

Stuck at home and unemployed, some students seek out sugar dating for companionship, financial support

Amid the pandemic, the service SeekingArrangement has seen a rise in new membership.

By NATALIE RADEMACHER and JASMINE SNOW



Sarah*, who began using the site SeekingArrangement to help compensate for lost wages after being laid off, poses for a portrait near campus on Monday, May 4.

Sarah* typically uses dating sites like Tinder and Bumble. When she got laid off from her full-time job due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she figured she may as well try getting paid to date online.

After some research, the University of Minnesota student found that the companionship site SeekingArrangement was the best fit for her.

“I felt like I was just constantly going on dates and having very average conversations,” Sarah said. “Then I was reading online and this girl was like, ‘I am on SeekingArrangement, and I make \$500 a week just by talking to people.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, I do that anyway, why don’t I just start trying to make money for it?’”

SeekingArrangement relationships often involve young men and women, called “sugar babies,” exchanging companionship, intimacy and often sex with “sugar daddies” and “mommies” for fancy dinners, money and gifts. But stay at home orders in multiple states have changed the nature of many of these relationships, with SeekingArrangement now encouraging users to meet virtually.

With many students recently unemployed due to the pandemic and facing an uncertain future, some are turning to SeekingArrangement for financial support. New membership increased by 77% during the last two weeks of April compared to the same time last year said Kimberly De La Cruz, a SeekingArrangement spokesperson.

Times of economic hardship typically bring an uptick in new users, said De La Cruz.

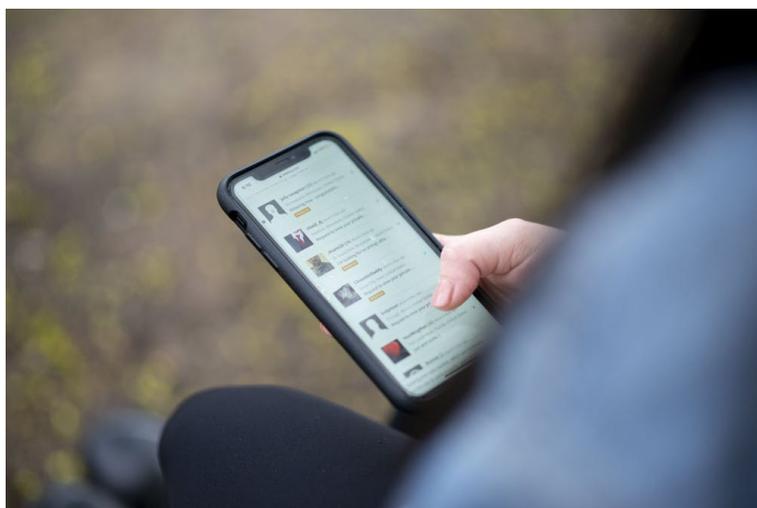
“People will come to our site to meet people who can support them financially,” she said.

Nama O’Donnell wrote her senior thesis at California State University Stanislaus in 2017 on sugar dating. She said it is not surprising that people are flocking to SeekingArrangement now, given rising unemployment and financial strain on people.

She said professional sex workers are also moving online to services like SeekingArrangement to find work since in-person business has largely disappeared.

The company’s customer support team tries to keep sex workers off of the site through language monitoring and user reporting, said De La Cruz.

Before the pandemic, students – who receive free premium memberships when they sign up with their .edu emails – were already on SeekingArrangement. About 1,000 University of Minnesota students were registered on the site last year. The service is marketed to college students as a way to make money, mitigate student debt and network.



JACK RODGERS

Sarah* displays the SeekingArrangement app she uses to message potential companions near campus on Monday, May 4.

Sarah said that she has primarily been using the site to build online professional connections that she hopes to explore when social distancing guidelines are lifted.

"I'm in this tough spot: unemployed student, tuition bills and student loans and all that. So, I made a profile, and I've just kind of been using it to make connections with people," Sarah said. "There are people on [the site] that are engineers like me that provide some advice, as I'm graduating and am going to be looking for a career or going to grad school."

While sugar dating typically involves meeting in-person, the company is encouraging sugar babies and their companions to meet virtually to accommodate nationwide stay-at-home orders and other social distancing measures. But a lack of in-person encounters means making money from dates can be more difficult.

The Minnesota Daily interviewed three sugar babies last year who made money meeting sugar daddies in-person. One student made \$100 a night having dinner with men she met on the site.

"I haven't made any money yet," Sarah said. "I honestly think it's because I can't meet anyone in person due to COVID."

Sarah said she has had fairly in-depth conversations with about 10 sugar daddies since joining. She said she does not think it is a good idea to meet up with people and break social distancing guidelines right now.

"I kind of try to keep my responses a little bit less active right now just because I don't want to convince someone that I'm going to meet up with them during quarantine and then want to back out at the last second," Sarah said.

While SeekingArrangement has been promoting virtual dates during the pandemic, it cannot enforce not meeting in-person.

"We've just been really trying to encourage our users to use this site to stay social, to meet new people and more than ever really get to know them before you get to meet them in person," De La Cruz said.

With it being more difficult to date in-person now, De La Cruz added that it is important for the service to continue operating, as meeting new people and maintaining some level of human interaction is important for mental health.

"COVID has kind of forced everyone to slow down and really have an engaging conversation," she said.

**The name of the student interviewed for this story has been changed for privacy reasons.*

SHARE



ONE LAST THING...

The Minnesota Daily dedicates itself to bringing you independent student-run journalism and up-to-date UMN and local community coverage. Our student staff and reporters deliver stories that connect us and provide conversations that give our readers context when they need it most.

The Daily relies on your help to do this. Your donation provides the Daily with the resources to continue its mission during this crisis and beyond.

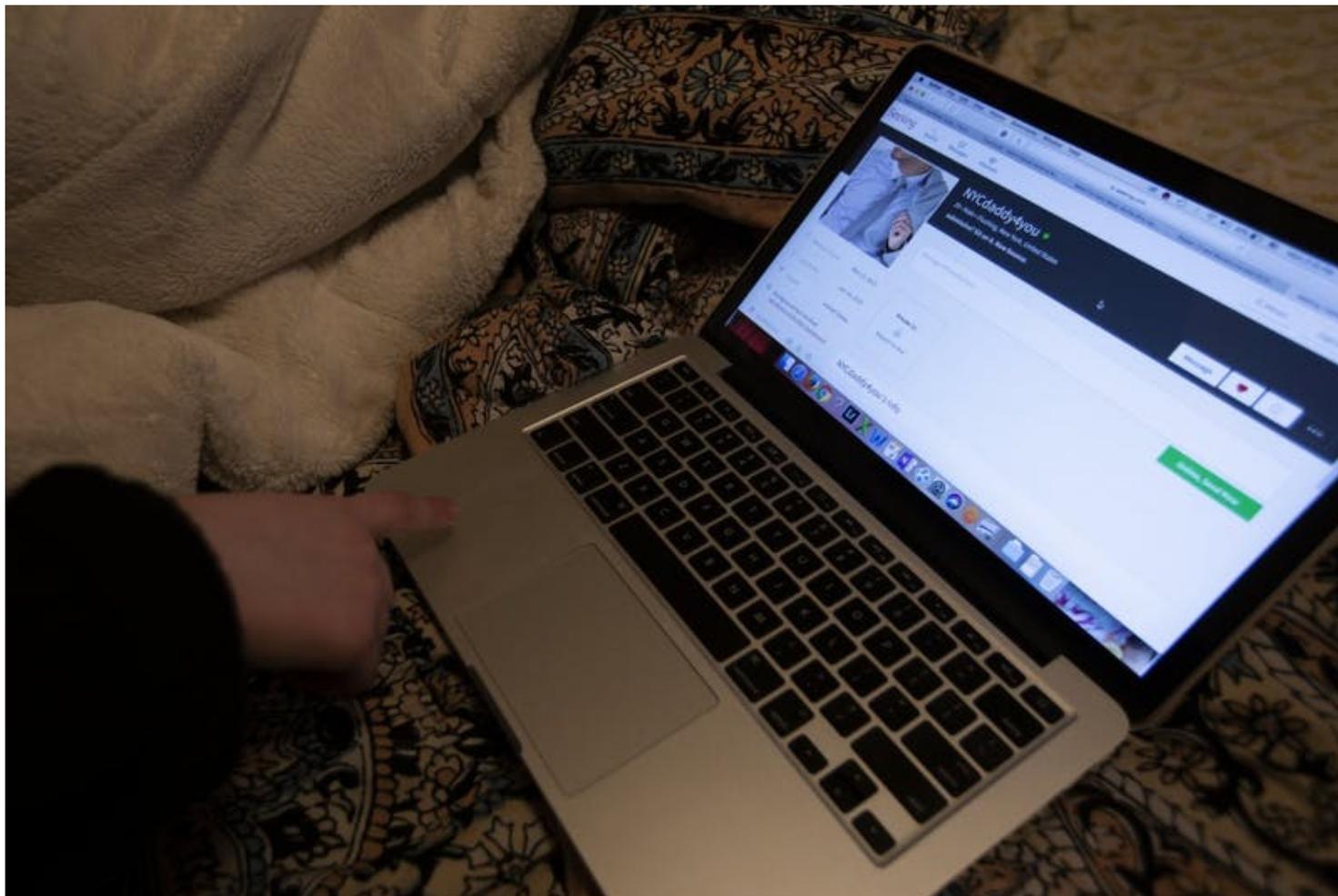
SUPPORT THE DAILY

Related Stories



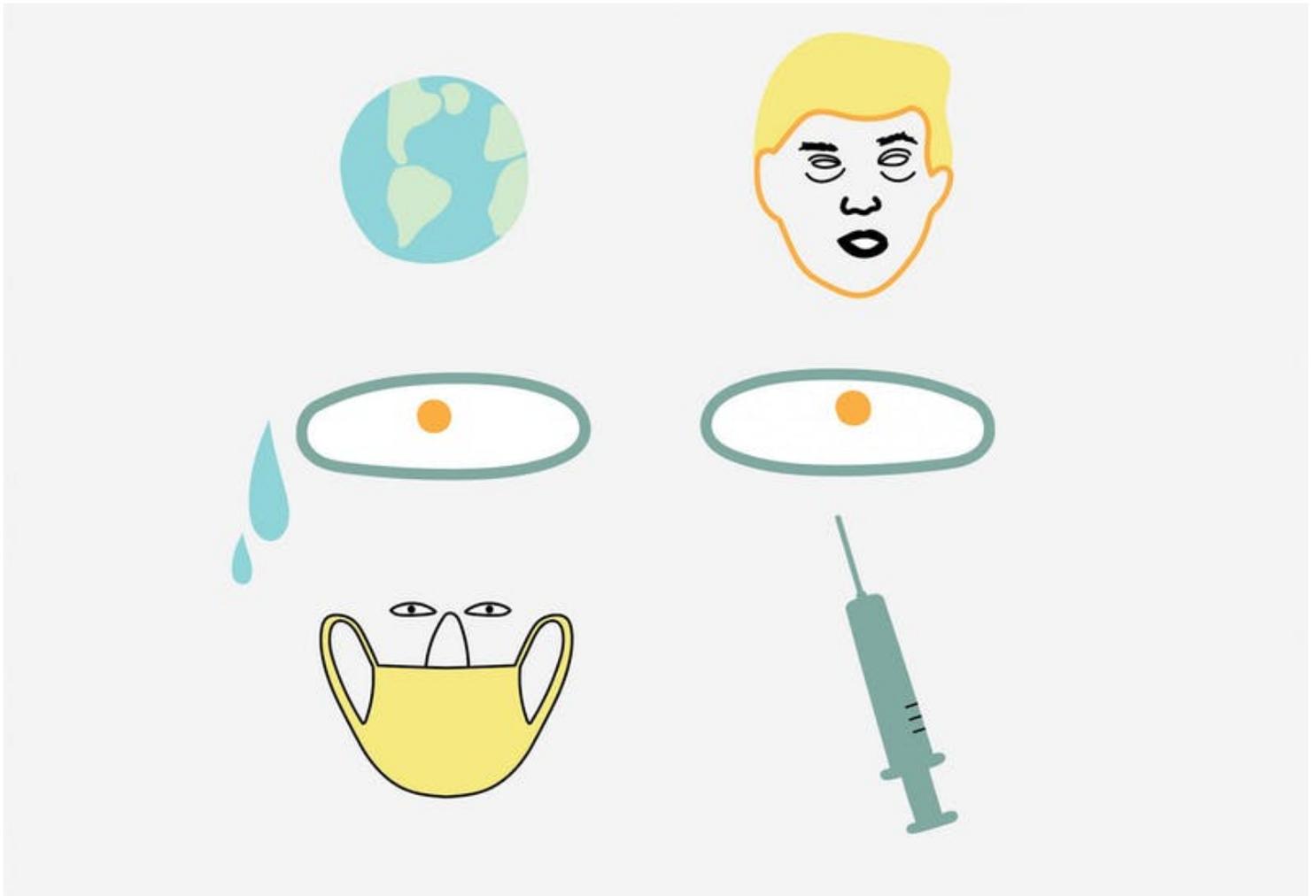
'You are truly essential': for student PCAs, the job doesn't stop with the 'stay-at-home' order

By **DYLAN MIETTINEN**



The bittersweet life of sugar babies at the University of Minnesota

By NATALIE RADEMACHER



New UMN class to offer COVID-19 historical context

By JASMINE SNOW