* and explicitly sought a sugar daddy. A few were also approached by older men and offered money for sex on social media. In several cases, they also exchanged with older men they met in clubs and bars in cities.

Amongst the young gay men, material exchanges also consist mainly of money, in the form of cash or payment via MobilePay, and gifts such as phones, computers, clothes and shoes. In addition to gifts, the material benefits they receive from older men also cover transport – for example, payment for taxis and trains to and from the places where they meet. Other material benefits include restaurant visits, hotel stays or car rides. In return for material benefits, they provide companionship, oral sex, anal sex, or the opportunity for the daddy to live out other sexual fantasies.

The young gay men we interviewed have dated between 10 and 50 daddies. Their criteria for selecting older men are similar to those used and described by the main group of young people engaged in compensated dating. They choose daddies based on the amount of money they will pay, whether they have 'good jobs' and their education. Emil (21) explains:

Clearly, they had things under control, such as their own house and their own car (...) Then they were all educated, engineers or architects or, uh, there was also one who was a banker.

Some of the young gay men see their exchanges and relationships with older men as part of 'coming out of the closet' and living out or exploring their sexuality. Several report how the exchanges started at a time when they began to identify as gay and started having sex with men. For some young people from the provinces, exchanges were part of a period when they were thinking of moving to cities, where they could live out their sexuality. Morten (24) explains: *"I think it's common for a lot of gay men to be like young and come from the provinces and go to the big cities and meet a grown man who can 'teach you'."* Historical books about gay men describe a long 'tradition' of exchanging sex for money when gay men move to the big city, often in relationships with men who are older. The book *Storbyen Trækker* (The City Attracts) (Edelberg 2012) describes how this was a widespread practice in the 1960s.

Some of the young people we interviewed find it difficult to grasp and explain why they engage in compensated dating. The money and gifts are important, but there is also a sense of power, as Emil (21) tells us here:

I can't quite figure out if what was missing was the material things or the benefits of it, or if it was the conversations with them. I think primarily the benefits, um, yeah (...) More the possibility of being able to, well, there was also something, well, some kind of power in it. Got into the habit of, um, sending requests and things like that, so you just went to the cinema, so you just sent a request.

Money tends to be the most important thing for the young men we interviewed⁵. In some cases, they are pressured by a lack of money because they have to repay a loan or pay the rent. Other times they feel lured by the large sums of money they are offered. Most view the gifts and money they receive as extra income they can spend on shopping, socialising or, in a few cases, saving.

The pull of money, boundaries slipping and 'feeling dirty'

Several of the young men have had unpleasant or boundary-crossing experiences. These experiences range, as they do for the other young people in our interviews, from financial pressure to stalking, assault and rape. Moreover, several found that their boundaries were pushed and that relationships gradually started to resemble prostitution. This led, as in Emil's (21) case, to feeling dirty:

I clearly believe that the times I sold my body were also the most unpleasant, so I come home and stood for half an hour in the shower and scrubbed everything I could, and had... something like anxiety attacks like, what the fuck did I just do... but if you get offered DKK 8,000 to fuck someone, then it's something you bloody well consider.

Henrik (22) had a similar experience:

Yeah, and I also just think that when I got home, I went to take a shower and I just remember feeling like I couldn't clean myself at all. I just kept going because I was just so sad because there I could really feel that it wasn't good.

Some of the young men we interviewed also found it unacceptable that men took photos of them without their consent. Peter (25) reports:

And then he wanted to take photos of me, so he did. With an SLR camera. All I had to do was stand there and take off my clothes. On a driveway on a road, out in the woods. He just did it.

Peter also saw that an older man he was exchanging sex with began to arrange contacts for him with other men, who were significantly older, without him feeling comfortable about it: *"Then it ended up with driving to a restaurant. And it was just so absurd to sit there after fisting an 80-year-old man and getting a MacBook worth DKK 20,000."*

Henrik (22) also had boundary-crossing experiences. Even though the gifts he was offered were enticing, he reports that finally he *"couldn't be a part of it"* and *"moved on"*:

Even though something in me really wanted that B&O speaker, then perhaps I could start to feel my boundaries, or start to feel myself actually, so I could feel it starting to tighten up inside of me, or like, I couldn't really be a part of it. So I had to stop it and be like, "It was nice to eat together, but you can take your speaker and go" - yeah, because by then I had kind of moved on.

⁵ The strong focus on financial compensation in this group, and the way in which young gay men associate their exchanges with 'coming out', may relate to the fact that historically there has been a particular subculture amongst gay men where sex is exchanged for money with men who are older when the young person moves to the big city (Edelberg 2012). Previous studies also show that gay men have sold sex more often than average (Kuosmanen 2008) and have exchanged sex and intimacy for money more often (Dahl & Østergaard 2021).

Thus, the main challenges amongst the young men we interviewed are a general sense of stigma and shame associated with sexual behaviour and gender identity, the fact that their boundaries, as for the majority of young people engaged in compensated dating, evolve in tandem with their increasing dependency on the material benefits, and the fact that older men use their financial advantage to negotiate forms of sex that the young men do not want.

Particular problems amongst young people from other ethnic backgrounds

The study includes nine young women with an ethnic background other than Danish, including young people whose parents come from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Some live with their biological parents, and others are adopted. However, despite their differing backgrounds, what they have in common is the experience of feeling different, discriminated against or left out in their schooling and upbringing in Denmark. Karla (31), for example, says that it was difficult to be coloured at her school:

I just think it was really difficult, the whole growing up thing, being dark skinned and living in that little town, and going to primary school, and always feeling different from the others. I think it was difficult throughout my primary school because I went to this primary school that is actually known to be a bit racist. It was just a really bad school. There were many things. It was just hard, all that, and with friends.

Anne-Mette (24) also has bad memories from school:

It was clearly not a very fun time. I was, you know, the only one with, the only coloured person in that area. I was the only dark person in the class, and then you take some... well then you become a little bit of a target, I think. And I've always been good at speaking my mind out loud, so I've had to learn to modify that, too.

In several cases, young people from other ethnic backgrounds explain that their entry into compensated dating was a direct result of this experience of being different and marginalized, or of having a problematic relationship with their families. Some were not able to live at home or get help from their family or the social services, and therefore lacked money to live on. A few were homeless from time to time, and several were placed outside of the home or needed psychological help or public support during their childhood and adolescence.

Several of these young women also experienced a double stigma, linked partly to their ethnicity and skin colour and partly to their compensated dating experience. Several of them describe how their ethnic background is linked to shame about their exchanges and a particular fear of how their family and the outside world would react if they discovered that they had exchanged sex or intimacy.

The subgroup of young women with an ethnic background other than Danish who also belong to the LGBT group, describe very specific challenges: They describe what can be termed a triple stigma, linked to ethnic origin, gender identity and their experience of exchanging sex. Furthermore, they describe how they have had to keep their sexual lives and compensated dating a complete secret from their families, and that they are very afraid of bringing shame onto their families. Anne-Mette (24), who has an African background and has sex with both men and women, is particularly concerned about what her grandparents would think of her choice, and about protecting them from the other people's prejudices:

It's wrong that I find sugar dating exciting, it's wrong that I have a Tinder profile. I think my grandmother and grandfather would think it was totally wrong-ish. The thing about me accepting drinks in town from other men or guys, the thing about me net dating is wrong. I know that my grandparents would think it was totally wrong that I am a bit attracted to my own sex. These things would be shameful.

Fayar (29) elaborates on how both her ethnicity and her sexual orientation have been difficult for her social environment to deal with:

I think that to understand how the whole rumour mill works, it's because when you're a minority, you're kind of guarding your own identity and stuff, you'd rather not step outside of the circle, and I've obviously done that, so the fact that I suddenly become a disgrace or that I suddenly disgrace the family name, that's something that I've been threatened with through my youth... that if I wanted to do what I wanted to do... then I would at least have to know that I had to change my surname. It was like that - the community's interests rather than the individual's.

Young people who have both an ethnicity and a sexuality that differ from the majority require assistance from society adapted to their particular needs. It is very challenging for them to keep their sexual lives and experience of compensated dating secret, and they need to share their experiences with young people with similar experiences in a free and unprejudiced space. This group may therefore have a particular need for counselling to be anonymous and discreet, and for it to be tailored to people of both different ethnic backgrounds and gender identities. The professionals we spoke to in the context of the project also pointed out that these young people are easier to exploit because of their vulnerable networks and lack of family support. This group, therefore, has a particular need for social services in a safe environment, taking into account the various types of stigma these young people experience.

Young people's thoughts on relevant support services and initiatives

The previous chapters addressed young people's motives for compensated dating and their experiences and attitudes. Here, we highlight some of the issues that young people focus on when we ask them if there is anything they have felt was lacking from adults and from the system, and if they have thoughts about anything that could have remedied these shortcomings. These questions also gave them an opportunity to reflect on what they think might help other young people experiencing problems associated with compensated dating.

Some say that they have not had any problems in their lives and so they have not thought about whether the social system could have done something differently to help them.

However, most of the young people we spoke to *have* faced some challenges and have various thoughts on how their family, the educational system and social services might have helped to their lives turn out differently. Many relate the problems they experience in exchanging sex or intimacy for material and non-material benefits, such as in relation to crossing boundaries and stigma to their childhood experiences. They are concerned about the challenges they faced *before* they began compensated dating and how these experiences led to trying compensated dating and had an impact on how they handle relationships with sugar daddies, and how compensated relationships affect them in general.

In this chapter, we describe the main issues that young people focus on when we ask about their experiences with, and their need for help from adults and the system, in their upbringing, their current lives and the context of compensated dating.

A great need for adults to talk to

Many of the young people say that during their upbringing they could not talk to their parents about sex or their well-being in general, and that they therefore needed other adults to talk to. Several imagine that their lives would have been different if adults had acknowledged and listened to them when they were children and teenagers. Clara (23) explains:

I think it would have stopped much, much sooner if my parents were paying more attention. If my parents were more attentive and if they saw what was happening, then, I think this pattern would have been broken. The fact that my parents allowed me, their fourteen year old daughter, go through a lot of abuse. If they had just been a little more attentive and tried to ask a little more about how I was feeling and things like that, I think the pattern would have been broken then.

Stine (24) also thinks that adults talk too little with their children about sex. When the media and social media are simultaneously 'flooded with sex', it can be difficult for young people to find their way, she says. She calls for more open and unbiased talk about sex in schools, because this is precisely what many young people have been lacking at home.

Attention to well-being and young people's sexuality in schools

A number of young people call for greater attention to children's well-being in schools and childcare institutions. Several also believe that there should be more focus on sex education and knowledge young people's sexuality. Lotte (25) feels that there is a lack of information at school:

We need to focus on sex education. What the various options are when you are young. Instead of things being taboo... It's like the things that you're not allowed to do are also the things that you want to explore.

Some are aware of services such as the Children's Helpline, Headspace and other services for children and young people, and believe that educational institutions could both learn from these services and increase their referrals to them. In general, many of the young people have a high regard of these wide-ranging services for young people who are not thriving. For example, Sofie (24) says:

If only in school you were like... or in high school you were like, hey, we actually have these services if you think you have any problems... Headspace is really like that: "Do you find it difficult financially? Do you have boyfriend troubles? Do you have this and that?" It's a very wide-ranging service where you can drop in and talk to someone.

Sofie knows about many available services herself, but she does not feel that adults like parents or teachers know about them. Moreover, they can be hard to find online. She thinks adults should be able to say: "If you are under pressure, then go here. Then you can get help, there is someone who will talk to you and take you by the hand. Come and talk to Ejnar. He's good at this, he can help you with the things you can't quite figure out."

Many young people describe the school system as crucial to young people's well-being. They stress how important it is that there are adults in this system who can handle the conversations they lack at home, especially in relation to sexuality and gender identity. Several of them mention that there is too little focus on taboos, otherness and diversity, and that it would be beneficial if schools and society in general dared to talk about and be open about topics such as compensated dating, and if there was better cooperation with organisations that work specifically with children and young people.

Removal from home, foster care, and child-/youth institutions

Several young people say they think their lives would have been easier if they had been removed from home at an early age. Rosa (26) is one of those who believes that removal from home could have made her life different.

I would say that as a child I should have been removed from home. I was never removed... I ran away from home, of course... Or adopted earlier or something. Avoided the orphanage. Avoided the environments there.

Sarah (29) was sent to a children's home as a toddler, because both of her parents were mentally ill. She thinks it would have been better if she had been adopted from the start:

It would have been wiser to have me adopted because they knew they were so mentally ill they would never be able to get me back. I needed a mother and father, with whom I knew I would stay for the rest of my life. That I would have that contact for the rest of my life instead of constantly being afraid of losing them, and I think that destroyed a lot of my self-esteem and self-confidence. That fear of constantly, well, will I have a mum and dad tomorrow, or will they quit because I'm just a job?

Sarah thus links the fact that she experienced abandonment as a child to the fact that she has low self-esteem as an adult. And she also believes that this lack of self-esteem has contributed to her difficulty vis-à-vis setting boundaries in her relationships with men, both in relationships with boyfriends and in compensated dating:

I feel obliged to love them because I'm used to people not doing anything for me unless I give something back, and also because I'm used to it not being normal to be helped by other people. So when someone helps me, I actually feel like I'm in debt and I feel like I have to give a lot of myself to keep allowing myself to accept help, and so I let them exceed my boundaries sometimes.

Several of the young people also report that they have experienced deprivation and bad influences from other young people in children- and youth institutions, and several report that they developed a drug habit while in an institution. Others call for children and young people to be able to talk to an independent person, such as a psychologist, without their parents being present – for example, when going into foster care. Sarah (29) says:

I think you should have the opportunity to talk to a psychologist as a child, without being forced to have your mother and father, or your foster family there. There must be a child psychologist you could go to without (...) I think that when a child comes to someone and questions such serious things as "my mum and dad don't love me", you should have a psychologist that the child could talk to without your parents being involved, or your foster parents being involved, because if you had that, then there would be a chance that this psychologist would have seen what was wrong and helped me to have a better upbringing in later years, and also to have a better start in life when I moved out of home, and then I might never have ended up in this. Never been with these violent men. Never have ended up in sugar dating and prostitution.

Sarah's story points to a key dilemma about the age at which a child should start to be consulted and counselled independently of their parents, and the importance of having access to a psychologist as a child.

The importance of housing and economy

Some young people talk about how they might not have begun to engage in compensated dating if there had been easier access to housing or student accommodation. Malou (29) explains that she has met several young people in this situation:

For example, when you have had a bad boyfriend, needed money for a deposit, and the local council cannot help. Then they choose to sugar date to get money for a deposit, and once they get into sugar dating, they get addicted to it like drugs, because you get addicted to that feeling of attention and money.

When asked what might have helped her after she started compensated dating and selling sex, Rosa (26) also focuses on financial help:

Win a million (laughs), if I could be better at working and taking care of myself and having a better income. I've never really succeeded in that. Right now I can't even find someone who wants to help me with a deposit (...) I've heard that from other girls too: When they leave boyfriends, or when they haven't had help from the start from their family, for example to avoid homelessness. To establish a home to begin with. Kind of like start-up-help.

The above quotes show that the financial situation plays a major role for this group of young people, and that they associate starting or resuming exchanging intimacy and sex for money with their financial situation. For example, if there had been easier access to youth housing and help through the social services, many of them believe that they might not have become addicted to compensated dating.

Young people call for mentoring, and for like-minded people as a sounding board

A number of our interviewees underline the importance of adult contact persons. Some say that they have had a contact person they have benefited from and others say that they have lacked such a person. Aidia (19) says that there was a period when she was having a hard time, when she rarely went to school and mostly hung out with her friends. She thinks a good adult contact person could have changed a lot for her during that time, but stresses that it is important for such a person not to push too hard:

They should not be too intrusive and you should come of your own free will. Because I remember I had some [contact persons] who were just too much. The thing about taking it nice and easy and not trying to push you. The thing about just taking it as it comes, because eventually it will come at some point... just someone who can go out and do things with you, and eventually you'll want to open up.

A common theme in young people's stories is that they need adults to listen to them, but that things must also happen on their terms and at their pace.

Many of the young people would also have liked someone to talk to about their experiences of compensated dating. They want to be able to share their experiences with someone who has experience of exchanging sex or intimacy themselves. For example, Sille (25) emphasises the need to talk to like-minded people:

There was so much doubt for me in the beginning about what is it?... What am I doing and how do you do something like this? I would have really liked to have someone who could have said: "If you ask for so little money, they also expect that... well, that you are so and so"... there I could have used someone who had said something about self-respect; That is, the associations they [the men] have with it and think: "Well, then I can probably get her to do this. She has such a low opinion of herself, so"... that I could have used someone who had said: "You don't have to do that." Or a place where I could exchange experiences and say: "I had a very strange experience and he was completely gone, that guy", or positive experiences where I could say: "That was really cool, too".

Emilie (23) also needs like-minded people to talk to and thinks that ideally the contact should be anonymous and preferably online, because she is afraid of stigma and being recognised by friends:

If you had such a forum or support group where you could talk to others who were also into sugar dating... and share your experiences. Where you had someone to talk to, if you don't dare go to a friend, you can go to someone else who is also sugar dating (...) I think it's almost easier when it's online, because then you don't have to meet someone face to face. It can also be a bit scary, I think (...) Well, maybe it's easier that it's online, because then you don't have to give your name, you can just talk to each other.

Many of the young people mention mentoring as something they think would have a positive effect in relation to compensated dating. For example, Marie (24) suggests that it would be very useful to have a slightly older person to talk to, who was open-minded and interested in what the young persons want and are experiencing, without viewing them as a victims:

Because you're confused about yourself, and being able to articulate this about yourself is bloody difficult in relation to social media, because you're just bombarded with it (...) That thing about not having a hobby, or you don't have something you're into. Or that you don't have a drive to do something else, and if you're just sitting behind a screen wanting all this that everyone else has. It's not a drive, it's just superficial things. But you also get content and substance from someone who is a little older, who takes you by the hand and helps you and says: "There's also this you can do in your life". (...) And which is not about being saved. I really just need a community where I can come in and talk about it.

In our interviews, we met quite a few young people who expressed the need to have someone to talk to. They stress that it can be difficult as a young person to deal with social media and the ideals that appear there, and that it would be nice to have contact with adults who listened without prejudice and to meet other young people with whom they can have a community and, for example, pursue a hobby together. Some of the interviewees have benefited from talking to staff at Reden Ung and LivaRehab, for example, while others would not contact these services because they consider them narrow-minded or irrelevant.

Advice from one young person to another

We asked young people what they would say to other young people who are considering compensated dating. Their responses vary widely, but they consistently advise other young people to consider whether it is a good idea and to think carefully about their own boundaries. Miriam (22) says she would advise young people to think carefully before they start exchanging sex or companionship, because it does not always work out the way that one imagines:

Well, if someone was sitting next to me, I would definitely warn them, even though they said: "No, but I'm sure I can". So I would definitely warn them and say: "Listen, you need to understand what you're getting into". And then it's up to them if they want to try it, and then they can risk having a really unpleasant experience, or not, but it's up to them, because there's only one way to find out, and that's to do it, but it's also dangerous, because there's a risk that it's not what you thought.

Miriam says that, when sugardaters.dk was first launched, it was 'the big thing' that everyone was talking about. She tells us about a warning she got one day when she was at Christiania with her friend:

This woman came up to us, she was 30-40, and she told us how she had put an ad on sugardaters and had met a man and she had been beaten up so badly. He had simply lost it, and he had pounded away at her. And then she kind of got away and told me about this incident, and you just thought, "Wow, you have to be careful".

Aidia's (19) advice to other young women is about feeling own boundaries, saying no and not taking the blame if you feel your boundaries are being exceeded. She also advises young girls to stay away from "gang environments and boys who are connected to gangs" and "to find environments where boys respect girls":

I would say that you should at least be careful where you go. It depends on the environment and all that. Find the right people to be with and then learn to say no, and it may be difficult, but if you don't say no, nothing will be done about it. If you don't say no to a guy, he really just thinks he can do it. So, that thing about remembering to say no, that's very important. And then sense if it's something that you want to do yourself. Also, talking about it if you feel your personal boundary has been crossed can be really difficult. This thing about it never being your fault. It's not, and then you always have to talk to some good friends about it.

The above shows that the young people we interviewed are concerned about minimising risks and that they advise others to stay away from environments where there is pressure and where it can be difficult to maintain their own personal boundaries. Several say it's best not to get into compensated dating if at all possible.

Types of young people who engage in compensated dating: Four young people's stories

We hope the report will help paint a picture of the complexity and diversity of young people's motives and experiences. This chapter features four case stories, which broadly represent the *types* of young people we met in the project. The four cases are thus based on the traits and experiences of several young people and not on the stories of specific individuals. We hope that it makes sense for practitioners to think in terms of these 'archetypes' when meeting young people, bearing in mind, of course, that these are constructed cases.

Case 1. **Sanne** (25) lives in a rented room that the local council helped her to get after she was in a crisis shelter for a while. She receives education support (SU), but does not come to school very often because she cannot concentrate.

For Sanne, life has involved many changes. When she was very young, her parents divorced and she has not had much contact with her father. She visited him sometimes when she was 11-12 years old, but he was often stoned and did not keep appointments, so the contact fizzled out. Sanne's mother has had many partners, and Sanne has often felt that her mothers' partners were more important than her children. There has been a lot of drunkenness in the home and she has not felt safe. Her mother has also had some back problems and she has self-medicated with painkillers and alcohol. Sanne says that, as a child, she took on a lot of responsibility at home, trying to make sure that her siblings had food and clean clothes, but also as a way of seeking positive attention from her mother.

At school, Sanne has done OK academically but has had a hard time socially. Her family has moved around a lot and it has been challenging for her to establish and maintain friendships. She has been bullied, both because she was fat and because her family was different from others. In 7th form, Sanne found a friend, Ella, whom she describes as the pretty girl at school, with long blond hair and large breasts. They started hanging out together and stealing a little from school and smoking in breaks.

At the beginning of 8th form, some 10th form boys start taking an interest in them, and they start partying with them and smoking pot. They do not attend school much anymore, and her mother is summoned to a meeting. The teachers say that Sanne has changed and that they are worried about her. The mother reacts by scolding Sanne and saying that she has done everything for her. The teachers do not really do much more, and Sanne and Ella gradually start to consume quite a lot of alcohol. They have fun and feel that something is happening. At a party at the home of one of the older boys, Sanne has a little too much to drink and wakes up with no clothes on. She cannot remember what happened. After this, she feels that people at school look at her in a new way, and there is a story circulating that she had sex with three of the boys that night. She tells her mother about the experience, but her mother dismisses it and calls her a whore.

Sanne rarely comes to school, and the teachers contact her mother again. In the middle of 8th form, she ends up being sent to a boarding school, where she continues to party, and ends up getting kicked out. Her mother tells her that she cannot bear to have her at home anymore and that there is an institution she thinks will be good for her. At this point, Sanne is often depressed and sometimes thinks about taking her own life. At the youth institution, however, she meets Tommy, aged 17, with whom she falls deeply in love. He makes her feel beautiful and she says she would do anything to make him happy. After a while, the two move in together in the basement of one of Tommy's acquaintances, and for a couple of years they live a wild life of drugs and parties. At one point, Tommy suggests that they can make money from other people watching them have sex. Sanne thinks it's a bit exciting, and they place an ad on [sugardater.dk](#). They start making money this way, but at one point Tommy suggests that only Sanne should have sex with daddies. Sanne does not want to, but since they have accumulated debts and they are both unemployed, Tommy says it is the only solution, and that if she loves him, she has to do it. Sanne goes along with it and have sex with a lot of different men in a period of time. However, she becomes increasingly depressed and also contracts some venereal diseases that she cannot get rid of. Tommy drinks a lot, and eventually she does not even get any of the money she earns. Sanne talks secretly to a staff member at a youth centre, and they help her to get away from Tommy and into a crisis shelter for a while.

Case 2. Tina (27) grew up in a big city in a family with highly educated parents. They helped her financially during her education, but otherwise she found that they were more concerned with their respective careers than with her and how she was doing. While at school, she often felt left out and was bullied for being 'geeky', always dressing in black, and listening to alternative music. She has had several romantic partners, both male and female, but has often found that relationships bored her and that sex became routine and predictable. When she created a profile on [sugardaters.dk](#), it was because she was looking for freedom to live out parts of her sexuality that she felt were not available in her social circle at the time. She wanted to feel that she was the one who chose her partners and could decide for herself if and when she wanted to see them. On [sugardaters.dk](#) she could meet sex partners who matched her criteria and where she could live out a role secretly and anonymously.

Tina sees herself as a feminist, and compensated dating is a way for her to deal with the sexism she has experienced in some of her relationships and on online dating platforms. In compensated dating, she discovered, for example, what it was like to live out what she called a 'whore fantasy', without having to feel ashamed in the situation. She also liked the fact that there was a man who would pay so much for her company and sex, and treat her to fancy dinners and hotel stays. Over a period of a year and a half, Tina met five men. Sometimes, she found it rewarding, but in one case she found that the man she met did not respect her boundaries sexually and used his status and wealth to make her provide types of sex she did not want to.

Tina did not start compensated dating because she needed money, but because of the excitement and affirmation, and the secret space it provided for sexual role-play. She has now stopped compensated dating and cultivates her need to experiment by being part of polyamorous communities and sex clubs. Tina found that compensated dating was an exciting experience for her, although she is annoyed by the stigma attached to the practice, and has therefore been reluctant to tell her parents and siblings about her experiences. In her close circle of friends and in the LGBT environment, she finds that she can easily be open about her experiences.

Tina is now in higher education and does not reject the possibility that she might start seeing a daddy again at some point if she feels like it.

Case 3. **Michael** (23) grew up in a large provincial town and had his first sexual experience at the age of 13. He had a difficult childhood and adolescence. Both parents had mental health problems while he was growing up, and he often felt he had to fend for himself. It was also difficult to talk to anyone about his sexuality: For example that he was attracted to boys and not girls, unlike the other boys at school. His schoolmates called him 'queer' and 'gay' bullied him at break times or after school.

At the age of 14, Michael met some older men on a gay chat forum and started a relationship with one of them. He did not know exactly what the relationship was about, but the man invited him home to eat and sleep and gave him pocket money. He felt enticed by the money and the care and attention he received from the older man, which he felt that he lacked at home. The man listened to his problems and they developed a close personal relationship. His interest in older men, he says, is linked to his problematic and distant relationship with his father. After a few years, the man introduced him to other men living in Copenhagen, who also paid him money for sex. Tired of feeling different in his hometown, Michael moved to Copenhagen. Over time, he ended up in what he himself describes as prostitution, where he did not have a personal relationship with the men, but where he had brief encounters with them in their cars and received cash for sex and blowjobs. The money he earned he used to pay for rent, designer clothes and going out with friends.

Today, Michael regrets ending up in that situation and feels that his boundaries were exceeded and that he was exploited by the older men. He finds it difficult to have sex without feeling ashamed, to form close, trusting relationships, and to keep a steady boyfriend. He wishes that he had had someone to talk to about his experiences with compensated dating/prostitution and the challenges involved in 'coming out' as gay. After moving to Copenhagen, he discovered that there were LGBT networks and social services where he could receive advice and support, and he has received help from LGBT Denmark, for example. He has been seeing a psychologist since he was young and still goes to therapy to process his experiences. He wishes that, when he was a child and young person, there had been social services in his hometown that catered specifically for young gay and LGBT people in prostitution and compensated dating that could deal with the particular experiences and double stigma faced by this group. Furthermore, he also believes that there should be education in schools about the dark sides of prostitution. Michael has recently started further education and now receives state support to cover his rent.

Case 4. **Nadine** (21) grew up in a small provincial town with her family, who come from an African country. Her father could not find work, and her mother often worked overtime to make ends meet. She was raised according to what she calls cultural Muslim principles, and when she became a teenager, her parents and older brothers kept her on a short leash to prevent her from going out with random men. While at school, she made a few friends, but also experienced racism and felt different from the other children at school because of her family and background.

Nadine started compensated dating when she met a group of friends she smoked pot with. There were some older guys who had access to drugs. Sometimes she got drugs, gifts, or money if they had sex. It happened in strict secrecy, so that her family and the ethnic group to which she belonged did not find out about her drug use or discover that she was receiving money from men. She feared being viewed as 'a disgrace' in her own circle or tarnishing the family honour and name. Later, she started compensated dating through one of the websites that provide contact with sugar daddies. Because it was online, she could arrange compensated dates anonymously, avoiding what she called 'the rumour mill' finding out about it. Besides getting money and gifts, she was also driven by the forbidden nature of compensated dating and felt she could do as she pleased without having to think about her family and cultural circle

Sometimes, she slept with one of the older men because she was afraid to go home to her family, who she found very controlling. It was also too risky to meet the men in town or in a hotel, so almost all the meetings took place privately at the men's homes or in a car in a remote place outside town. This meant that she agreed to be more intimate with some of the men than she would have liked, and that they became progressively more demanding.

Nadine did not know anyone else who had tried compensated dating, and she needed someone to share her experiences with. She was very careful to keep her experiences secret, because being discovered could have serious consequences. She feared being punished or being ostracised by her family. At one point, she was the victim of an assault where one of her daddies from a gang environment held her captive for several days. She got in touch with a counselling service where she felt she could tell her story. Here, she got help to deal with her excessive use of alcohol and drugs and to get back on track with her schooling.

It was difficult for Nadine to stop compensated dating completely, because her finances were in a very bad state, but after a few years she found a boyfriend who had a job and whom she also moved in with. Her boyfriend does not know about her past, and she does not dare tell him about it, because he looks down on 'whores', as he calls them. Nadia hopes that there will be more associations and counselling services that can help young people from other ethnic backgrounds than Danish with their experiences, and where they can share their good and bad experiences in a safe space, preferably with other people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Important discussions and future prospects

This chapter begins with a brief reflection on the possible limitations of the project and then a number of reflections on which discussions and future focus points that we, as researchers, believe are essential when it comes to compensated dating in Denmark.

When compensated dating became a concept in Denmark about ten years ago, and the media and the public started to take an interest in this form of exchange of sex and intimacy, people imagined that it would be a new group of young people who would try it (*Berlingske Tidende* 2015; Dyrvig Henriksen 2017; Kristiansen 2019). It cannot be ruled out that this is, to some extent, the case. Several of the professionals from youth institutions that we spoke to say that, over time, they have gained the impression that ‘everyone’ engages in compensated dating. Teachers and others close to young people also find that such dating has become more prevalent and more legitimate and that many ‘ordinary’ young people try it out, stop again and move on with their lives. Dahl & Østergaard’s (2021) data also suggests that there is an increasing acceptance of this type of exchange relationship amongst young people.

However, our interviews paint a complex picture of the compensated dating phenomenon in Denmark. We have only met a few of the category of young people engaged in compensated dating of which there are allegedly many: Those who engage in compensated dating for a period and stop without any consequences. Thus, though there are strong indications that this type of more unproblematic compensational dating exists in society, it is not possible, based on our analyses, to assess whether the young daters that do not experience negative consequences represent a large proportion of the total number of young people who exchange sex and intimacy for benefits.

This report concentrates particularly on young people who experience difficulties: Young people who feel they are lacking something both before and after their engagement in compensated dating, and for whom compensated dating, beyond the temporary experience of earning some money and being acknowledged by someone, leads to further marginalisation and stigmatisation. Most do not feel that they get what they had hoped for and imagined out of compensated dating, especially not in the long run. But even for those young people for whom compensated dating leads to a feeling of acknowledgement and recognition, this feeling does not seem to last. Most of these young people are also left with the feeling that they did something they did not want to do, or were pressured or threatened into doing. At the same time, young people who have not experienced pressure or threats find that there is still shame and stigma attached to what they have done, and this can be difficult to live with. Because of shame and stigma, many feel that the choices they make and the experiences they have had in this part of their youth are something that cannot be forgotten or erased, even if they want to.

The fact that so few of the young people we interviewed found that compensated dating gave them what they hoped for calls for various reflections and initiatives.

When we ask the young people we interviewed what is really needed when it comes to helping vulnerable individuals, they are almost unanimous: Society must ensure that young people are listened to and acknowledged in the family and at school. They want us, as a society, to be quicker at picking up the signals from children and young people who are not thriving, and they want more focus on bullying and 'slut' rhetoric in schools. Many of them want schools to be better at focusing on diversity, both sexually and ethnically, and for teachers and educators to be more aware that it is often at home, with their parents, in the relationship between the young person and their parents, and not usually with the young person themselves, that problems begin.

These young people's recommendations are not new – we already *know* that vulnerable young people often come from vulnerable families. But there are indications that, as a society, we have not been able to adequately address and solve this problem, given that, when asked what would best help their vulnerable peers, this is what they focus on.

Another key issue for the young people in our report is the importance of the media and social media. A lot of young people are critical of the way sugardaters.com works, for example, and many think it would be a good idea to better regulate, or perhaps even ban sites like this. Although many of them find that they themselves have been able to control or manage their own compensated relationships, they have heard about and met young people who have problems and cannot control it, who can get into difficulties and become exploited. That is why they also want special attention paid to young people under 18 and their experiences of sugar dating websites. We believe that young people's experiences and reflections suggest that we, as a society, should discuss how to relate to sites that facilitate compensated dating amongst young people.

One of the key questions of this research project was the impact of compensated dating on young people and whether they get what they want out of it. The answer is by no means simple. Our interviewees talk about freedom, both to be themselves and to be someone other than themselves, and they want more money, recognition, care, excitement and fun. Some, like Tina in Case 2, may find that compensated dating can give them something of what they want, and we have made room in the report for stories like Tina's, where the young person finds that compensated dating offers a space for sexual and identity-testing play. However, the report also clearly shows that many of the young people experience negative consequences, and we have presented their stories of unpleasant requests, boundary crossing and abuse.

It is, therefore, important to note that, for most of them, the benefits of compensated dating do not seem to last. As we have shown, there may be various reasons for this. Some, like Sanne in Case 1, have such low self-esteem that it is difficult for them to assess what is reasonable to agree to. In order to keep the attention of her daddy, she goes to such lengths that she ends up in a situation, both in human and social terms, which she finds difficult to handle.

It may be interesting to dwell a little on the very different experiences of the young people, and for a moment to consider them as illustrations of some cultural trends that may be important to discuss. Recent literature on young people tells us that there is high pressure vis-à-vis achievement in many areas of young people's lives (Petersen 2016). Well-being surveys of young people in Denmark reveal that many young people have a hard time (Danish Health Authority 2021).

For many young people, it is important to be visible, especially on social media, and they say that they experience high demands vis-à-vis achievement in many areas of life, for example, education (Bjønness 2019; Sørensen et al. 2017). There can also be pressure in terms of appearance and having a perfect body in order to get hold of the consumer goods that their role models consume or, for some of the young people who exchange date, to feel like they are something special that others are willing to pay for.

The reaction of parents, teachers, educators, social workers and politicians to these cultural trends makes an impact on the younger generations. For example, many of our interviewees ask us researchers in the interview situations: “What do you think about compensated dating?” “Do you think that compensated dating is ok?” As a researcher, in order not to influence the outcome of the research, one will often try to avoid answering that question. However, it is perhaps worth considering how we should approach this question from the point of view of young people, both as a society and as professionals in institutions working with young people.

In this report, we brought to light the very different thoughts, motives and attitudes of the young people we interviewed. Many of the young people we interviewed speak of a ‘something-for-something’ logic as the most natural thing in the world – and therefore it is essential for adults, parents, teachers, professionals, politicians, and other opinion-makers to take young people’s experiences seriously and to be curious about this logic and how it affects young people’s perceived choices and decisions. This something-for-something logic is not necessarily unambiguous or applicable in all contexts, but a number of questions emerge from the findings of this report about where it comes from, what kinds of implications it has for the most vulnerable young people, and how professionals should relate to it in their contact with young people.

When we talked to young people, a lot of them associated getting into compensated dating with wanting something they had been lacking: Money, care, love and recognition, or boundaries and excitement. Many feel abandoned by the adults in their lives and try to help themselves in whatever ways they can. They push boundaries and try to both find themselves and forget themselves.

These feelings and actions do not arise in a vacuum but in reality, particularly a media reality, which evolves rapidly. In many respects, young people live their lives in a market, where advertisers compete for their attention, offering everything from luxury to fame. It may be important for professionals to talk to young people about how they feel about this and whether there is anything that social workers can do to help them make choices they will be happy with in the long term. And perhaps there is also a need for a more general discussion between professionals, politicians and other opinion makers about how commercial media affects young people’s lives, and the impact of market logic, both on young people’s choices and on how we, as adults, behave.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express a wish in terms of future research. There is great concern, both amongst the young people and amongst professionals, about young people under the age of 18. Due to the research design, COVID-19 and the care and responsibility of the staff for the young people, it was not possible for this project to gain specific knowledge about young people under 18. We therefore urge foundations and funders to support future research into what young people between 15 and 18 years experience. We also hope that youth institutions and services for young people will increasingly open their doors to research. That said, it has been extremely rewarding and constructive to have such close cooperation between research and practice in this project, and we hope that many of the contacts and relationships that have been established can be perpetuated in future projects.

Summary of significant results from the qualitative part of the project

For this project, we interviewed 60 young people aged between 18 and 30, with very varied backgrounds and motives for engaging in compensated dating. There is a clear tendency that young people with experience of compensated dating come from families that have experienced challenges. Well over half of the young people we interviewed experienced instability in their upbringing. A large proportion experienced divorce, mental illness, problematic substance use or domestic violence. A few also experienced sexual abuse in their childhood. It is also very common amongst these young people to have changed school many times, to have felt different or left out, and to have been bullied. Together this created a feeling of insecurity and a lack of attachment.

About a quarter of the young people we interviewed were placed in institutions, in foster families, or with other family members for varying periods of time during their childhood, often against a background of neglect, mentally ill parents or sexual abuse.

The young people got into compensated dating in many different ways. The majority have experience with online dating – for example, Tinder – and for many of them Tinder was also the gateway to compensated dating relationships. Others say they were contacted on Facebook, or when in town to party and be with friends. However, many find contacts on one of the Danish sugar dating websites – often sugardaters.com. Here, they create a profile describing what they are looking for, and usually include photos of themselves.

The young people we interviewed have very different motives for exchanging. However, with a few exceptions, one motive recurs: Money. In most cases, however, material motives other than money – gifts, dinners, travel, transport, drugs and/or alcohol and hotel stays – accompany the attraction of money.

In general, the young people engaged in compensated dating tend to describe a lack of positive social contact during their upbringing. In other words, they did not feel acknowledged or taken seriously. They refer to absent parents, unsympathetic teachers or unappreciative boy/girlfriends. For a large number of the young people in our interviews, compensated dating seemed to be a way of being recognised and acknowledged, thereby gaining something they felt they were missing.

Some of the young people also regard compensated dating as a way of challenging and exploring both their own boundaries and those of society. For them, in addition to money, the motive for compensated dating is often related to excitement and pushing boundaries.

When it comes to the young people's benefits from compensated dating, experiences also vary widely. The majority of the young people feel they get something material out of their exchange of sex and companionship: Most often cash. For many, however, non-material benefits are also important. For most of the young people, the central thing is to be seen and acknowledged. Some say they got a type of kick that they recognised from doing cocaine or MDMA, for example, or that they appreciated being able to be someone other than themselves and to explore their own sexuality in the company of daddies. For others, it may be about being pampered and enjoying being with more mature men. Some talk about the rewards of good conversation, life experience and the company of their daddies, and that older men are more exciting than their peers. Finally, there are a few who feel that in compensated dating they have some kind of feminist control.

Although many of the young people find that they get something they wanted out of their exchange relationships for a while – be it money, gifts, excitement, attention or control – what they get out of it tends to become increasingly less satisfying over time.

For most of the young people, the desired consequences and experiences do not last, or they come at too high a price. For example, feelings of acknowledgement, intoxication and power can be difficult to sustain over time, and many young people describe how they end up doing things they did not initially want to do. Consequently, for many compensated dating leaves them feeling that they are transgressing both their own and perhaps society's boundaries. They may find it difficult to say no if, for example, their daddy offers a larger amount of money for a specific service, or they may be afraid to say "Stop!" in a situation, because they fear violence or threats. Even some of the young people who initially enjoyed hotels and dinners, for example, feel that their relationship with their daddy eventually became all about sex.

However, a smaller group report that they have not experienced problems in relation to boundary setting. Several of these young people link their own control of the situation to the fact that their upbringing gave them skills that enable them to maintain the boundaries they set for themselves.

Others, however, link the fact that they have experienced boundary transgressions in childhood to their difficulty in setting or maintaining their own boundaries in compensated dating.

We asked the young people to consider the relationship between regular dating, sugar dating⁶ and prostitution. One group regarded sugar dating and regular dating as pretty much the same thing, while for others the two are very different. For many of them, the biggest difference between regular dating and sugar dating is the degree of commitment. Whereas they describe regular dating as based more on feelings and intimacy, they regard sugar dating as a cash exchange relationship with fixed pre-agreements. However, the agreements are not as fixed as in prostitution, and many imagine that there is far more freedom in sugar dating than in prostitution.

However, some young people categorise what they do as prostitution, even when they use sugar dating websites or Tinder. They like the fact that there are fixed agreements regarding services and payments, as this makes the interviewees more comfortable about what to expect than what they experience on Tinder, for example.

⁶ We used the term sugar dating at the time of the interviews.

Another group of the young people describe their relationships and exchanges as dates or encounters, viewing what they do as very different from prostitution, even if they receive cash payment. These young people regard the equation of sugar dating with prostitution as both incorrect and problematic, even though they see clear parallels. Prostitution is seen as something that one is forced to do, and this group does not identify with selling sex out of necessity.

Regardless of the fact that, in theory, many young people see sugar dating and prostitution as fundamentally different, many still find it difficult to distinguish between them in practice. As we also illustrated in the chapter on boundaries, some of them find that they do not get what they imagine out of exchanging, and/or that the boundaries of what they want to be involved in shift in unwanted ways, both in individual relationships, and as, over time, they enter into an increasing number of relationships. Many of them find that their sugar dating, which they thought would differ substantially from their image of prostitution, becomes increasingly similar to that image over time – it becomes simply selling sex for money.

Many of the young people we interviewed recently stopped or tried to stop their engagement in compensated dating. For some, stopping was the result of a long period of reflection, while for others it was more spontaneous – due to a bad experience, for instance. Some of them, contracted sexually transmitted diseases, but most eventually experienced psychological discomfort which made it impossible to continue. They have self-esteem problems, become stressed, or feel in other ways that it is unhealthy for them to continue their involvement in compensated dating. Many felt an insidious discomfort related to the longer-term consequences of being reduced to “something sexual”.

Some stop to engage in compensated dating because they start relationships with boy/girlfriends and do not find this compatible with compensated dating. Others start to get bored and want to “get on with their lives”. A few mention a need to stop compensated dating in order to regain their self-respect, restore their own desire or regain a capacity for intimacy that they feel compensated dating destroyed.

Finally, several of the interviewees specify stigma, shame and taboo as reasons for quitting. Most of them find it hard to talk freely about compensated dating, and they tell only a few friends about it. It is not only the outside world’s view of compensated dating, but also their own ambivalent feelings that prompt them to hide their engagement in this kind of relation. The ambivalence is often about their own family. Many, particularly those from ethnic backgrounds other than Danish, are concerned that their families would be very unhappy if they found out about their compensated dating. Even those young people who do not experience problems with compensated dating and who wish it was not taboo, want to spare their parents from knowing about it. They feel that the societal norms that portray the exchange of sex or intimacy for material goods as wrong are so strong that it would be difficult for their parents to accept it, and accordingly their parents would change their view of them.

A key theme of this study is how the social system can improve its response to young people who engage in compensated dating. A small group of the young people interviewed say that they have not had any problems in their lives, so they have not thought about whether the social system could have done anything differently to help them. However, most of those we spoke to *have* faced some challenges that they wish had been dealt with differently. Many of these young people talk about the problems they experience in compensated dating, but they are often more concerned with the challenges they had *before* they started this activity and how these influenced both why they chose to try compensated dating, and how the exchange relationships affect them.

Many young people stress that when they were growing up they could not talk to their parents about sex or indeed their well-being in general. They think that things could have been a lot different if parents, teachers, educators and other adults had acknowledged them and talked to them about how they felt. In general, the young people we interviewed believe that at school more attention should be paid to children's well-being. Furthermore, several believe their lives would have been easier if they had been removed from home at an early age.

A number of the young people say that they have either had a contact person they benefited from or that they lacked such a person. Many young people also mention mentoring schemes or conversations with their peers as something they believe would have a positive effect vis-à-vis compensated dating.

Development of social assistance and initiatives

Reden Ung. Mads Andersen Høg & Julie Jochims Engelbrechtsen

Reden Ung is a nationwide initiative under the aegis of YWCA Social Work that provides information, counselling and education on the exchange of intimacy and sexual services, for the benefit of young people, relatives, and professionals. Reden Ung aims to prevent young people from getting into trouble in the context of exchanging intimacy and sexual services, and to support young people in getting the best possible tools to feel, think, and act responsibly in relation to their own boundaries and those of others in intimate relationships.

The research project has contributed to a much more nuanced picture of the target group and the challenges that young people face. For example, boundary violations have often been very important for the users who contact counselling services. But research has revealed our common knowledge and provided a less black-and-white picture of boundary violations - that they are not necessarily something that happens the first time one sends a nude picture, or the first time that one goes on a date for money. Boundaries may also be violated gradually, over varying periods of time. The many different motives that the young people in the research project talk about have also been an important contribution to our understanding of the young people's situation. This nuanced understanding of young people's motives and situations is crucial when it comes to providing advice and guidance to young people in difficult situations.

In this project, Reden Ung was tasked with developing practical tools based on the research results. We did this in cooperation with the project's practical partners from U-turn Copenhagen, SSP Ballerup, De Unges Hus, Headspace and Børns Vilkår.

As an extension of young people's demand for earlier initiatives and initiatives that take a broader and more open-minded view of young people's sexuality, the work on developing practical tools had a slightly broader scope than just the compensated sex amongst young people over 18 that the researchers have focused on. Therefore, the following section addresses a broader definition of the problem. The section is based on Dahl & Østergaard's (2021) definition of "exchange of intimacy and sexual services for material and non-material goods". A number of the tools also target young people under 18, in order to work preventively before they experience problems in the context of compensated dating.

Practical challenges

A key question in relation to the development of the practice was: Which knowledge and tools can best support professionals working with young people who exchange intimacy and sexual services for benefits?

A common theme that emerged from the practitioners was a lack of knowledge of the field. What exactly is 'sugar dating'? Is it a term that young people use themselves? What do they get out of it? Moreover, what do they actually experience when they exchange? Taking ownership of a conversation can be challenging if one has limited knowledge of the subject to be discussed. The conversation can quickly become distanced, and as a professional you can feel *unprofessional* if you do not know enough about the young people's situation and the reality they experience. Thus, lack of knowledge can either mean that professionals do not engage in the important dialogue around the exchange of intimacy and sexual services with the young person(s), or that the conversation becomes biased and superficial and thus of no benefit to the young person.

In addition, several of the practical partners felt uncomfortable about asking questions that could potentially be perceived as crossing young people's boundaries. Is it an uncomfortable conversation for the young person to be in? Can I say/do something wrong in the conversation? Is the young person shutting down? etc. The young people themselves also mentioned (see the chapter on relevant services and initiatives, page 47) that discussing the subject with professionals crosses boundaries and sometimes feels awkward. Several practical partners also pointed out that they find it difficult to apply their professionalism to conversations about sexuality and exchange. Although the professionals are trained to talk about difficult things, several feel that there is something "extra at stake" in discussions about compensated dating. Therefore, the practical partners asked for concrete guidelines to prevent professionals from overstepping the boundaries of young people in dialogues about compensated dating.

Compensated dating and other forms of exchanging intimacy and sexual services for benefits arouse strong feelings and sharp attitudes in many people. This also applies to professionals. But, as the research also shows, it is important to be able to speak openly when talking to young people about compensated dating. Only in this way can the focus of the conversation be directed towards the needs and well-being of the young people. Most professionals are well aware that pointing a finger or admonishing can have a negative effect on a discussion. But for some, it can be difficult to maintain a professional approach. Therefore, the practical partners asked for tools that could facilitate a more reflective discussion on compensated dating, which could address both its advantages and its disadvantages constructively.

Many professionals also find it difficult to keep young people, especially the most vulnerable ones, focused on the conversation. Especially when it comes to very serious topics like sex, boundaries, and violations of these boundaries, the dialogue can quickly become very ponderous and you can easily lose the young person's attention. Therefore, it is important for professionals to have tools that can guide the conversation in a more fun and playful direction, where the conversational space does not become too serious, but still provides fertile ground for a constructive dialogue.

The practical partners in the project thus emphasised that the practical tools to be developed in the project would provide professionals with more knowledge about exchanges amongst the young people, and provide concrete guidelines for conversations in which exchanges could be discussed openly, without the young person feeling uncomfortable or having their boundaries crossed. The practical tools should also provide a framework for a reflective space, in which both professionals and the young people concerned can talk openly and in a nuanced way about both the advantages and disadvantages of compensated dating.

Practical tools

Reden Ung devised a range of practical tools for working with young people, based on research findings, Reden Ung's own practical experiences, and discussion with the project's practical partners. The aim of the tools is to help professionals to work in a knowledge-based, preventive and supportive way with the group of (marginalised) young people who are considering compensated dating, have already engaged in compensated dating, or are at particular risk of problems related to exchanging intimacy and sexual services for benefits.

The practical partners were keen for the tools to be used both in 1:1 conversations with the young people and in group settings. Therefore, we devised different practical tools for use in different contexts.

*The video **The Exchange of Intimacy and Sexual Services for Benefits – A Short Introduction for Professionals***

The video presents some of the key quantitative research findings in video format. This 5-minute video provides an insight into the range of the target group, social risk factors, material and non-material motives, issues, and legislation in the field.

*The handbook **The Exchange of Intimacy and Sexual Services for Benefits – A Short Introduction for Professionals***

The handbook describes specific attention points and guidelines for the difficult conversation about the exchange of intimacy and sexual services for benefits. There is a particular focus on identifying why a young person engages in compensated dating and how to respond as a professional when the young person either wants or does not want to stop. There are also tools to support a general discussion about boundaries and expectations. Finally, the book outlines the relevant legislation. The handbook can be downloaded/ordered on www.redenung.dk

Sukkerland (Sugarland) – conversation cards about sugar dating, desire and boundaries

The aim of 'Sukkerland' is to support open, non-judgmental dialogues between young people and professionals. The name 'Sukkerland' (Sugarland) reflects the world that young people live in, where temptations and aspirations for an exciting life including, amongst other things, dating, boy/girlfriends, sex, social media and partying, challenge young people's boundaries. Using the conversation cards, professionals can help young people explore Sugarland in a safe, nuanced environment. Of course, professionals should talk about all the things that entice young people, but they should do so in a way that allows individuals to reflect on the challenges that can arise when their boundaries are moved: For example, because money is involved.

Sugarland is a discussion tool consisting of 60 conversation cards, designed to pave the way for conversations about compensated dating, desire and boundaries with groups of young people aged 15-18. The conversation cards can also initiate dialogues about exchanging in a broader sense: For example, about what is at stake when young people offer a blowjob for a bottle of alcohol or are offered money for nude photos.

The conversation cards relate to the everyday lives of young people with the purpose of kindling reflection and highlighting various courses of action in (potentially) boundary-violating situations.

The cards do not take a normative position, for example, on compensated dating, drug taking or image sharing. Instead, they encourage young people to reflect on what they think is right and what is wrong. They provide young people with insights into situations in which it can be difficult to sense what feels good and what does not. They also trigger reflection on how better to listen to their gut feelings and to react if their boundaries get crossed. At the same time, the cards enable professionals to contribute their knowledge on such matters as legislation, professional perspectives or support options in a safe environment, based on young people's own perceptions of reality.

Sukkerland thus creates a common 'third party', so that the conversation can be based on concrete actions without the young people's private stories being exposed in the common forum. To keep things from getting too serious, there is also a category that features fun questions about myths and facts about the body and sexuality.

Digital cartoons

In cooperation with the researchers, young people from the project, and young people from U-turn and Levende Streg, Reden Ung devised three digital cartoons featuring stories about three young people with different experiences of sugar dating. The three young people have different backgrounds and motives, and encounter various issues in the course of the stories.

It was challenging to develop concrete, short narratives, at the same time accommodating the many nuances that the research has demonstrated. The idea was, therefore, to focus on some of the most significant issues that emerged during the project.

It was also important for us that the comics work in an educational context. The cartoons had to strike a balance between being an exciting story that could hold the interest of young people and still being true to the reality and nuances of the research. Therefore, it was also crucial to be in continuous discussion with both the recipients of the cartoons (including young people from U-turn) and the young people with experience of compensated dating, who had provided their experience based stories to the project.

Reden Ung devised teaching material for inspiration, which can form the basis for subsequent work with the cartoons. The teaching material focuses, for example, on desire and boundaries, boundary setting and stigmatisation.

The aim of the material, which deploys various exercises and discussion questions, is to help students understand that other people's attitudes and boundaries are not necessarily the same as their own. Amongst other things, students will learn how money can influence their choices, how important it is to think about other people's boundaries, and that they also have a responsibility not to exceed other people's boundaries. The material also helps young people to consider the fact that it is not always easy to say no in every situation, and what they then can do, if it is hard to maintain own boundaries.

Research shows that many young people at some point in their lives many will find themselves in exchange situations that require them to sense and set boundaries. The material aims to enable students to leave school better equipped for the reality in which they live.

Skill development material for other advisory services

In cooperation with Children's Welfare and Headspace, Reden Ung has produced training material for volunteer counsellors. We devised so-called 'theme boxes' for the volunteer portal and two videos for Headspace's volunteer portal, Headspace Academy.

The material for the two volunteer portals features advice on counselling situations, information on legislation/rights and inspiration for how to ask good questions as a counsellor in concrete counselling situations that deal with the exchange of intimacy and sexual services for benefits. For one thing, the project highlights how important it is for a counsellor to explore, together with the user, any expectations they may have of the exchanges. Research shows that young people's expectations do not always match the reality they encounter.

The research also highlights the variety of reasons young people may have for engaging in compensated dating. The skill development has thus made it clear that if a counsellor does not probe these motives with the user, it is difficult for them to gain a clear picture of the young person's situation. This, in turn, can make it difficult for a counsellor to support the young person in bringing about the change they desire, irrespective of whether change means the young person becoming able to stop compensated dating or setting boundaries in exchange relationships.

All materials are designed to provide volunteer counsellors with professional knowledge about compensated dating in an easy and quick way. At the same time, advisors are encouraged to consult research reports from the project, in order to gain more knowledge, if they have the time and interest.

Development of Reden Ung's practices

Reden Ung has also used the research results to develop its own practices. Prior to the project, based on our own experience of several years of counselling the target group, plus minor studies, we had some knowledge of the target group and their challenges. However, taking part in such an ambitious, wide-ranging research project provided us with a far more solid and nuanced basis to work from.

Knowledge from the project is now a regular part of the internal training of counsellors and, via external presentations, we have placed extra focus, for example, on the vulnerable section of the target group who engage in compensated dating: E.g. young people with a high level of drug use and young people who have been sexually abused.

In other words, we have used the new research results to give Reden Ung's educational material for young people and professionals a professional boost.

If you are interested in learning more about the practical tools developed during this project, you are more than welcome to contact Reden Ung at kontakt@redenung.dk or visit www.redenung.dk

Summary of quantitative results: prevalence, young people's backgrounds, experiences and attitudes

Karen Margrethe Vendelbo Dahl

In addition to the qualitative interviews, the project also includes quantitative analyses based on two questionnaires: One for 1,732 young people aged 18-30; the other for 24,200 young people aged 15-22.

The quantitative part of the project focuses on a broad continuum of exchanges of intimacy for material and non-material benefits, which at one end includes exchanges of companionship or kisses in return for a single drink on a date, and at the other end includes sexual intercourse given in exchange for gifts or money. The quantitative study thus focuses both on the phenomenon of compensated dating and on a number of other forms of exchange of intimacy for material benefits that young people do not themselves identify as compensated dating.

The questionnaire targeted at 18-30 year olds was conducted by VIVE in close cooperation with the research group, and was sent to a representative sample of 8,000 young people from across Denmark in September-November 2019.

The questionnaire targeted at 15-22 year olds was based on existing data from the Youth Profile Survey, which addresses risk behaviour, health and social well-being amongst young people in upper secondary education or in the 10th form (an optional extra year in Danish education for pupils at the end of lower secondary school). This data was collected between November 2019 and January 2020 and is linked to register data from Statistics Denmark. The analyses based on the Youth Profile Survey include data from 17 local councils throughout Denmark. The 24,200 participants represent 10% of young people aged 15-22 at the time of the survey, who were in the year 10 or other post-16 education.

The 18-30-year-old questionnaire is adapted to accommodate the questions of the research group. Therefore, all questions address various aspects of the exchange of intimacy or sex for material and non-material benefits, or background conditions that may shed light on the phenomenon. It asks about experiences of intimacy exchange throughout the respondent's lifetime. The 15-22-year-old questionnaire collected information on factors such as young people's socio-economic circumstances, family background and social well-being, and asked questions such as whether they had provided sexual services in exchange for gifts or other benefits in the last 12 months.⁷

⁷ See also the VIVE report, 'Young people's exchange of intimacy for material benefits' (Dahl and Østergaard 2021).

The spread of sugar dating and the exchange of intimacy for material benefits

The questionnaire targeting the experiences of 18-30 year olds shows that, at least once in their lives, around 5% of this group have experience of kissing, exchanging sexual photos or having sex in exchange for various types of material benefits. One in ten of those who have kissed, exchanged photos or had sex (0.5% of respondents) define the exchange as sugar dating. Half of those who have exchanged intimacy for material benefits say they felt obliged to kiss or have sex in return for something material, but have never been intimate with the intention of obtaining something material. Conversely, 21% of the group have been intimate in order to obtain something material without feeling obliged to do so. Thus, the split between feeling obliged to offer intimacy as a form of reciprocation and using one's intimacy purposefully to obtain something material shows that a large proportion of those who exchange (48%) do not regard it as a purposeful act with the intention of obtaining a specific material or non-material reward. Conversely, there is a smaller group (21%) who more actively use their bodies to obtain material benefits without even experiencing any obligation to be intimate.

The 79 18-30-year-olds who have exchanged intimacy for material benefits are divided into two roughly equal groups in terms of whether the material benefits they received met their expectations. Thus, 40% answer that the material benefits met their expectations *to a great extent* or *to some extent*, while 39% answer that the material benefits met their expectations *to a lesser extent* or *not at all*. 21% answer that they *do not know* whether the material benefits met their expectations.

In the Youth Profile Survey, 2.3% of 15-22 year olds who are in year 10 or other post-16 education indicate that they have provided sexual services in exchange for gifts or other benefits in the past 12 months, while 3.6% indicate that they do not know if they have had this experience. Compared to the 2015 Youth Profile Survey, there is an increase of about 1%, with 0.9% of females and 1.7% of males responding in 2015 that they had provided sexual services in exchange for gifts or other benefits (Youth Profile Survey 2016). VIVE cannot determine from this data whether there has been a real increase in the number of young people who have had transactional sex. However, the increase in the number of young people who have profiles on the websites that offer sugar dating indicates an increased interest in sugar dating amongst young people in Denmark.⁸

Background and motives for exchanging

VIVE's questionnaires reveal that most people cite social and emotional reasons – for example, affirmation and excitement – for the exchange, while a few indicate that the exchange has merely been necessary to make ends meet. Out of the young people who said yes to having exchanged intimacy for material goods, 12% stated loneliness as their reason, while 13% stated the search for excitement and 7% said they did it to live out a fantasy.

⁸ There has been an increase in the number of people using websites that facilitate sugar dating: for example, sugardaters.com, sugardating.dk and the US-based website seekingarrangement.com. Sugardaters.com, the most popular of these websites in Denmark, has stated that in 2016 it had 58,000 profiles on the website, while in March 2020 it had 115,000. Of these, according to the website, 33% of the profiles are registered as sugar babes (i.e. younger women seeking sugar daddies), 22% are boytoys, who are primarily younger men seeking sugar daddies or sugar mummies, 44% of users are registered as sugar daddies, while fewer than 1% of users are registered as sugar mummies seeking boytoys. According to sugardaters.dk, there were approximately 10,000 active users on the website in March 2020. We do not have information about the number of profiles from the other websites in Denmark that provide sugar dating.

In terms of finances, 8% said they were seeking access to luxuries, while 4% said the reason was a tough financial situation, including needing money for drugs.

Differences between young women's and young men's exchange of intimacy

The proportion of young women and men who admit to having exchanged intimacy for material benefits depends on *how* one asks and *who* one asks. The survey of 18-30 year olds approaches the topic indirectly by asking whether respondents *have felt obliged to give something intimate in return for drinks, dinners or gifts* and then asking more directly whether *they have been intimate for the purpose of obtaining material benefits*. In this target group and with this question formulation, VIVE finds a clear preponderance of women who have offered companionship in exchange for material goods (8% v. 3% of men), and a slightly smaller preponderance of women who have kissed or had sex for material goods (just under 6% of women v. 4% of men). Conversely, using data from the Youth Profile Survey, which focused on 15-22 year olds and asked whether they had *provided anything sexually in return for gifts*, VIVE found a higher proportion of men than women had had these experiences (just under 3% of men v. just under 2% of women).

In addition, VIVE's analysis of the survey of 18-30 year olds shows that women who have exchanged intimacy for material benefits are relatively more vulnerable than men who exchange intimacy. 30% of women who have exchanged intimacy report that they have at least two mental disorders, compared to 5% of male exchangers. Amongst those who have not exchanged, 10% of women and 7% of men have at least two self-reported mental health disorders. 32% of female exchangers have used either cannabis or other drugs in the past month, compared with 16% of male exchangers and 9% of women who do not exchange, and 20% of men who do not report having exchanged.

Finally, the VIVE study finds a high over-frequency of female exchangers who have experienced sexual abuse, with 10% having experienced an assault before the age of 13, and 35% having experienced abuse after the age of 13 (5 and 12% respectively among women who have not exchanged). Amongst men who have exchanged, 3% say they experienced abuse before the age of 13, while none experienced abuse after the age of 13. However, VIVE's Youth Profile Survey analyses of 15-22 year olds do not see the same differences between women and men who report that they have provided something sexual in return for something material.

Socially vulnerable people have exchanged intimacy for material benefits more often

The survey of 18-30 year olds shows that 8% of young people who *often* or *always* experience financial worries, exchanged kisses or had sex for material benefits, compared to 3% of young people who *rarely* experience financial problems. In the Youth Profile Survey, VIVE finds that 3.9% of 15-22 year olds who are in Preparatory Basic Education and Training (FGU), typically chosen by young people who have difficulty coping with the demands of a high-school-like youth education, have engaged in exchanging sex in the past year, compared to 1.8% of young people in traditional high school education. In addition, the analyses show that 4.5% of young people who have received support from the municipality in the form of preventive social action or an actual placement outside the home have provided something sexual in return for gifts or other benefits, compared with 2.1% of young people who

do not receive support from the municipality. In the survey of 18-30 year olds, young people with mental health problems also emerge as a group with more experience of exchanging intimacy for material benefits. Finally, VIVE finds that 9% of young people who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 13 and 13% of young people who experienced sexual abuse after the age of 13 have, at some point, kissed or had sex in exchange for material benefits, compared to 4% of young people who have not experienced sexual abuse.

Lack of adult contact and excessive time spent on social media

Analyses of the Youth Profile Survey show that 15-22 year olds who have provided sex in return for material goods in the past year are more likely to be found amongst young people who lack adult confidants, as 3.8% of this group have experience of giving something sexual in return for a gift, while 5.2% of these young people are in doubt. In the group who answered that they have adult confidants around them, the same is true for 2.2% and 3.5%, respectively. Finally, the analysis shows that 3.5% of 15-22 year olds who spend more than 3 hours a day on social media have provided something sexual for material benefits, compared to 1.9% of 15-22 year olds who spend less time on social media.

Gay men and bisexual women have exchanged intimacy more often

The analyses of 18-30 year olds show that both homosexuals and bisexuals are more likely to have exchanged kisses or sex for material benefits, with 16% of homosexuals and 12% of bisexuals having exchanged kisses or sex for material benefits compared to 4% of young heterosexuals. In return for kissing or sex, gay young people more often receive gifts or money (20%), while a smaller proportion (1%) have received only drinks or dinners. Amongst bisexuals, more receive only drinks, dinners or entry to clubs and events (8%), while 6.5% receive gifts or money. Classified by gender, the analyses show that, amongst the female exchangers, there are many bisexuals, while amongst the male exchangers there is a large overrepresentation of homosexuals. However, amongst both men and women, heterosexuals make up 75% of the group who have exchanged kisses or sex for material goods.

Unsolicited requests

The survey of 18-30 year olds shows that 19% of respondents have, at some point in their lives, experienced unsolicited contact with a view to exchanging something intimate for something material. This is the case for 10% of men and 28% of women in the survey. Women are most likely to be approached for transactional sex through social media, while men are equally likely to be approached through social media and via dating apps. Here, too, we see a social gradient, as evidenced for example by the fact that young people with few socio-economic resources (employment, education and finances), young people with mental disorders and young people who actively use cannabis or other drugs are more likely than other young people to be contacted for the purpose of an exchange.

Attitudes to sugar dating amongst 18-30 year olds

All of the young people in the survey of 18-30 year olds were asked about their opinion on sugar dating and to receiving money and gifts for sex. This part of the survey shows that 20-25% of 18-30 year olds think it is ok to receive money or gifts for sex, while 50% accept sugar dating if it feels good for the person who engages in such practices. At the same time, a quarter say they would lose respect for another person if they practised sugar dating, while a third think the practice is morally wrong. About half agree that sugar dating is the same as prostitution.

Not surprisingly, the 18-30 year olds who have exchanged kisses or sex for material benefits are more positive about such exchanges than young people who have not done so. In contrast, there is little difference between the responses of exchangers and non-exchangers on the question of whether sugar dating is morally wrong or whether it is the same as prostitution. Amongst those who have not exchanged intimacy for material benefits themselves, VIVE finds that young gay and bisexual people are more supportive of sugar dating and exchanging sex for material benefits than heterosexuals.⁹

⁹ See also the VIVE report, 'Young people's exchange of intimacy for material benefits' (Dahl and Østergaard 2021).

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"Yes, for a short time you feel you have the power because you are paid to do something you like to do. You like going to hotels. You like going on wellness weekends. You like going to the cinema. You like eating good food and you get paid for it, so you say to yourself: "Yes, I have the power. I get paid to do something I love, and it's a famous person. He wants me." The problem is, when it develops and ultimately he only wants sex, it feels like he's taking it all away from you in one go. Ripping off the Bandaid."

(Mie, 27)