

# Couple Identity, Sacrifice, and Availability of Alternative Partners: Dedication in Friends With Benefits Relationships

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**Abstract** Friends with benefit relationships (FWB) combine elements of ongoing friendship and physical intimacy. Although many studies have examined predictors of who are likely to enter these relationships as well as their outcomes, we do not know what relational factors are associated with FWB relationship outcomes. This study examined the association between three commitment variables: couple identity, satisfaction with sacrifice, and alternative availability and FWB relationship adjustment and sexual satisfaction. In a young adult sample ( $n = 171$ ), bivariate correlations demonstrated greater couple identity, more satisfaction with sacrifice, and less alternative availability which were associated with greater relationship adjustment, but not sexual satisfaction. In a multivariate context, satisfaction with sacrifice was the only significant predictor of FWB relationship adjustment. There was also a significant interaction between alternative availability and satisfaction with sacrifice in the prediction of sexual satisfaction. For those who perceived fewer alternative options, the degree to which they were satisfied with sacrificing for their partner was positively associated with sexual satisfaction. Implications for enhancing FWB relationships are discussed.

**Keywords** Casual sex · Hooking up · Friends with benefits

## Introduction

One subtype of casual sexual relationships, friends with benefits (FWB), is commonly defined as “recurring sexual activities between individuals who have a pre-established friendship but who do not define their relationship as romantic” (Weaver, Claybourn, & MacKeigan, 2013, p. 152); there is, however, variability in the degree to which FWB relationships are more “friends” or more “benefits” (see Mongeau, Knight, Williams, Eden, & Shaw, 2013). Research on FWB relationships has shown that these relationships are fairly common among young adults, with 12-month prevalence rates ranging from 14.5 to 60 % (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005; Owen & Fincham, 2011; Puentes, Knox, & Zusman, 2008). Compared to peers who do not engage in FWB relationships, those who decide to engage in these relationships report higher rates of alcohol use, being less thoughtful in their relational decision making, and being motivated by sexual desires (e.g., Lehmillier, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011; Owen & Fincham, 2011).

In addition, 25–40 % of young adults hope their FWB relationship will progress into a committed relationship and approximately 20 % of FWB relationships actually do (Eisenberg, Ackard, & Resnick, 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2012). Similarly, approximately 20% of FWB relationships deteriorate to the point where the partners are no longer friends after the FWB relationship ends (Owen, Fincham, & Manthos, 2013). However, the majority of young adults remain friends with their FWB partner after the intimacy ends. Given these outcomes, it is not surprising that young adults report that FWB relationships result in more positive emotional reactions than negative (Owen & Fincham, 2011). At the same time, many young adults recognize both positive and negative aspects of FWB relationships; with having sex and lack of commitment on the positive side and feeling deceived, lack of clear expectations, and poor communication quality on the negative side (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes

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et al., 2005; Lehmiller et al., 2011; Quirk, Owen, & Fincham, 2014).

Although FWB relationships by definition lack the exclusivity of romantic relationships, there are some attitudes and behaviors that are commonly viewed as signaling commitment (e.g., sharing personal information, sexual contact, going on dates, expressing desire for an exclusive romantic relationship) (Furman & Shaffer, 2011; Mongeau et al., 2013; Owen & Fincham, 2012). Accordingly, it may be fruitful to view FWB relationships through the lens of commitment theory (cf. Stanley & Markman, 1992). Most commitment theories are rooted in interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which suggests that relationships develop over time by investing time, energy, and resources as well as engaging in positive exchanges. In return, there also tends to develop a concern about the loss of the relationship as well as a reduced desire to search for alternatives (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). This theory has been applied in various contexts, such as how employees are engaged in the workplace, friendship, and romantic relationship development (e.g., Owen et al., 2013; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

Accordingly, the current study examined three aspects of dedication commitment: couple identity, sacrifice, and alternative availability and the extent to which they predicted FWB relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> These three aspects of commitment align with common relational processes in the initial phases of relationship development (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010), such as developing a shared sense of purpose (e.g., couple identity), which is commonly based on investments of time and energy (e.g., sacrifices), mixed with external forces that may strain these processes (e.g., alternatives). There were several other aspects of commitment that were not included in this study (e.g., morality of divorce, structural investments) that generally assume a stronger level of commitment. Although there has been some examination of commitment, broadly defined, the specific aspects of commitment have not been evaluated in FWB research.

### Commitment Theory in Relation to Friends with Benefits

Commitment models generally describe two essential elements: (1) the desire to be in the relationship (i.e., dedication commitment) and (2) factors that constrain a person to stay in the relationship (i.e., constraint commitment) (Adams & Jones,

1997; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette 1994; Stanley & Markman, 1992). In regard to FWB relationships, previous research has linked aspects of commitment in the friendship element of the FWB relationship to greater relationship satisfaction (e.g., Owen et al., 2013; VanderDrift, Lehmiller, & Kelly, 2012). Additionally, feeling constrained in the relationship has been related to overall negative emotional reactions about the FWB relationship (Owen & Fincham, 2011). However, the degree of commitment ambiguity in FWB relationships as well as hope for a future romantic relationship has been unrelated to relationship satisfaction (Owen & Fincham, 2011; Quirk et al., 2014).

Within dedication commitment, having a strong couple identity (“we-ness”), satisfaction with sacrifice, and lack of alternative monitoring are foundational for couple formation and maintenance (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Indeed, the on-going nature of the friendship and physical intimacy may suggest that some FWB partners act “as-if” they are a couple, (e.g., going on dates, sharing personal information), thus contributing to a shared identity (Furman & Shaffer, 2011; Mongeau et al., 2013; VanderDrift et al., 2012). At the same time, FWB relationships have been typified by limited communication about their relationship status and boundaries (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes et al., 2005), which may obscure the sense of shared identity. Accordingly, those FWB relationships that do foster a couple identity are likely to bring more security to the partners and an overall positive sense of the relationship (see Stanley et al., 2010).

Common to friendship and romantic relationships are acts of sacrifice or the tendency to set aside personal interests for the betterment of the relationship or the partner (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008; Hughes et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2010). In exclusive romantic relationships, the degree to which partners feel like a team with their partner and are invested in the relationship is linked with partners’ satisfaction, willingness, and frequency of sacrifice (e.g., Stanley et al., 2002; Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007). However, in FWB relationships, the commitment to an exclusive relationship is missing, and thus the desire to sacrifice may be tempered. On the other hand, if the FWB relationship does appear viable, the lack of clearly defined boundaries may be secondary, and sacrifice may be associated with more positive FWB relationship functioning.

The last facet of dedication commitment examined in the current study was alternative monitoring or the cognitive process that involves comparing the current partner to possible alternatives (Stanley, Lobitz, & Dickson, 1999). Theoretically, as commitment and relationship satisfaction develop, the degree to which partners seek out or consider alternative partners should decrease (cf. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Yet, the lack of exclusivity in FWB relationships may make this assumption more tenuous. For instance, Lehmiller, VanderDrift,

<sup>1</sup> For FWB relationships, the long-term vision of the relationship is, by definition, not certain. Although some individuals hope for a longer-term commitment, the lack of communication and clear expectations can complicate matters, which is likely why desire for an exclusive relationship has not been associated with better FWB relationship adjustment (Bisson & Levin, 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2011). Thus, we did not include this aspect of commitment in the current study.

and Kelly, (2014) found that partners in FWB relationships were more likely to engage in extra-dyadic behaviors and were more likely to discuss this involvement as compared to persons in exclusive romantic relationships. However, their use of a comparative framework (i.e., FWB vs. exclusive romantic relationships) limits our understanding of within group processes. Nonetheless, the degree to which FWB partners perceive more available alternative partners could negatively impact the degree to which couple identity and sacrifice are related to FWB relationship functioning. The degree to which individuals display pro-relational behaviors is likely a function of their commitment to their partner as well as the degree to which alternatives (e.g., partners, work) provide a viable distraction of energy and time. Thus, these aspects of commitment do not operate in isolation, but rather influence one another in the overall appraisal of FWB partners' relationship adjustment. Consequently, those who have fewer options for alternative partners could perceive a closer association between their FWB couple identity and their relationship satisfaction/adjustment as the degree to which their energy/time is invested into other sources are limited.

We examined these three facets of dedication commitment in relation to two dimensions of FWB relationship functioning: relationship adjustment and sexual satisfaction. Relationship adjustment has a long history in romantic relationship research as well as in FWB research (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2012; Owen et al., 2013; Quirk et al., 2014). Relationship adjustment, or the degree to which individuals view their relationship as a happy, well-functioning, and trusting environment, varies across both FWB and romantic relationships. In addition, young adults' FWB sexual satisfaction is paramount, given that sexual motives can drive the initiation and continuation of these relationships (Lehmiller et al., 2011). For example, Bisson and Levine (2009) found that FWB relationships were typified more by physical intimacy as compared to passion or commitment. Moreover, the degree of physical intimacy has been linked to relationship adjustment as well as the degree to which the friendship continues after the end of the FWB relationship (Owen et al., 2013; Quirk et al., 2014). Thus, it is clear that sexual satisfaction is an important element to FWB relationships.

In the current study, we posited that couple identity and sacrifice would be positively associated with FWB relationship adjustment (Hypotheses 1a, 1b) and sexual satisfaction (Hypotheses 2a, 2b). We also hypothesized that greater availability of alternative partners would be associated with lower FWB relationship adjustment (Hypothesis 3a) and sexual satisfaction (Hypothesis 3b). Lastly, we expected that greater availability of alternative partners would moderate the association between couple identity, sacrifice, and FWB relationship adjustment (Hypothesis 4a, 4b) and sexual satisfaction (Hypothesis 5a, 5b), such that the association would be stronger for those who perceived fewer alternative partners.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were students from a large southeastern university in the U.S. Only students who were not in a committed relationship and who reported having a FWB within the last 12 months participated in the study. Thus, we initially started with 454 participants; however, after applying our inclusion criteria, the final sample was 171 participants (52 men and 118 women; 1 participant did not provide information about gender), with a median age of 19 years (range 18–23). About half of the participants identified as Caucasian (49.1 %), 29.8 % identified as African American, 14.0 % identified as Latino/a, 2.9 % identified as Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 0.6 % identified as Native American (3.4 % indicated other or did not indicate their race/ethnicity). Only 13 of the participants reported being currently involved in their FWB partnership and the mean time since the FWB relationship ended was 3.16 months ( $SD = 3.15$ ).

### Measures

#### *FWB-Relationship Adjustment (FWB-RA)*

The FWB-RA measure was adapted from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale-4 (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005). The items included “How much do you trust this person?”, “Do you confide in this person?”, “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your most recent FWB partner are going well?”, and “Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.” Although this measure was adapted from an exclusive romantic relationship measure, the items have high face validity across relationships and have been utilized in previous FWB studies (e.g., Owen et al., 2013; Quirk et al., 2014). Further, other studies have adapted similar exclusive romantic relationship measures for FWB relationships and they have shown significant associations with other indicators of relationship health and dysfunction, such as secure attachment, perceived deception from FWB partner, as well as predicted a greater likelihood of remaining friends post-FWB relationship (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Owen et al., 2013; Quirk et al., 2014). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .78.

#### *Sexual Satisfaction*

Sexual satisfaction was measured using the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, Harrison, & Crosscup, 1981). The ISS is a 25-item scale created to measure problems in sexual satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *none of the time* to 7 = *all of the time*, indicating how sexually satisfied they were with their partners.

Though the scale is often scored such that higher scores indicate lower satisfaction, we reverse scored items such that higher scores indicate higher satisfaction. Sample questions include (adjusting for FWB relationship): “I think our sex life is wonderful” and “My FWB partner has been very sensitive to my sexual needs and desires.” The measure has been utilized with a wide range of ages, partner statuses, and ethnic backgrounds. Previous research has reported alphas of 0.96 (for men) and 0.93 (for women) (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010). Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was 0.90.

#### *Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992)*

We adapted three subscales from the Commitment Inventory: Couple Identity (5 items), and Satisfaction with Sacrifice (5 items), Alternative Availability (5 items). The only change to the items was the inclusion of “FWB partner” versus “partner” in some items where the word “partner” had been used. The items on the Couple Identity subscale assess the degree to which participants view their FWB relationship as a “we” or a cohesive unit. An example item is “I tend to think about how things affect ‘us’ as a couple more than how things affect ‘me’ as an individual.” The items on the Satisfaction with Sacrifice subscale assess participants’ feelings about the value of doing things for the relationship or FWB partner. An example item is “It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my FWB partner.” The items on the Alternative Availability subscale reflect participants’ beliefs about whether other partners could be viable options if their current FWB relationship ended. An example item is: “I would have trouble finding a suitable FWB partner if this one ended.” All of the items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate greater sense of couple identity, more satisfaction with sacrifice, and less perceived alternative availability. The validity of these measures has been demonstrated with a variety of samples, albeit with participants who were in exclusive romantic relationships (e.g., Stanley & Markman, 1992; Stanley et al., 2010; Whitton et al., 2007). Cronbach’s alphas for Couple Identity, Satisfaction with Sacrifice, and Alternative Availability in the present sample were .79, .81, and .62, respectively.

#### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through an introductory course on families across the lifespan that meets a liberal studies requirement and therefore attracts students from across the university. Students were offered multiple options to obtain extra credit for the class, one of which comprised the survey used in this study. Over 95 percent of the class decided to participate in the study. They completed informed consent and were told how to access the online survey. They were given a five-day window in which to complete the survey. All procedures were approved by the university IRB.

#### **Results**

The means, SDs, and bivariate correlations are shown in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> As seen in the table, couple identity and sacrifice were positively associated with FWB relationship adjustment (supporting Hypotheses 1a, 1b). However, they were not significantly associated with sexual satisfaction (not supporting Hypotheses 2a, 2b). We also found that participants who perceived less alternative availability also reported greater FWB relationship adjustment (supporting Hypothesis 3a), but not sexual satisfaction (not supporting Hypothesis 3b).

Next, we tested whether these bivariate associations would emerge when examined in a linear regression. We conducted two multiple regression analyses in which we used FWB-RA and Sexual Satisfaction as the dependent variables, respectively. The predictor variables were Couple Identity, Satisfaction with Sacrifice, and Alternative Availability. We also controlled for gender in these models. The results for both analyses are shown in Table 2.

The results for FWB-RA demonstrated that Satisfaction with Sacrifice ( $b = 0.32, SE = 0.07, p < .001$ ) and gender ( $b = -0.33, SE = 0.14, p = .015$ ) were statistically significant predictors. Participants who reported that they were happy with level of sacrifice to the FWB relationship also reported greater levels of relationship adjustment. Additionally, women were more likely to report greater relationship adjustment as compared to men. However, the Couple Identity and Alternative Availability were not significantly related to FWB-RA ( $ps > .05$ ).

Similar to the bivariate correlations, the regression analysis predicting Sexual Satisfaction was not statistically significant ( $F = 1.82, p = .13$ ) and none of the predictors were significant ( $ps > .05$ ). However, satisfaction with Sacrifice emerged as a predictor that approached statistical significance ( $b = 0.16, SE = 0.08, p = .059$ ). Collectively, the results from the multiple regression models demonstrated greater support for the role of Satisfaction with Sacrifice in FWB relationship adjustment (supporting Hypothesis 1b) and sexual satisfaction (supporting Hypothesis 2b) as compared to the other commitment variables.

Lastly, we conducted moderator analyses between availability of alternative partners and couple identity, and sacrifice in the prediction of FWB relationship adjustment and sexual satisfaction. To do so, we replicated the regression analyses above, but added the interaction effects (i.e., Alternative Availability  $\times$  Couple Identity, Alternative Availability  $\times$  Satisfaction with Sacrifice). We grand-mean centered the predictor variables prior to conducting the analyses. Alternative availability was not a significant moderator for Satisfaction with Sacrifice or Couple Identity in the prediction of FWB relationship adjustment ( $ps > .40$ ; not supporting Hypotheses 4a and 4b). Additionally, Alter-

<sup>2</sup> There were no significant associations between the time in which a person participated in a FWB relationship and any of the variables in the current study ( $rs$  ranged .01 to  $-.19$ ).

**Table 1** Means, SDs, and bivariate correlations

	1	2	3	4	5
1. FWB-RA	–				
2. Sex Sat.	.30***	–			
3. Couple Id	.27***	.06	–		
4. Sacrifice	.43***	.15	.69***	–	
5. Altern Avail	.21**	.03	.39***	.38***	–
<i>M (SD)</i>	3.75 (0.87)	5.00 (0.93)	3.27 (1.32)	3.71 (1.23)	2.92 (0.96)

*FWB-RA* friends with benefits-relationship adjustment, *Sex Sat* sexual satisfaction, *Couple Id* couple identity, *Sacrifice* satisfaction with sacrifice, *altern avail*, alternative availability

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2** Summary of regression analyses predicting FWB relationship adjustment and sexual satisfaction

	FWB-Relationship Adjustment		Sexual Satisfaction	
	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>B</i>
Gender (female = 1)	–0.33 (.14)	–.18*	–0.28 (.16)	–.14
Altern avail	0.04 (.07)	.04	–0.02 (.09)	–.02
Sat sacrifice	0.32 (.07)	.45***	0.16 (.08)	.21
Couple identity	–0.03 (.07)	–.05	–0.05 (.08)	–.08
Model adjusted $R^2$	.20	.02		

*Sat Sacrifice* satisfaction with sacrifice, *Altern Avail* alternative availability

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

native Availability was not a significant moderator for the association between Couple Identity and Sexual Satisfaction ( $p = .39$ ; not supporting Hypothesis 5a). However, Alternative Availability was a significant moderator for the association between Satisfaction with Sacrifice and Sexual Satisfaction ( $b = 0.10$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .05$ , supporting Hypothesis 5b). Specifically, a test of the simple slopes demonstrated that for participants who were +1 SD above the mean on Alternative Availability, Satisfaction with Sacrifice was positively associated with Sexual Satisfaction ( $b = 0.28$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .008$ ). Yet, for participants who were -1 SD below the mean on Alternative Availability, Satisfaction with Sacrifice was not significantly associated with Sexual Satisfaction ( $b = 0.09$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .34$ ). Thus, for participants who reported that they had fewer alternative options (i.e., +1 SD), satisfaction with sacrificing for their FWB partner was positively associated with sexual satisfaction. However, for those who reported having more alternative options (i.e., -1 SD), the degree to which they were satisfied with sacrificing for their partner was unrelated to sexual satisfaction with their FWB partner.

As an exploratory test, we also examined whether participants' gender moderated any of the associations between relationship adjustment and sexual satisfaction and couple identity, satisfaction with sacrifice, and alternative availability. We only found one significant moderation effect. Women's ratings of satisfaction with sacrifice were positively associated with sexual satisfaction ( $b = 0.32$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .008$ ); however, men's ratings

of satisfaction with sacrifice were not ( $b = 0.01$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .92$ ). The three-way interaction between participants' gender, satisfaction with sacrifice, and alternative availability was not significant ( $p = .32$ ).

## Discussion

FWB relationships for some young adults are a stepping-stone to, or a proxy for, an exclusive romantic relationship. Accordingly, it is important to understand and promote healthy ways for young adults to enter and navigate these relationships. The current study revealed that young adults who reported greater couple identity, satisfaction with sacrifice, and less alternative monitoring also reported greater FWB relationship adjustment. However, in a multivariate context (i.e., controlling for the variance of the other variables), only satisfaction with sacrifice was a significant predictor of FWB relationship adjustment (and marginally so for sexual satisfaction). None of the other variables demonstrated a significant association with sexual satisfaction. Accordingly, satisfaction with sacrifice may have a particularly important role in young adults' ability to foster a positive FWB relationship.

Given that our data were correlational, we cannot fully disentangle the direction of effects. For example, it is likely that those FWB relationships that are going well are more likely to engender willingness and happiness with sacrificing for the rela-

tionship/partner. In similar ways, being satisfied with sacrificing for the relationship/partner could also lead to better relationship adjustment. Theoretically, the association between relationship adjustment and investments into the relationship are a circular process that builds over time (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Stanley et al., 2010). A strong couple identity and perceiving less alternative availability were also positively associated with satisfaction with sacrificing, suggesting that these are interlinked components of dedication to the FWB relationship, and this finding mirrors previous studies with partners in exclusive romantic relationships (e.g., Stanley & Markman, 1992; Whitton et al., 2007). Thus, these three dimensions of commitment may suggest that as young adults feel more like a couple (we-ness) and perceive less available alternatives (for whatever reason), they become more invested via prosocial acts (i.e., sacrifice) within the relationship.

However, it is important to consider the potential conflict that may arise for young adults who believe that they are a “we” with their FWB partner, but later learn that these perspectives are not congruent with the lack of exclusivity inherent in FWB relationships. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that having greater relationship awareness and making sound relationship decisions may be the difference between those who enter FWB relationships and feel deceived and those who do not (e.g., Quirk et al., 2014). For example, it may be important to discern the degree to which young adults forego alternative options. That is, some young adults may choose to forego alternative relationships may be doing so to promote the FWB relationship (i.e., partner choice) whereas others may not feel that they have alternative possibilities and thus they may feel more constrained.

Although couple identity and lack of alternative availability were not significant predictors of relationship adjustment in a multivariate context, they did reveal initial, bivariate, positive associations. Thus, those young adults who felt that they did have a stronger couple identity with their FWB partner reported greater relationship adjustment as did those who did not perceive that they had many viable alternatives to the current FWB relationship. An alternative explanation could be that young adults who felt more positive about their FWB relationship were more likely to feel like a couple and were less convinced that alternative partners were available. Indeed, several researchers have noted that not all FWB relationships are similar in terms of emotional and physical connection, with some FWB relationships mimicking exclusive romantic relationships by spending more time and sharing of activities than others (e.g., Mongeau et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2013). However, the lack of significant effects within the multivariate context may suggest that these aspects play a secondary role to the power of satisfaction with sacrifice.

Lastly, sexual satisfaction tended to be linked with greater satisfaction with sacrifice; however, this was found to be robust only for those who reported that they had few alternative partner options and for women. It could be the case that those who do not seek alternative partners and devote more time and energy to the

relationship engage in more sexual activity and are more sexually satisfied.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, those who are engaging in more sexual activity with greater satisfaction are less likely to want to seek out alternatives and feel more positive about giving to the FWB relationship. Interestingly, we also found that women, but not men, who were satisfied with sacrificing for their partner were also more sexually satisfied. Why this is case is not clear; however, women may have a stronger connection between their satisfaction with sacrifice and sexual satisfaction for several reasons: (1) it could be an experiential effect, whereby women may be most sexually connected with their partner when they are invested in the FWB partnership; or (2) women may receive more positive sexual responses from their FWB partner when they are more invested (and happy), and/or (3) women who have stronger sexual satisfaction and satisfaction with sacrifice may be selecting better FWB partners. These hypotheses are also connected to research noting gender differences in the role that an emotional bond has for sexual satisfaction (e.g., Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012; see also Petersen & Hyde, 2010).

The strengths of the current study should be understood within the context of its methodological limitations. First, the sample comprised university students who were enrolled in a course on families, which may introduce a selection bias. Thus, the degree to which our results will generalize to other young adults who are not in college, adolescents, or older adults is unknown. Second, our sample had twice as many female participants as compared to male participants, yet we still were able to detect significant interaction effects based on gender. Nonetheless, larger samples may illuminate deeper, more subtle patterns in these gender interactions. Third, we utilized constructs that are commonly employed for studies of romantic relationships. It may be useful to have measures that capture depth of relationship functioning. For instance, what it means to “trust in” or “confide in” for a friendship versus a FWB relationship vs. a romantic relationship may be qualitatively different, necessitating different measurement procedures. Fourth, all of the measures were self-report, and thus our data reflect common method variance. Future studies may want to examine more specific FWB behaviors as they are connected to these attitudinal FWB factors. Further, we assessed relationship functioning at the individual level and not at the couple level. To date, we do not know of any studies that have examined FWB relationships at the couple level.

Our purpose here was to document whether the construct of commitment could be useful in advancing understanding of FWB relationships. The results suggest that it is important for young adults to be aware of commitment as they enter these FWB relationships. Specifically, our work highlights the fact that satisfaction with sacrifice seems to play a vital role in FWB relationship adjustment, suggesting that young adults should

<sup>3</sup> Although not reported in the results section, we found that frequency of sexual contact within the FWB relationship was significantly associated with satisfaction with sacrifice  $r = .24, p = .003$ .

be aware of the investments they have in these relationships. The interlocking aspects of couple identity and alternative availability are also related to overall FWB relationship functioning. In any event, it is important in future research to understand the nuances of how the commitment develops within FWB relationships and the potential positive and negative outcomes associated with it in this relationship context. Ultimately, we hope that more discussion will occur about how to help young adults develop strong, happy, and satisfying FWB relationships, should they choose to engage in such relationships.

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