

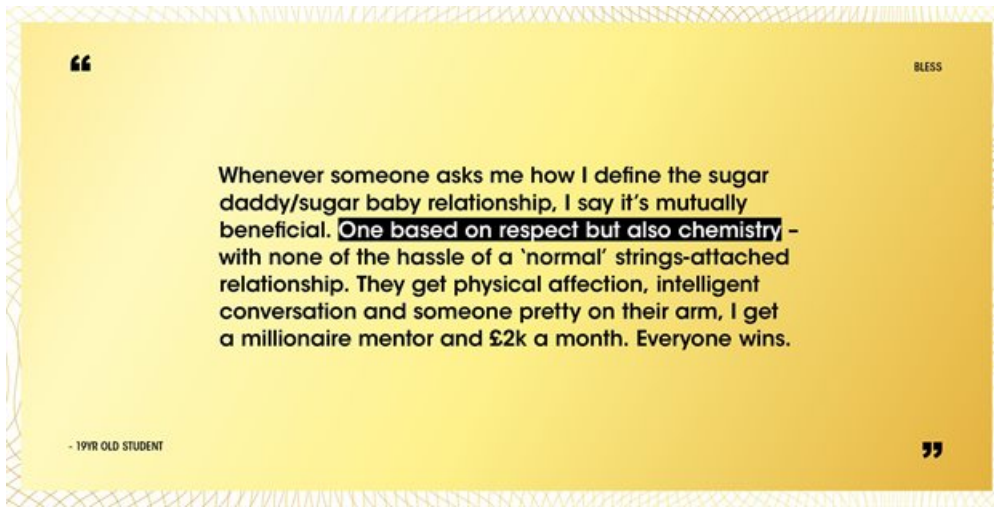
What is shaping culture? Bless

By Brett Rogers

6 Jan 2021

Through millennia of demonisation, transactional relationships have become taboo. This was not always the case. Until the 1930s, 'love matches' were virtually unheard of with families 'using' their children as pawns in economic and social games of advancement. While this is less common than before, it still happens in many parts of the world, but it seems that it's only those who choose this type of relationship for themselves that are frowned upon.

Blessees, blessers, sugar mommies and daddies, these are some of the terms used now to describe people in transactional or 'mutually beneficial' relationships. Transactional relationships are not simple cases of *money for sex*. While there are those who take advantage of economic/romantic power, there are many out there for whom this type of relationship is their way of being able to connect human-to-human.



For this theme we needed a powerful voice to speak up for those who so often get diminished. Founder and CEO of African Star Communications, Farah Fortune is that powerful voice both as a businessperson as well as a thinker. When chatting with her during the podcast she unravelled some highly problematic misconceptions about transactional relationships with a pragmatic mind. Perhaps one of the most important aspects that she hit on was whether or not it's appropriate to have opinions on how people live their lives. Something that probably hits home for many of us, when we think of others who have opinions on our lives?

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When we think of transactional relationships, we often forget about the growing nature of online relationships on places like Instagram, Twitter and now OnlyFans. Here money is exchanged for favours, and in some cases just a human connection. We need to give this far greater credence when we see it ingrained in our popular culture, from powerful voices like Beyonce, who references OnlyFans in one of her latest tracks.



Another powerful person who joined us for a podcast was anthropologist and author Lebohang Masango. She wanted to express the disconnect that we have about the nature of the people in these relationships; how we categorise them as predator and prey, dismissing the subtler nature of choice. Yes, there are people who are in desperate need of monetary help, but this does not dictate the entire nature of transactional relationships.

"It's so much easier to cast people in these well-worn roles of a 'predator man and this woman who is a victim and is so desperate' but the way I have understood it is that these young women are self-aware, know what they want, have a firm handle on their agency and are exercising their choices." - Lebohang Masango

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We spoke with Jane who is currently in a healthy transactional relationship, and she has some excellent advice for those who are seeking such relationships.

You used the words "mutually beneficial" when describing your relationship; can you elaborate on that?

When I think of a Sugar agreement it has to cover the basic relationship foundation. There needs to be mutual respect which I think is easily side-stepped in these situations, especially walking blindly into your first agreement. I'm sure there are many arrangements where it's clear: cash for regular dates and sex, but that's not what I wanted. **What I like about Sugar relationships is that the ground rules are clear and boundaries are discussed and agreed upon.** There's a slight detachment, which I've come to appreciate.

What do you know now, that you wish you had known before going into this relationship?

I wish I knew that there's more room for negotiation than I thought, initially. You need the confidence to say NO if you're uncomfortable with any situation, but this goes for any relationship, right? When benefits, be it monetary, vacations or gifts are discussed it's so easy to take what you can get and give more than you should. This can quickly escalate and cause problems. **I learned that a real connection is crucial but even more so, respect.**

What personal rules do you have regarding mutually beneficial relationships?

Safety first! When I think about it, the same rules apply to all online dating sites: **meet in a public space, don't share personal information on the first date and above all trust your gut!** When I initially created a profile on Seeking.com, I made it very clear that all parties involved would need to do a full STI screening, just in case we get along. I know there's a stigma to this kind of relationship and in all honesty, I was worried about their past encounters. I soon realised that I've never asked a guy I've dated before to do that and didn't ask again.

How did your relationship come about?

After breaking up with a long-time partner I wanted to push my boundaries, so I created a profile on Seeking.com. I matched with a few guys but soon grew bored. I then started a conversation with the man who is still in my life today. We shared just enough personal information to establish that we would get along and then went for breakfast to see if initial instincts were correct. **Things were awkward in the beginning, even more so than a Tinder.**

For all the Janes in the world, there are also many Joaos who have had less pleasant experiences. Joao is a young Brazilian man who found himself in a transactional relationship by chance, seeking a UK visa/passport. His partner suggested that dating him was a solution to his problem and to his passport problems. Sadly, respect was not part of the arrangement.

Did you feel like you were in a position of power or vulnerability?

In the beginning, I thought I was powerful because the sex was good and I knew how to make him feel good. But I was also thinking about how if I had a passport with him, he would ruin my life because **I had to be totally dedicated to him.** It was a kind of mental abuse.

What is the worst part?



Pressure, and ownership - **I don't belong to anybody.** So, I had to decide between my passport and my freedom.

Would you do it again, if you were given the opportunity?

I don't think I would do this again to get a passport. **Fuck, there is too much pressure.** If someone thinks that you belong to them then not again, maybe I'll go to college.

So, what is the conclusion to this? Our basic belief is that people's relationships are none of our business and we have no right or dominion over them. This is obviously not a cut-and-dried statement, as sometimes people are in danger, or are being taken advantage of – but that is true of any relationship regardless of any transactions within them.

What we do know is, with the growing gap between the rich and the poor, as well as the changing of attitudes towards transactional relationships, they are not going away.

ESTIMATED RANGE OF TRANSACTIONAL SEX AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

51%

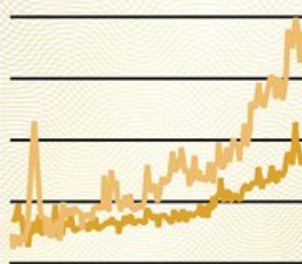
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"A lot of guys, regardless if they're in a relationship, in a marriage, or single, some of them can feel very lonely, neglected, and not feeling good about themselves, so I always try to provide a little spark in their life, like going: 'Hey, you look good. You're enough. You do well. Keep going.' And I always encourage them."

MONICA HULDT - ONLYFANS MODEL

GOOGLE TREND:

Sugar Daddy
Sugar Baby



2004

2019

ABOUT BRETT ROGERS

Brett Rogers, culture lead at Cape Town advertising agency HaveYouHeard and content curator for In_, a channel of content, which showcases cultural forces that are changing the world. It aims to inform, inspire and entertain the viewer and does so with multimedia posts, including podcasts, videos, google trends, mini Q+A's and more. In_ talks to those interested in in-depth cultural exploration and those curious about the world we live in.

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