

# Netflix and chill?: Exploring and refining differing motivations in friends with benefits relationships

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Previous work on friends with benefits relationships (FWBRs) has demonstrated a need for more specific attention to exploring the motivations for engaging in such relationships. Moreover, recent research has revealed new developments in the complexities of FWBRs in general, prompting a reevaluation of previously noted trends. This manuscript contains two studies. Study 1 used open coding to condense the existing typologies of FWBR motivations, uncovering a previously undocumented motivation, labeled sliding. Study 2 replicates study 1, and also accounts for multiple simultaneous motivations as well as potential motivational changes throughout the duration of FWBRs. Results reveal that most people in FWBRs only experience one motivation for engaging in their relationships. Moreover, motivations tend to change as FWBRs develop, including desires for relational escalation, de-escalation, and companionship. Sex differences as well as relationship type differences are discussed as well.

KEY WORDS: Casual sex, friends with benefits relationships, goals, motivations, young adults

Emerging adults are increasingly pursuing casual sex relationships in favor of traditional romantic relationships (Bogle, 2008; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). One popular type of casual partnership is the friends with benefits relationship (FWBR; e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Lehmillier, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). Green and Morman (2011, p. 329) defined FWBRs as “an existing, opposite sex platonic friendship...that incorporates sexual activity...and is not designed to create romantic commitment.” The combination of sexual and platonic interaction creates a myriad of social (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006), personal (Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2009) and health concerns (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). The scripts, progression, and maintenance of FWBRs differ greatly from traditional dating relationships (Green & Morman, 2011; Knight, 2014). One such difference involves the reasons that people initiate FWBRs (Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005) as opposed to initiating romantic relationships (i.e., first dates; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004). Moreover, there are multiple (and sometimes conflicting) reasons why people begin FWBRs (e.g., Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Lehmillier, 2011). The goal of this manuscript is to build on this literature by expanding and/or refining the FWBR motivation typology and exploring potential differences in motivations across FWBR types (Mongeau, Knight, & Williams, Eden, & Shaw, 2013).

In this manuscript, we report two studies of college students' motivations for engaging in FWBRs. In study 1 we

identified motivations for initiating FWBRs through qualitative methods (i.e., open coding; Strauss & Corbin, 1999), and examined how those motivations differed between sexes and across the seven FWBRs types (Mongeau et al., 2013). In study 2 we replicated study 1 with a larger sample size and a more confirmed thematic structure. Moreover, we inquired about perceived change in motivations from relationships' inception to the time at which data were collected, as well as if people in FWBRs identify with multiple motivating factors. Understanding the differing motivations in FWBRs can help such relationships in their safe-sex practices (VanderDrift, Lehmillier, & Kelly, 2012), as well as increase relational communication (Bisson & Levine, 2009) and, ultimately, relational success.

## FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS RELATIONSHIPS

Compared to romantic relationships, FWBRs feature distinctly low levels of desire for exclusivity (Hughes et al., 2005), relationship-focused communication (Bisson & Levine, 2009), and intimacy (Puentes, Knox, & Zusman, 2008). Friends with benefits relationships are just one of several non-monogamous sexual relationships that young adults gravitate toward (Bogle, 2008). Booty-calls (Jonason, Norman, & Richardson, 2011), one-night stands (Campbell, 2008), and hookup relationships (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000) all feature platonic, relational, and sexual elements (Wentland & Reissing, 2014). Thus, it

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is important to distinguish FWBRs from other casual sex relationships.

Green and Morman (2011) compared the nonsexual benefits of FWBRs to other casual sex relationships (e.g., booty-calls and hookup relationships). Participants in FWBRs report more relational benefits (e.g., shared activities, intimate moments, and reciprocated disclosure) than participants in other non-committed sexual relationships. On the other hand, FWB partners tend to avoid discussing the nature, rules, and boundaries of their relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Knight, 2014), potentially stunting relational and/or sexual development compared to traditional relationships. In summary, FWBRs represent a unique relationship type—a relational limbo—through which individuals must negotiate their emotional, physical, and platonic needs.

Not all FWBR characterizations are the same. Mongeau and colleagues (2013) uncovered seven different types of FWBRs. Three types describe a continuum of closeness. First, *true friends* “...reflects the traditional definition of FWBRs (i.e., close friends who have sex on multiple occasions;” p. 39). *Just sex* FWBRs are just the opposite, where partners associate solely to engage in coitus. Third, *network opportunism* FWBRs are described as friends who share network links that allow them to interact both platonically and sexually, “typically while consuming alcohol” (Mongeau et al., 2013, p. 39). The remaining FWBR types are associated with romantic relationships in one way or another. Often, one or more partner uses the FWBR to initiate romance, either intentionally (*successful transition in*), accidentally (*unintentional transition in*) or unsuccessfully (*failed transition in*). Lastly, the *transition out* category describes once romantic relationships that maintain sexually activity (Mongeau et al. 2013).

People form explicit and implicit goals for their interpersonal relationships, both new and old (Dillard, 2004). Because the relational categories of FWBRs are so diverse, different types may initiate their relationships for different reasons. For example, just sex relationships likely have inflated sexual goals, whereas successful transition in FWBRs may have more relational goals. If indeed Mongeau and colleagues’ (2013) typology of FWBRs is valid, we might expect that goal structures and desired outcomes (i.e., motivations) should differ across the seven types of FWBRs. It is thus necessary to frame our studies within the existing motivation literature.

## SELF-DETERMINATION MOTIVES

Motivating factors, broadly, typically exist on a continuum ranging from *amotivation* (no intentionality whatsoever) to *integrated regulation* (highly autonomous, informed decision making; Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). In this way, a person’s motivation for a given behavior (or relationship) can advance across this continuum based on time, context, or important turning points. Self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2000) explains that humans inherently seek out new challenges, change, and novelty. From a relational standpoint, this helps

to explain why individuals might favor FWBRs over romantic relationships. It is in part the flexibility and lack of strings attached that appear to draw people toward FWBRs over other partnerships (Hughes et al., 2005).

According to SDT, not only is it possible to fluctuate in the inherent nature of one’s motivation, it is also likely that people have self-regulated motivations that accompany, contradict, or replace their intrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It follows that individuals seeking out FWBRs may do so for a variety of reasons, as opposed to solely for sexual intercourse. For example, SDT acknowledges that some goals are *approach focused* (e.g., achieving or attaining something), whereas others are *avoidance focused* (e.g., circumventing failure, avoiding unfavorable outcomes; Elliot, 1999). In this way, individuals may seek out this FWB relationships over other types (approach) or actively elude romantic partnerships in favor of FWBRs (avoid). Below we document the existing literature on motivations in FWBRs and how, if at all, they align with the tenets of SDT.

## EXISTING MOTIVATIONS IN FWBRs

Considerable work has investigated motivation structures across relationship types (e.g., Darnon, Muller, Schragger, Pannuzzo, & Butera, 2006; Mongeau et al., 2004; Umphrey & Sherblom, 2007). Researchers contend that much like romantic relationships, the motivations for engaging in FWBRs derive from a series of goals (Hughes et al., 2005; Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Lehmillier et al., 2011). Ryan and colleagues (1997) note that humans are often *intrinsically* motivated, meaning that they strive to accomplish goals that are themselves immediately rewarding and satisfying. *Extrinsic* motivations, on the other hand, propel people to engage with something for the process of an external reward. This further clarifies the motivations that drive people to engage in FWBRs (noted for their short term and immediate rewards; Bisson & Levine, 2009) versus pursuing traditional romantic partnerships (which may result in numerous extremal benefits such as financial stability, resources, or clout; Fletcher, Tither, O’Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004)

Foundational work on close relationships has revealed a number of goals for first dates (Mongeau et al., 2004), and romantic relationships more broadly (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999). Moreover, studies have noted the movies for casual sex relationships (e.g., Bradshaw, Kahn, & Seville, 2010; Meston & Buss, 2007). The overriding themes that recur across investigations are *love goals* (e.g., emotional connection, intimacy, and companionship), *sex goals* (e.g., mating, experimentation), and *social goals* (e.g., gaining resources, having fun, establishing status).

Extant research has produced a typology for FWBR initiation that is distinct from first date goals. Hughes et al. (2005) reported five primary motivations for initiating FWBRs: *just sex* (purely sexual motivation), *emotional connection* (the desire for increased closeness and/or intimacy), *relationship simplicity*

(wanting an easy, natural, and stress-free relationship), *relationship avoidance* (purposeful avoidance of the exclusive and/or romantic elements of a relationship), and *wanted an FWBR* (couples who "...became single and took advantage of the opportunity"; Hughes, Morrison, Asada, 2005, p. 56). This final category is akin to the social goals that many first-daters and romantic couples experience (Mongeau et al., 2004), inasmuch as those who subscribe to both categories seek convenience, companionship, and interaction.

These five goals align with SDT's approach/avoidance spectrum (Elliot, 1999). Just sex, emotional connection, and wanted a FWBR motivations are likely approach goals, in which one or more FWB partner seeks out sexual, relational, and social outcomes, respectively. Relationship simplicity and relationship avoidance describe avoidance goals, where commitment, connection, and defining the relationship are actively circumvented.

Lehmiller et al. (2011), as well as Karlsen and Træen (2013), have indirectly replicated these findings. Together, results of these three studies provide an important but insufficient starting point for capturing motivations in FWBRs. That sex, relational ease/avoidance, emotional connection, and social inclusivity appear across multiple studies suggests distinct and intact categories. However, in none of these studies were respondents were not asked about what *specifically* motivated their participation in FWBRs. Rather, results were implied through participants' answers to more broad questions (e.g., "How would you describe your feelings toward [your FWB partner]?"; Karlsen & Træen, 2013, p. 87). Thus, while the above categories serve as a useful starting point, they may be need of expansion or refinement. Moreover, None of the above studies acknowledged that FWBRs describe multiple distinct relational categories. Thus the nuances of FWBR motivations are in need of further parsing.

In summary, we aim to extend the FWBR literature by describing what motivations FWB partners have for initiating their relationships. We contend that distinct FWB types experience motivations with different frequencies much in the way that dissimilar casual sex relationships differ across relational benefits (Green & Morman, 2011). Men and women also likely differ in their motivations for engaging in FWBRs (Lehmiller et al., 2011); however, it is not yet known if there are sex differences between specific motivational categories. We offer two studies that, collectively, seek to answer these questions.

## STUDY 1

Our first goal of study 1 was to explore the motivations that people have for initiating FWBRs. Scholars have alluded to this question; however, no study to date has directly asked participants their motivation for engaging in FWBRs. The similarity between authors (Hughes et al., 2005; Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Lehmiller et al., 2011) motivational typologies (i.e., sex, emotional connection, relational simplicity, relational avoidance, and wanted an FWBR) suggests that the typology is likely intact. In study 1 we aimed to further explore these themes.

*RQ1: What motivations do individuals report for initiating FWBRs?*

Also missing from the literature is how, if at all, motivations differ across FWBR types. Because FWBR types differ in their levels of expressed friendship, romantic intent, and sexual interest (Mongeau et al., 2013), they likely have different reasons for starting their relationships. Thus, we were also interested in how reported motivations differ across FWBR types.

*RQ2: How do self-reported motivations for engaging in FWBRs vary across the seven categories of FWBRs?*

Finally, we wished to explore sex differences in FWBR motivations. Previous literature has identified sex differences for first date goals (Mongeau et al., 2004), mate selection (Fletcher et al., 2004), and navigation through FWBRs (Lehmiller et al., 2011), such that men's goals are typically more sexual, whereas women's goals are more relational. We questioned how, if at all, men and women experience differing motivations for entering FWBRs.

*RQ3: Do men and women differ in the types of motivations that they report for engaging in FWBRs?*

## Methods

**Participants and Procedures.** Participants included 145 heterosexual undergraduate students (64 women) enrolled in communication courses at a large Southwestern university. Respondents identified primarily as Caucasian ( $n = 98$ ), Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 20$ ), Asian ( $n = 18$ ), and Black/African American ( $n = 9$ ). Mean age was 20 years ( $SD = 2.63$ ). The average relationship length of FWB partners was 9.34 months ( $SD = 5.21$ ). In order to qualify for this study (an online survey), participants must have currently been in an FWBR, been at least 18 years old, and have Internet access.

As part of a larger survey about sexual relationships, respondents were offered Green and Morman's (2011) definition of an FWBR. All participants in this study confirmed that their current relationship matched this description. First, to assess motivations, participants were asked to think back to the beginning of their FWBR and explain, "What are the reasons you entered this friends with benefits relationship?" Next, participants were asked to consider which FWBR category most appropriately characterized their relationship (as described by Mongeau et al., 2013). During this procedure no relationship label was provided. Rather, a short description of each type was offered, as well as an option for those who did not identify with any of the seven FWBR types. Respondents identified their FWBRs as *true friends* ( $n = 80$ ), *just sex* ( $n = 17$ ), *network opportunists* ( $n = 15$ ), *successful transition in* ( $n = 4$ ), *accidental transition in* ( $n = 10$ ), *failed transition in* ( $n = 9$ ), and *transition out* ( $n = 10$ ). These responses were used to run a chi-squared analysis of FWBR type x FWBR motivation. A separate chi-squared analysis was run for sex x FWBR motivation.

**Unitizing, Coding, and Measures.** Working independently, two coders used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) to categorize open-ended responses. First, the primary investigator reviewed answers using a fully data-driven approach. This initial round of review yielded many results similar to the typology developed by previous authors (i.e., Hughes et al., 2005; Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Lehmillier et al., 2011). These motivations included: a) relationship avoidance, b) just for sex, c) relational simplicity, d) emotional connection, and e) wanted an FWBR. The primary investigator used these results to craft a codebook<sup>1</sup> that encouraged coders to “use the existing typology as a guide, but [to] also search for themes that are not in line with any of the descriptions and mark them as distinct.”

Using the book crafted by the primary investigator, two reviewers coded answers independently. Next, coders met to discuss discrepancies. Differing codes were resolved through two rounds of discussion. Next, coders re-coded each answer individually. Coders met again to resolve lingering discrepancies. Once all codes were agreed upon, coders met one final time with the primary investigator to review each answer and ensure that it was appropriately labeled. The intercoder reliability ( $\kappa = .85$ ) was considered acceptable.

## Results

Our first research question (RQ1) asked what motivations FWB partners report for initiating their relationships. Participants' answers reflected previous typologies of FWBR motivations (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005). Just sex ( $n = 44$ ) was the most common motivation (e.g., “just for sex, nothing else”). Emotional connection ( $n = 27$ ) was the second most common motivation (e.g., “I really [sic] wanted to be his girlfriend, but he doesn't want that so I'll take what I can get”). Third was relationship avoidance ( $n = 23$ ; e.g., “It's college yanno [sic]? Can't get tide [sic] down!”), and relationship simplicity ( $n = 11$ ; e.g., “Relationships have too much drama, this is just easier.”), which although conceptually distinct, shared many common attributes. Finally wanted an FWBR ( $n = 13$ ) was listed as a reason for entering FWBRs (e.g., “I'm looking for friends with benefits, nothing more”).

Importantly, 27 respondents indicated that they had no specific motivations for beginning their relationships. Many of these responses alluded to a situation in which the relationship “just sorta [sic] happened without planning.” After several rounds of discussion, a novel motivation, labeled *sliding*, was added to the existing typology and encompassed all 27 previously unspecified answers. We chose this term because these relationships begin without any formal planning or conscious decision (see Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). See Table 1 for frequencies of study 1 motivations.

Our second research question (RQ2) asked how if at all self-reported motivations vary across the seven FWBR categories. During analysis, only 8/42 cells fit the necessary frequency

Table 1. Self-Reported Motivations

Motivation	Study 1 <sup>a</sup>	Study 2 <sup>b</sup>
Relationship Avoidance	23 (14.2%)	41 (9.74%)
Just for sex	44 (27.2%)	124 (29.45%)
Relational Simplicity	11 (6.8%)	63 (14.96%)
Emotional Connection	27 (17.9%)	70 (16.63%)
Wanted a FWBR	13 (8.0%)	25 (5.93%)
Sliding	27 (16.7%)	98 (23.28%)
Total	145 (100%)	421 (100%)

<sup>a</sup> $n = 145$ . <sup>b</sup> $n = 365$ .

Table 2. Crosstabs of FWBR Motivations vs. FWBR Categories (Study 1\*)

	Avoidance/ Simplicity	Just Sex	Emotional Connection	Sliding/ Wanted a FWBR	Total
True Friends	19	25	17	19	80
Just Sex	2	8	1	6	17
Network Opportunism	6	5	0	4	15
Transition in FWBRs	7	6	9	11	33
Total	34	44	27	40	145

Note.  $\chi^2(9) = 242.32$ ; Cramer's  $V = .75$

\* $p < .001$

requirement of five to properly run procedures (see Rao & Scott, 1981).<sup>2</sup> As such, several categories were combined due to conceptual and empirical similarity. For motivation categories, relational simplicity and relational avoidance were combined into one category, as were sliding and wanted an FWBR. For FWBR types, the four transition categories were combined into one. The resulting table featured 12/16 cells meeting the necessary requirements.

Differences in motivations were significant across FWBR types,  $\chi^2(9) = 242.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .75$ . Due to the abundance of true friends FWBRs, interpretations of this table were difficult. Despite making up only 10% of FWBRs in study 1, just sex FWBRs appear to be motivated by sex, or simply slide into a FWBR rather than initiate another form of relationship. Network opportunism FWBRs showed no emotional motivation, and there was an even distribution of motivations across the transition in FWBRs. See Table 2 for motivation frequencies across FWBR types.

Our third research question (RQ3) asked about sex differences in motivations for engaging in FWBRs. During analysis, the same compressed categories were used in order for all cells to meet the minimum frequency for analysis. Chi-squared tests revealed a significant sex difference  $\chi^2(3) = 12.32$ ,  $p = .006$ , Cramer's  $V = .29$ . Men reported just sex as their motivation

<sup>1</sup> Note, this codebook is available to readers upon request.

<sup>2</sup> The original chi-squared table can be provided to readers upon request

(41.2% of all responses) more than twice as frequently than women (15.6% of all responses). Conversely, emotional motivations were very similar for men (17.28%) and women (20.31%), respectively. Women displayed a slight preference for sliding/wanting a FWBR.

## Discussion

Two goals drove study 1. First, we aimed to explore the previously documented motivations that people have for initiating FWBRs (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005; Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Lehmillier et al., 2011). Second, we wished to explore differences in self-reported motivations across FWBR types (as described by Mongeau et al., 2013) and between sexes. Our results indicate that motivations for initiating these relationships vary based on both relationship type and sex.

The results of our first research question (RQ1) demonstrated that the previously established motivations for FWBRs (Hughes et al., 2005) can be applied to multiple datasets. Sex was the most common motivating factor for those who engage in FWBRs, despite just sex FWBRs representing a very small portion of the sample in study 1. This finding is likely due to the way that FWBRs are defined—as friends (or acquaintances) that engage in repeated sexual activity (Hughes et al., 2005; Knight, 2014). Sex appears to be a common motivator regardless of FWBR type, even those in which sex is secondary to friendship (e.g., true friends and transition FWBRs).

The most intriguing finding was the emergence of sliding as a motivating factor in FWBRs. Stanley et al. (2006) explain sliding as non-deliberative relationship initiation that is “associated with greater risks than explicit and thoughtful deciding” (p. 506). This lack of motivation is consistent with FWB couples avoidance of relational talk (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Stein, Ray, Van Raalte, & Mongeau, in press). Sliding also highlights a lack of goal construction that, according to Dillard (2004), alters both cognitions and behaviors in relationships.

The clear distinction between approach focused motivations (e.g., just sex, emotional connection, wanted a FWBR) and avoidance focused motivations (relationship simplicity, relationship avoidance, and sliding; Elliot, 1999) in our results allow for a more theoretical discussion of the findings. Interpreting the results of RQ1 through SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) allows us to question the associations between the underlying motivations for engaging in FWBRs and the experiences and outcomes of such relationships. Given the exploratory nature of this study, this ordering is purely speculative, but our results provide a starting point to answer questions of this nature.

Another way of conceptualizing the sliding motivation in SDT is by understanding it through as a form of amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this way, FWB partners who slide into their relationships experience a less integrated approach to their relationships. In fact, the FWBR motivational typology may fit on an amotivation—integration spectrum; advancing from sliding, wanted a FWBR, and just sex, through relational simplicity, relationship avoidance, and emotional connection.

Our second research question (RQ2) focused on motivational differences across Mongeau et al.’s (2013) FWBR types. Despite true friends representing over half of our sample, just sex accounted for the majority of self-reported motivations. On one hand, it is possible that true friends are simply adding intercourse to a previously platonic friendship (as suggested by Lehmillier et al., 2011). If this is the case, the intentionality and planning of true friends FWBRs should be brought into question (i.e., amotivation, integrated regulation, or somewhere between; Ryan et al., 1997). Moreover, it stands to reason that true friends may experience varying levels of motivating factors. Discerning the degree to which true friends (and all FWBRs) experience each motivation should be a prominent concern for future research.

On the other hand, it may be that many people who describe their relationships as true friends are suffering from a social desirability bias (i.e., demand characteristics). True friends place, by definition, relational needs over their sexual desires (Mongeau et al., 2013). The frequency with which sex solely motivates true friends calls for a potential reinvestigation of the existing FWBR typology. Said differently, there may be more effective ways of gauging the intricate differences between FWBR types.

Not surprisingly, emotional connection was the strongest in true friends and transition FWBRs and appeared only once between just sex and network opportunism FWBRs. The role of romance in FWBRs is highly subjective (Knight, 2014), but it is clear that emotional desire is a relatively common motivating factor in some FWBRs, and not in others. This finding may relate to SDT’s explanation of intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The prospect of an emotional motivation suggests long term and likely external rewards for a lengthy and committed partnership. Those FWBRs devoid of emotional motivation may be more focused on intrinsic motivating factors, like sexual conquest or social status (as is sometimes the case with first-daters; Mongeau et al., 2004).

The third research question (RQ3) noted two differences between men and women. First, just sex was reported more than twice as frequently by men as opposed to women. This finding is in line with previous work (Lehmillier et al., 2011; Mongeau et al., 2004), which highlights the increased sexual motivations of men, regardless of relationship type. However, unlike previous research, there was nearly no difference at all in emotional motivation between men and women. This lack of difference is important, as it signals that FWBRs may be used as a test to initial a more traditional relationship (Owen & Fincham, 2012), and that such tests occur with similar frequency between sexes.

Although fruitful, study 1 neglects several issues. First, the overabundance of true friends FWBRs made analyses lopsided. Indeed, some chi-squared cells were so underpopulated that it risked violating the statistical assumptions of the procedure. Second, study 1 assessed motivations that individuals have for *initiating* FWBRs, but not for *maintaining* such relationships. It is also common for multiple motivations to propel people

through their interpersonal relationships (Dillard, 2004). It is important to explore the possibility of multiple simultaneous motivations in FWBRs, given their increasing popularity (Garcia et al., 2012), and distinctness from romantic relationships (Lehmiller et al., 2011). Study 2 takes the first step in addressing these queries.

## STUDY 2

In study 2 we sought to accomplish two goals. First, we replicated study 1 in that we a) asked individuals to report what motivations they have for initiating their FWBRs (H1), b) observed the ways in which motivations vary across the seven FWBR types (H2), and c) explored sex differences in motivations (H3). Our goal was to not only gather a more diverse set of FWBRs, but also to question whether a more relationally diverse sample produces different ratios of (or entirely new) motivations. This is especially important given that chi-squared methods were employed to answer the second and third hypotheses. Having an adequate population of cells in a chi squared is necessary for proper interpretation of results. Thus, we sought to collect a larger sample that, hopefully, yielded a more balanced representation of FWBR types.

We also investigated if individuals report multiple motivations for initiating their FWBRs in study 2. Interpersonal scholarship has documented that relational partners are often driven by multiple motivations during their sexual interactions (Umpfrey & Sherblom, 2007), conflict resolution episodes (Darnon et al., 2006), and episodes of relational talk (Impett et al., 2010). Motivations for engaging in FWBRs have been studied singularly (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005; Lehmiller et al., 2011). Moreover, the tenets of SDT explain that intrinsic motivations can compete against and supersede extrinsic motivations, and vice-versa (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Indeed, deadlines, threats, tangible rewards, and extenuating circumstances can alter, fracture, or expand already existing motivations, especially those intrinsic in nature (Deci & Ryan, 1985). We aimed to expand the FWBR literature by seeing how many (if any) simultaneous motivations FWB participants have for initiating their relationships.

*RQ4: Do people report multiple motivations when initiating FWBRs?*

Additionally, people often experience motivational shifts as the nature of their relationship changes (e.g., Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Rusbult & Agnew, 2010). Friends with benefits partners may perceive a shift in their motivations as their relationships progress. One example of this can be found in the transition in FWBR categories, in which partners spontaneously shift their initial goals of (presumably) non-monogamous sex to exclusivity and romance (Mongeau et al., 2013). Such seemingly sporadic swings can be explained within the framework of SDT, which posits that humans have numerous adaptive responses to the changes within their social contexts and

relationships (Ryan et al., 1997). Self-determination itself is classified as an adaptive process that allows for goals, motivations, and behaviors to shift in line with new or competing desires (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As such, a final research question positions FWBRs as a unique relational context in which such change may occur.

*RQ5: Do people perceive changes in their motivations over the course of their FWBR's lifespan?*

## Methods

**Participants and Procedure.** Participants included 365 heterosexual undergraduate students (164 women) enrolled in communication courses at a large Southwestern University ( $M_{age} = 19.17$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ). Ethnicities were primarily Caucasian ( $n = 256$ ), Asian ( $n = 34$ ), Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 31$ ), Mixed race ( $n = 23$ ), or Black/African American ( $n = 21$ ). Respondents identified as true friends ( $n = 101$ ), just sex ( $n = 90$ ), network opportunism ( $n = 60$ ), successful transition in ( $n = 31$ ), unintentional transition in ( $n = 30$ ), failed transition in ( $n = 29$ ), and transition out ( $n = 24$ ). The average relationship length of FWB partners was 11.01 months ( $SD = 4.35$ ). In order to qualify for the study (an online survey), students must have currently been in a FWBR, be at least 18 years old, and have Internet access.

Using the categories developed in study 1, respondents were asked to select the motivation(s) that they had for initiating their FWBRs at the start of the relationship (i.e., “check all that apply...”). Participants were reminded that “if your motivations for entering this relationship do not match any of those listed above, please check ‘other’ and provide, in your own words, and explanation of your motivations.” Next, respondents answered an open-ended question following the prompt, “How, if at all, have your motivations changed from the beginning of your FWBR until now?”

**Analysis.** Frequencies of motivations were tallied. During analysis, individuals who checked more than two boxes for this question were noted and their responses were unitized. Two Chi-squared analyses (motivation x FWBR type and motivation x sex) were performed only on individuals who reported a single motivation ( $n = 318$ ) so as not to violate independence of cells (Rao & Scott, 1981). To answer RQ4, those who indicated multiple reasons for entering their FWBR were tallied and percentages were calculated.

Open coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) were used to answer RQ5. Unlike the methods employed in study 1, this was an entirely data-driven approach. Two coders independently assessed answers, unitizing and labeling as they saw fit. Coders met with the principal investigator to discuss similarities and differences between generated themes. Once there was full agreement on themes and the total number of unitized responses, the coders independently labeled each response. A final meeting was called in which both coders reviewed their answers and settled remaining differences ( $kappa = .81$ ).

**Results**

**Replicating Study 1.** Participants in study 2 reported all six motivations uncovered in study 1: just sex ( $n = 124$ ), sliding ( $n = 98$ ), emotional connection ( $n = 70$ ), relationship simplicity ( $n = 63$ ), relationship avoidance ( $n = 41$ ), and wanted a FWBR ( $n = 25$ ). Because participants were offered the option to identify multiple motivations, the number of motivations reported exceeded the sample size. See Table 1 for frequencies of motivations. Of these answers, 19 individuals reported an “other” motivation. Using the open coding methods from study 1 (Strauss & Corbin, 1999), it was found that 14 of those responses fit into an existing category, and that the other five were unintelligible, and were thus removed from chi-squared analyses.

Like in study 1, in study 2 we asked if motivations significantly varied across FWBR types and between sexes. Chi-squared test revealed a significant difference for type of FWBR,  $\chi^2(9) = 70.02, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .28$ . Avoidance/simplicity motivations were most common among true friends. Just sex FWBRs were by far the most motivated by just sex. The transition FWBRs were most likely to be motivated by emotional connection. Sliding/wanted a FWBR were fairly common across all FWBR types, but were most prevalent across true friends and transition FWBRs. See Table 3 for motivations across FWBR types.

A second Chi-squared test revealed significant differences for sex, such that men were more likely select the *just sex* motivation, and less likely to select the emotional connection motivation than women,  $\chi^2(3) = 26.01, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .29$ . All other motivations were relatively equal between men and women. See Table 4 for motivation frequencies by sex.

**Addressing Multiple and Changing Motivations.** Next, we asked if individuals would report multiple motivations for entering FWBRs (RQ4). The 365 participants in this study reported 421 motivations for entering a FWBR, signaling that some participants do experience more than one motivation for entering a FWBR. Specifically, 318 individuals (87.12%) reported one motivation, 27 individuals reported two

Table 3. Crosstabs for FWBR Categories and Motivations for Engaging in FWBRs (Study 2\*)

	Avoidance/ Simplicity	Just Sex	Emotional Connection	Sliding/ Wanted FWBR	Total
True Friends	30	16	10	32	88
Just Sex	8	48	6	16	78
Network Opportunism	14	14	5	21	52
Transition FWBRs	15	15	32	35	100
Total	67	94	53	104	318

Note:  $\chi^2(9) = 70.02$ ; Cramer’s  $V = .28$   
\* $p < .001$

Table 4. Sex Differences in Motivations

Motivations	Study 1*		Study 2**	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Relationship Avoidance/ Simplicity	16	18	37	30
Just for sex	34	10	70	24
Emotional Connection	14	13	17	36
Wanted a FWBR/Sliding	17	23	51	53
Total	81	64	175	143

Note. Study 1:  $\chi^2(3) = 12.32$ ; Cramer’s  $V = .29$ . Study 2:  $\chi^2(3) = 26.01$ ; Cramer’s  $V = .29$   
\* $p = .006$ . \*\* $p < .001$ ,

Table 5. Changes in Motivations Reported in Study Two

Self-Reported Motivations	Frequency
Emotional Connection	53
Convenience/Companionship	45
Just sex	17
Relational Decline	14
Miscellaneous	14
Total	143

Note. 39.18 of the original sample reported some change in motivations

motivations, 13 individuals reported three motivations, and five individuals reported four motivations.

Our final research question (RQ5) asked how if at all FWB participants’ motivations changed over time. Of the 365 individuals who reported at least one motivation for engaging in their FWBRs, 143 (39.18%) reported that their motivations had changed in some way. When noting changes in motivation, only five individuals reported two or more motivations. Those individuals’ responses were unitized. First,  $n = 53$  participants reported and increased desire for *emotional attachment* (e.g., “At first it started off as a late night booty call and then...I decided that that over time, maybe a relationship would develop [sic].”). Similarly,  $n = 45$  individuals stated that, after time, their FWBRs relied heavily on *convenient companionship* (e.g., “... now we care about each other, we have good sex, but we don’t worry about labeling ourselves and we are not exclusive.”). These changes were most common for participants previously motivated by just sex.

Less common were participants who noted a decline in their relationships. For example,  $n = 17$  respondents who, once craved emotional connection were now only motivated by sex (i.e., *just sex*; “...It changed once we decided it would only be a friends with benefits relationship and nothing more.”). Additionally,  $n = 14$  participants noted specific *relational declines* (e.g., “At first i [sic] wanted to feel closer with this person, but after a while i [sic] didn’t really care to feel close with him.”).

An additional 14 respondents included answers that were unintelligible and were therefore deemed miscellaneous.

## Discussion

Our principal goal of study 2 was to replicate and extend the findings from study 1. First, we sought to confirm the updated typology of motivations for engaging in FWBRs, noting that individuals may report multiple simultaneous motivations. Second, we looked to observe differences in motivations between sexes and across relationship types. Finally, we observed how, if at all, individuals report changes in their motivations over the course of their FWBRs.

### Replicating Study 1

In study 2 we presented a more diverse sample than study 1 in terms of both relationship type and sex. The most common motivation in study 2 was just sex, reaffirming the priority of sex in FWBRs (Bogle, 2008). The next most common motivation was sliding, which is consistent with the notion that FWBRs entail little conversation or planning (e.g., Knight, 2014). The lack of discussion surrounding rules and boundaries by FWB couples (Bisson & Levine, 2009) lays the foreground for sliding to occur. Emotional connection and relational simplicity were less common but still prevalent, suggesting that some FWBRs are more strategic than others. Specifically wanting a FWBR was the least common motivation. Thus it may be that FWB partners simply take what they can get when a romantic relationship does not work out (Karlsen & Træen, 2013).

Differences in motivations across FWBR types were differently distributed in study 2, in part because of a more diverse representation of FWBR types. One key difference is that true friends were less likely to select just sex as their primary motivation. Instead, true friends were more aligned with relationship simplicity/avoidance and sliding/wanted a FWBR. This finding is in line with the definition of true friends (Green & Morman, 2011), and highlights the platonic elements of true friends. Transition FWBRs were most likely to be motivated by emotional connection and sliding/wanted a FWBR, also consistent with their definition (Mongeau et al., 2013). Moreover, transition FWBRs likely have the most intimate conversations (Knight, 2014), and are therefore most likely to be emotionally connected. Finally, nearly half of the network opportunism FWBRs reported sliding/wanted a FWBR as their motivation. This last finding is important for understanding the interplay between network opportunism FWBRs (Mongeau et al., 2013) and the reasons for why such relationships avoid relational communication (Bisson & Levine, 2009).

Sex differences in motivations in study 2 were more consistent with previous research (Lehmiller et al., 2011; Mongeau et al., 2004), in that men are more motivated by sex and less motivated by emotional connection. The desire for simplicity/avoidance and sliding/wanted a FWBR were consistent between

sexes. Societal norms surrounding FWBRs encourage men to have sex and women to crave connection (Bogle, 2008); however, simplicity, avoidance, and sliding are encouraged across all FWB participants (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2009).

### Shifts in (Multiple) Motivations

Our fourth research question (RQ4) asked whether individuals report multiple motivations for FWBRs. Even when allowed to denote multiple motivating factors, a strong majority (87%) of participants identified only one motivation. This may suggest that, initially at least, most FWB partners have simple goal structures—possibly due to the cultural shift in “dating” that encourages young adults to forgo meaningful relational investments in favor of sexual escapades (Garcia et al., 2012). Juggling several competing motivations may also be too mentally taxing for FWB partners, who, in many cases, are looking for ease and simplicity (Hughes et al., 2005). It should be noted, however, that our measuring of motivations was categorical, and not continuous. Allowing participants to generate continuous means for each motivation could encourage a more diverse spread of motivating factors. This practice could allow for a clearer contrast between the underlying motivations and integrated regulative motivators that people in FWBRs grapple with.

Our final research question (RQ5) asked how (if at all) FWB partners' motivations change over time. Motivational shifts were noted by 39.12% of participants. Nearly three-quarters of motivational changes involved a desire for relational escalation (emotional connection or convenient companionship). Such advancements in goal structure help explain the reasons why so many people use FWBRs to ignite romantic entanglements (Owen & Fincham, 2012). This finding also sheds light on how and why transition in FWBRs manifest (Mongeau et al., 2013). It is also likely that the shifts in motivations spur romantic behaviors in FWBRs. In fact, over 90 percent of FWB participants recognize increased romantic and/or platonic desire change the nature of their relationships (Weaver, MacKeigan, & MacDonald, 2011). It is therefore pertinent to explore the associative relationships between FWBR motivations and relational outcomes, such as relationship length, relationship satisfaction, and intimacy. Diary reports (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003), or longitudinal collections (such as those used by Sprecher & Felmlee, 2000) are both excellent methods for approaching these questions.

The remaining motivational shifts conveyed a downward trend in the platonic or romantic elements of FWBRs. For example, just sex is a common theme among FWBRs; however, in the context of motivational change, just sex indicated relational decline. Many respondents described initially desired romantic connection yet, over time, settled for just sex. This progression very closely matches the transition out FWBR typology (Mongeau et al., 2013). Further, many individuals explicitly noted a relational decline. For FWBRs this could

entail anything from forsaking relational goals to engaging in less frequent sex. Perhaps the uncertain nature of FWBRs (Knight, 2014) provides the conditions in which such relationships can be maintained despite relational decline.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our goal in this manuscript was to better understand the motivations that FWB partners have for initiating and maintaining their relationships. Our results point to several interesting differences in initial motivations between sexes, as well as relationship types. Our findings also expand the existing typology of motivations for engaging in FWBRs and explain some of the ways in which motivations shift as FWBRs develop.

Motivations for engaging in FWBRs (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005) parallel motivations for first dates (e.g., Mongeau et al., 2004), in that they are goal-oriented (Dillard, 2004), and often revolve around social gathering, sex, and/or romance. People often use FWBRs to explore both individual and relational desires (Owen & Fincham, 2012). As demonstrated in both studies, individuals strive for emotional connection, sexual engagement, companionship, and relationship simplicity/avoidance. Thus, the themes of romance, sex, and social interaction are reinforced. However, although people go on dates to begin romantic relationships (Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977), FWB partners appear more prone to sliding into their relationships (Stanley et al., 2006).

As such, the amotivation category (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997) appears to be more prevalent in FWBRs than in romantic relationships—which occasionally slide from dating into marriage (Stanley et al., 2006), but not from platonic interaction to romance. Related, FWB participants may be more intrinsically motivated (as opposed to extrinsically; Ryan & Deci, 2000), than romantic relationships, due to the sexual undertones and assumptions of the relationship. We cannot yet say with confidence that FWBRs experience one motivating factor more than another, but our findings can lead researchers toward these answers.

Similar to previous results (Lehmiller et al., 2011), sex differences in both studies displayed a tendency for men to be more sexually motivated, and less emotionally motivated, than women. Sex remains driving force in FWBRs (Garcia, 2012; Karlsen & Træen, 2013); however, the sex differences in motivations for starting FWBRs highlight some of the similarities that they share with dating relationships (Mongeau et al., 2004). While there are numerous motives for FWB partners, the gender norms from previous generations appear to influence these factors. Studies examining the associative (and even causal) relationship between gender norms and FWBR initiation are needed to aid in the explanation of how and why FWBRs are forged. Moreover, it may be that peoples' motivations for initiating FWBRs, in part, explain why they are so much less successful, satisfying, and communication-oriented than romantic partnerships (Stein et al., in press).

Perhaps due to increased relational ambiguity (Knight, 2014; Stein et al., in press), FWB partners experience considerable variability in their motivations, based on relational type. It is not surprising that different FWBR types have different goals and, presumably, different plans for achieving those goals (Dillard, 2004). More importantly, the prevalence of numerous motivations across several relational types suggests that FWBRs should be gauged differently. Rather than categorizing FWBRs by groups, it may be best to see how FWB partners fluctuate on their romantic desire, sexual desire, and relational closeness. Garcia and colleagues (2012) point to fluctuations in intimacy as an explanation as to why young adults prefer FWBRs. Using continuous data to measure perceptions could combine the FWBR typology and the motivational categories discussed in this manuscript to form a simpler understanding of how FWBRs function.

## LIMITATIONS

Both studies expand the literature on FWBRs by addition to the current motivational typology and exploring how different FWBRs experience these motivations. That said there are a number of factors that inhibit a more complete discussion of FWBRs. First, the use of chi-squared procedures provides interesting inferences about samples, but not the population. More robust quantitative measures (e.g., regression, multilevel modeling) would allow for a discussion of implications in the larger FWBR population. Associative tests can reach beyond acknowledging *that* FWBRs are distinct in their makeup and explore *why* these differences occur. Our results provide a stepping-stone for such methods, but ultimately falls short in terms of long-term implications.

Second, self-report data is useful, but in the case of particularly ambiguous relationships (i.e., FWBRs; Knight, 2014), dyadic data is necessary to a) ensure that both partners agree on their relational type, and b) provide other-reports of motivations. For example, people may be suffering from demand characteristics that persuade them to report more wholesome motivations (e.g., emotional connection and relationship simplicity) rather than admitting that they solely desire sex or are afraid of commitment (relationship avoidance). A partner's report may illuminate a less biased picture of a given FWBR.

Lastly, as alluded to above, the current measure of both FWBR types and motivations is in need of refinement. Seven types of and six motivations for FWBRs make for less straightforward analyses and results. Future research must simplify measures of FWBRs by crafting a series of continuous measures. One way to accomplish this is by allowing participants to gauge the extent to which they believe each motivation is guiding their relational quests. Moreover, rather than listing seven categories, measuring FWBRs on a spectrum of romantic desire, closeness, and sexual interest could allow for tests of association as well as interaction effects that, ideally, help explain the growing popularity of FWBRs (Garcia et al., 2012).

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