

# Perceptions of Partner's Deception in Friends With Benefits Relationships

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Friends-with-benefits relationships combine elements of friendship with sexual intimacy. Using hierarchical regression, the authors examined perceived deception in 310 relationships. In comparison with men, women reported greater deception by their friends-with-benefits partner. Perceived deception was inversely related to awareness of relational risk factors and directly related to anxious attachment, more sexual interactions as compared with friendship interactions in the relationship, and more favorable attitudes toward ambiguous commitment. Awareness of relational risk factors moderated the association between anxious attachment and perceptions of being deceived as awareness of relational risk factors was only negatively associated with perceived deception for those with lower levels of anxious attachment. Last, gender moderated the association between perceptions of being deceived and anxious attachment in that more anxious attachment was related to perceived deception for women, but not men. In particular, anxious attachment did not predict perceptions of deception for men, but greater degrees of anxious attachment for women increased perceptions of deception. Recommendations for assisting young adults to navigate this relational style are offered.

Casual sex relationships have been studied under various labels such as *sex with friends*, *hooking up*, *booty calls*, and *one-night stands* (Jonason, Li, & Cason, 2009; Jonason, Li, & Richardson, 2010; Sullivan & Reynolds, 2003). Sexual attraction between friends is commonplace, with researchers finding 30–68% of individuals reporting some level of sexual attraction or tension in their cross-sex friendships (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Kaplan & Keys, 1997; Reeder, 2000; Sapadin, 1988). Sexual intercourse between two friends is commonly referred to as *friends with benefits* (FWBs), which combines friendship (e.g., mutual support, fellowship, and companionship) with sexual intimacy (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Fielder & Carey, 2009; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Although FWBs relationships mirror some aspects of exclusive romantic relationships, they are unique in that they there are minimal explicit ground rules or ongoing commitment between partners (Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). FWBs relationships are fairly common among young adults (33–60%; Hughes et al., 2005; Owen & Fincham, 2012; Puentes, Knox, & Zusman, 2008), and they are associated with a range of positive outcomes (e.g., favorable

emotional reactions) and negative outcomes (e.g., complicating friendship; Bisson & Levine, 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2012).

To date, few empirical studies have examined the association between psychological and relational factors and reactions to FWBs relationships. Owen and Fincham (2011) found that young adults' negative reactions to their FWBs relationships were associated with psychological distress and constraint commitment (e.g., feeling stuck in the relationship, waiting for the relationship to progress into a committed relationship). The present study continues this line of research by examining predictors of young adults' reactions to FWBs relationships, with a specific focus on perception of deceit by their FWBs partner and psychosocial factors related to these perceptions. Deception in this study was conceptualized as young adults' perception that their FWBs partner was misleading or misrepresented feelings/intentions/actions to continue the sexual aspect of the relationship.

Young adults report that one of the advantages of FWBs relationships is the lack of clearly defined expectations or commitment levels between partners (Bisson & Levine, 2009). As a result, partners in FWBs relationships typically do not set ground rules or discuss the relationship and possible directions or outcomes (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Despite the ambiguity inherent in these relationships, a sizable minority (25–40%) of young adults report hopes or preferences for how they would like their partner to behave and how they wish the relationship would progress, even if these hopes are unspoken (Owen & Fincham, 2012). For example, one partner may have an unspoken hope for the relationship to one day progress into a committed relationship, yet because of the inherent casual nature of the relationship or fear of losing the friendship, they may keep those hopes secret. The other partner may enjoy the impermanent nature of the encounters and may represent themselves as having deeper feelings so as to continue the relationship. Although there may be no explicit expectations or stated commitment, the partner hoping for more may likely feel disappointed or deceived. Consistent with this notion, some young adults report that their FWBs partner misrepresented their intentions (e.g., being more emotionally or relationally invested than they actually were; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Consequently, young adults' reactions to FWBs relationships may vary on the basis of perceptions of their FWBs partner's honesty about his or her intentions.

### Predictors of Perceived Deception in FWBs Relationships

For those who do enter FWBs relationships, the ability to recognize warning signs in relationships (e.g., detecting signs that the relationship is not progressing in a desirable manner) may be a key factor in understanding their FWBs partner's intentions. Given that FWBs relationships are characterized by limited communication about the ground rules for the relationship, there is an increased likelihood that young adults may need to infer their partner's honesty about his or her intentions (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes et al., 2008). The ability to detect whether a FWBs partner is being honest about his or her intentions may vary on the basis of how individuals understand relationship dynamics and make decisions about romantic relationships (i.e., relationship awareness). Relationship decision making theories suggest that some individuals are more likely to slide through the process of a relationship without discussing or thinking about the progression and may be less aware of warning signs in the relationship (Owen, Rhoades, & Stanley, 2010; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). For example, young adults who expressed more thoughtfulness about what they want in a relationship and in a romantic partner were less likely to enter FWBs relationships (Owen & Fincham, 2011). This likely means that for those

who are more aware of healthy relationship dynamics and inclined to make intentional thoughtful relationship decisions, the inherent ambiguity in FWB relationships may not fit their personal preference or comfort with ambiguity.

The lack of clearly defined ground rules and expectations is one of the elements of FWB relationships that can be appealing for some individuals (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Although many people prefer to have a clear sense of direction in a relationship as well as a sense of what actions/feelings are acceptable or undesirable, others report greater affinity for ambiguous commitment preferring to let the relationship take its course, without attempting to define or direct it. Subsequently, those who prefer this type of relational approach may be more accepting of a range of relational outcomes and therefore be less likely to see themselves as having been deceived.

In addition, alcohol use can influence young adults' relational decision-making processes. Alcohol use has been shown to be a robust predictor for engaging in casual sex behaviors, including FWBs relationships (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011; Paul et al., 2000). For example, Owen and Fincham (2012) found alcohol use increased the likelihood of engaging in FWBs relationships, even for those young adults' who reported more thoughtful decisions regarding relationships. Although these associations are reflective of engaging (or not) in FWBs relationships, it is also possible that alcohol use continues to influence young adults' perceptions about the status of their FWBs relationships. That is, young adults' alcohol use may be related to less awareness of healthy relationships thereby impacting perceptions of their FWBs partner's intentions.

In addition, young adults' depressive symptoms have been associated with the negative reactions to FWBs relationships (Owen & Fincham, 2012). The association between negative reactions and depressive symptoms may reflect salient interactions within the FWBs relationship. For example, young adults who perceive their FWB partner's intentions as deceitful may experience diminished psychological well-being and may be at higher risk for depressive symptoms (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). Alternatively, young adults with more depressive symptoms might miss cues that their partner is being deceitful, as depressive symptoms can interfere with cognitive processing (Hartlage, Alloy, Vazquez, & Dykman, 1993).

Young adults' romantic attachment styles may also relate to their perceptions of deception by their FWBs partner. Attachment theory asserts that individuals' internal working models guide their actions, reactions, and needs for interpersonal closeness, security, and intimacy with others (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). Insecure attachment is reflected in two ways: anxious attachment reflects worry about abandonment or need for approval from others, whereas avoidant attachment reflects difficulty in becoming close to others or reluctance to join with others (Wei et al., 2007). Individuals who report more anxious attachment also report more eagerness to be in a committed relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Morgan & Shaver, 1999) as well as to engage in sexual intimacy to reduce insecurities and to form deeper emotional bonds (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Schachner & Shaver, 2004). Moreover, individuals with more anxious attachment report lower efficacy in sexual negotiations (Feeney, Peterson, Gallois, & Terry, 2000). They may subsequently overlook or disregard warning signs or interpret messages from their FWBs partner in a way that alleviates their interpersonal worries and fears. However, over time young adults with more anxious attachment might ultimately perceive their FWBs partner as being deceptive.

Gender has also been found to differentially predict engagement in casual sex as well as reactions to casual sex relationships (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham,

2010). In the past, men more so than women have been found to seek out multiple partners, and, thus, they may have been drawn to casual sex relationships given its diminished commitment constraints (Buss, 1988; Hill, 2002; Impett & Peplau, 2003). Moreover, gender influences expectations within these relationships as women tend to have greater desire for some level of exclusivity or hope that things will progress into a committed romantic relationship as compared to men (Cohen & Shodand, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Grello et al., 2006; Regan & Dreyer, 1999). These underlying desires and hopes, especially when not stated, may increase the possibility that women will feel disappointed or even deceived by a partner who does not share their perspective. Moreover, these expectations regarding casual sex relationships may be expressed via their attachment styles. For example, Gentzler and Kerns (2004) found that women's anxious attachment was related to less adaptive casual sex experiences (e.g., consensual but unwanted casual sex).

Lastly, the nature of FWB relationships vary. In some instances, the interactions may be largely characterized by companionship and elements of friendship, with minimal or occasional sexual intimacies. For others, the relationship may consist primarily of sexual intimacies, with the friendship component prioritized as secondary (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). These differences may equate to differences in expressions, intentions, and ultimately, how individuals feel about the outcome of these relationships. Also, the amount of time since engagement in the relationship may influence perceptions of the relationship and the end of the relationship. For example, individuals who have had ample time to process the relationship, to resolve lingering feelings, and to make meaning of the experience may have perceptions that have changed dramatically since the termination of the relationship. In contrast, those who have recently ended a FWB relationship may have stronger emotional reactions, without the benefit of time to mentally consolidate the experience.

## Hypotheses

The present study sought to identify correlates of perceived deception in young adults' most recent FWB relationship. We posited that perceptions of deception would be negatively associated with perceptions of the relationship quality with their FWB partner (Hypothesis 1a) and relationship awareness (Hypothesis 1b). We also posited that perceptions of deception would be positively associated with perceiver's depressive symptoms (Hypothesis 2a), insecure attachment including anxious and avoidant (Hypothesis 2b and 2c), alcohol use (Hypothesis 2d), ambiguous commitment (Hypothesis 2e), gender (more women than men; Hypothesis 2f), and degree of friends versus sexual benefits in the relationship (Hypothesis 2g).

In addition, we expected the association between perceptions of deception and anxious attachment would be moderated by gender (Hypothesis 3). Last, we posited that anxious attachment would moderate the association between perceived deception and awareness (Hypothesis 4).

## METHOD

### Participants

We initially recruited 1,023 students from a large southeastern university in the United States. Because we were interested in examining those within FWB relationships, we excluded participants

who were in a committed romantic relationship at the time of assessment, partially to control for those FWB relationships that transitioned into a committed relationship. Individuals older than 25 years of age were also excluded because of our focus on young adult sexual relationships. In addition, we excluded 250 participants because they did not report engaging in FWBs relationships within the past 12 months. Participants were provided with a definition of FWB relationships from Owen and Fincham (2011): “Some people say that a friends with benefits is a friendship in which there are also physical encounters, but no on-going committed relationship (e.g., not boyfriend/girlfriend). On the basis of this definition, how many ‘friends with benefits’ relationships did you have over the past 12 months?” Participants then report various types of physical encounters in which they engaged (i.e., kissing, petting, oral sex, or intercourse). The final sample included 310 participants who reported having at least one FWB relationship in the past 12 months. Of the final sample, 90 were men and 220 were women, with a median age of 19 years (range = 17 to 25). The majority of the participants identified as Caucasian (75.2%), 8.4% as African American, 11.6% as Latino/a, 1.6% as Asian American, 0.3% as Native American, and 2.9% as other or did not identify their race/ethnicity. Also, 49% of participants indicated that they were a freshmen, 31% were sophomores, 14.2% were juniors, 4.8% were seniors, and 0.6% did not indicate their year in school.

## Procedure

Participants were recruited through an introductory course on families across the lifespan that fulfills a liberal studies requirement in social sciences and therefore attracts students from across the university. In the fall semester of 2010, students were offered multiple options to obtain extra credit for the class, one of which comprised the survey used in this study. Ninety-eight percent of the class participated in the study. They completed informed consent and were told how to access the online survey. They were given a 5-day window in which to complete the survey. All procedures were approved by the university institutional review board.

## Measures

### *Time Since Most Recent FWBs Relationship*

To control for the varying time since individuals had been involved in their most recent FWBs relationship, we asked participants, “How long ago were you in a friends with benefits relationship with this person?” Nine response options ranged from “less than one week ago” to “3–4 months ago” to “11–12 months ago,” with ascending options in between to indicate number of weeks or months.

### *Ambiguous Commitment Scale*

We used four items of the Ambiguous Commitment Scale (Owen & Fincham, 2011) to assess participants’ preference for ambiguous commitment in a relationship. Example items include the following: “I would rather things be kind of vague about what our relationship is” and “It is important to me to know what this relationship means to us so we have a good sense of its future”

(reverse-coded). The four items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha in our study was .78.

### *Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form*

We used two subscales of the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form (Wei et al., 2007) to assess participants' attachment styles: anxiety and avoidance, each with six items. Participants rated items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*definitely not like me*) to 7 (*definitely like me*). Wei et al. (2007) reported support for the validity for this shortened measure through correlations with psychological well-being, loneliness, fear of intimacy, and comfort with self-disclosure measures. In the present study, Cronbach's alphas for the avoidance and anxiety subscales were .80 and .75, respectively.

### *FWB-Relationship Adjustment*

To assess the relationship functioning of young adults' most recent FWB relationship, we slightly adjusted the wording of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale-4 (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005). Participants rated their most recent FWB relationship, an approach commonly used to gather information and reactions pertaining to a specified relationship rather than one chosen and recalled by the participant (e.g., Owen & Fincham, 2009). For this scale, example items include "How much do you trust this person?" and "In general how often do you think that things between you and your most recent FWB partner are going well?" Response options ranged from 1 (*not at All*) to 5 (*a lot*). Cronbach's alpha for these items was .78.

### *Depressive Symptoms*

To assess participants' psychological distress in the past week, we used the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), which consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*rarely or none of the time, less than 1 day*) to 4 (*most of all of the time, 5-7 days*), with higher scores indicating more distress. The scale is a commonly used measure of depressive symptoms and has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity estimates in numerous studies (see Cole, Rabin, Smith, & Kaufman, 2004). Cronbach's alpha for our sample was .78.

### *Alcohol Use*

We used three items to assess alcohol use. The first question, "Within the last 30 days, on how many days did you have a drink containing alcohol?", was rated on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never drank all 30 days*) to 7 (*20-30 days*). The median number of days drinking was 3-5 days ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ). The second question, "How many drinks containing alcohol did you have on a typical day when you were drinking?", was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*never drank*) to 6 (*10 or more*). The median number of drinks was 3 (*3 or 4 drinks*;  $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). The last question, "How often in the last 30 days did you have five or more drinks on one occasion?", was rated on 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*never happened*) to 9 (*more than 10 times*). The median number of times participants had drunk five or more drinks on one

occasion was 3 ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ). These items are commonly used in measures of alcohol use (e.g., Saunders, Aasland, Babor, Fuente, & Grant, 1993) and in the prediction of casual sex behaviors (e.g., Owen et al., 2010). These items were highly correlated ( $r = .74$  to  $.78$ ), so we created a composite score. Cronbach's alpha in our study was .82.

### *Relationship Awareness Scale*

We used the Relationship Awareness Scale (Owen & Fincham, 2012) to assess participants' view of risk factors in relationships. The scale consists of four subscales with four items per subscale. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The present study used one of these factors—awareness of relationship risk factors (awareness) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ), which assesses individuals' awareness of relationship risk factors (Owen & Fincham, 2012). An example item is "I am able to recognize early on the warning signs in a bad relationship." The awareness subscale has been related to other relationship decision making factors, such as thoughtful relationship decision making and having a clearer long-term vision for relationships (Owen & Fincham, 2012).

### *Friends With Benefits–Partner Deception Scale*

We developed a brief measure of deception in FWB relationships. Participants were asked to respond to items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). A latent class exploratory factor analysis with direct oblim rotation was conducted. We compared a one- and two-factor structure. The results provided contrasting model fit statistics for the one- and two-factor models as the Akaike information criterion for the one- and two-factor solutions were 4,205 and 4,131, respectively, whereas the Bayesian information criterion for 1-Factor and 2-Factor solutions were 4300 and 4248, respectively. For the Akaike information criterion and Bayesian information criterion lower estimates are preferred. Model fit statistics do not always align and provide the same conclusions about which factor solution is advisable (McCoach & Adelson, 2010). Beyond the overall model fit, the factor loadings revealed that all five items demonstrated significant loadings on Factor 1 (i.e., factor loadings above .30). Three items (items 1, 2, and 5; see Table 1) demonstrated significant loading with the second factor, with estimates of .51, .51 to .65, respectively. In summary, we have support for the 1-Factor model via the fit statistics (albeit not unanimous support), all five items adequately fit with Factor-1, and conceptually, a basic level of perception should be able to be measured relatively briefly. As such, we retained the more parsimonious solution, one-factor model (see Table 1).

## RESULTS

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, ranges, and bivariate correlations for the variables in the present study. Because of the number of comparisons, we set an a priori  $p$  value of .01. We anticipated that participants' perceptions of deception would be negatively associated with reported relationship quality (Hypothesis 1a) and relationship awareness (Hypothesis 1b), These hypotheses were confirmed, with results demonstrating significant negative relationships between these variables. We also predicted that perceptions of deception would be positively related to

TABLE 1  
Summary of Factor Analysis for Friends With Benefits Deception Scale

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>
I have had a FWB partner misrepresent his/her feelings to continue the sexual aspect of our relationship.	.38
I have expected a FWB relationship to continue when it was suddenly cut off without explanation.	.33
We had similar expectations about the FWB relationship.	-.65
We had a mutual understanding about the ground rules prior to starting our FWB relationship.	-.60
After entering into our FWB relationship, I felt I had not been told the whole story about his/her true intentions.	.51

*Note.* FWB = Friends With Benefits.

reported depression, insecure attachment, ambiguous commitment, and gender (women more so than men). Positive significant associations were found between perceptions of deception and depression scores, anxious and avoidant attachment, ambiguous commitment, and gender (supporting Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c, 2e, and 2f). However, alcohol use and the degree to which the relationship was reportedly more friendships based (vs. benefits), were not significantly related to perceptions of deception (not supporting Hypothesis 2d, 2g).

To understand these relationships in a multivariate context, a hierarchical regression was performed in which perceived deception served as the dependent variable. In step one, time since the FWB relationship was used as a control variable, in step two depression, ambiguous commitment, awareness, degree of friends versus benefits, and avoidant and anxious attachment were used as predictor variables. In Step 3, we added the interaction effects (see final model in Table 3). Given that power is reduced for interaction terms we retained our  $p$ -value of .05 for these effects. Results for the overall model were significant,  $F(11, 277) = 7.67, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ , indicating that 25% of the variance in perceptions of being deceived was explained by the predictors in the model. Anxious attachment and gender were significant predictors of perceptions of deception, after controlling for the variance in the other predictors. That is, women and individuals with more anxious attachment reported more perceptions of deceptions ( $p < .01$ ). However, these main effects were qualified by significant interaction effects.

Of the three interaction terms, two significantly predicted perceptions of deception. The interaction between anxious attachment and awareness was a significant predictor,  $B = 0.50, SE = .22, p < .05$ . Tests of simple slopes revealed that, for lower levels of anxious attachment, the relationship between awareness and perceptions of being deceived was significant,  $B = -1.11, SE = .38, p < .01$ . However, for young adults who reported more anxious attachment, there was no significant association between awareness and perceived deception,  $B = 0.17, SE = .38, p > .05$  (see Figure 1). As such, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Second, the interaction between anxious attachment and gender was also significant,  $B = -0.99, SE = .45, p < .05$ . Tests of simple slopes revealed that, for men higher or lower levels of anxious attachment did not significantly predict perceptions of being deceived,  $B = 0.30, SE = .50, p > .05$ . However, for women, higher levels of anxious attachment significantly predicted perceptions of deception,  $B = 1.63, SE = .28, p < .01$  (see Figure 2). Thus,



TABLE 2  
Bivariate Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Friends With Benefits-Perceptions of Deception Scale	—										
2. Friends With Benefits-Relationship Adjustment	-.29**	—									
3. Alcohol use	-.01	-.03	—								
4. Avoid attachment	.17**	-.16*	.17*	—							
5. Anxious attachment	.36**	-.15*	-.03	.06	—						
6. Ambiguous	.14*	.03	.23**	.37**	-.02	—					
7. Awareness	-.16**	.15*	-.10	-.07	-.22**	-.12	—				
8. Depressive symptoms	.27**	-.09	-.05	.05	.38**	.11	-.15*	—			
9. Gender	-.14*	.05	.27**	.08	-.10	-.27**	-.04	-.11	—		
10. Degree of friendship	.09	-.18**	.12*	-.01	-.07	.16**	-.09	.06	.16**	—	
11. Time since last friends with benefits relationship	-.05	-.14	-.12	.13	-.04	.01	-.02	-.10	.02	-.06	—
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.02 (1.01)	3.60 (0.93)	3.75 (1.66)	2.93 (1.28)	3.68 (1.23)	3.29 (1.30)	3.53 (0.83)	1.84 (0.49)	—	2.87 (2.64)	4.77 (1.27)
Range	1-7.33	1-5.00	1-7.33	1-7.00	1-7.00	1-7.00	1-4.00	1-4.00	1-5.00	1-5.00	1-10

Gender was coded 1 = men, 0 = women.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3  
Linear Regression Predicting Friends With Benefits–Partner Deception Scale

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Time since last friends with benefits relationship	−0.08	.09	−.48
Step 2			
Gender	−1.53**	.55	−.16
Depressive symptoms	1.00	.52	.11
Alcohol use	−0.05	.15	−.02
Awareness	−0.58	.33	−.11
Ambiguous commitment	0.36	.20	.11
Avoidant attachment	0.38*	.20	.11
Anxious attachment	1.24**	.23	.35
Degree of friendship	0.37*	.19	.11
Step 3			
Anxious Attachment × Awareness	0.50*	.22	.12
Gender × Anxious Attachment	−0.99*	.45	−.14

Note. Gender was coded 1 = men, 0 = women. Only significant interactions appear in the table. Time since last friends with benefits relationship reflects the amount of time passed since the ending of their FWB relationship.

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

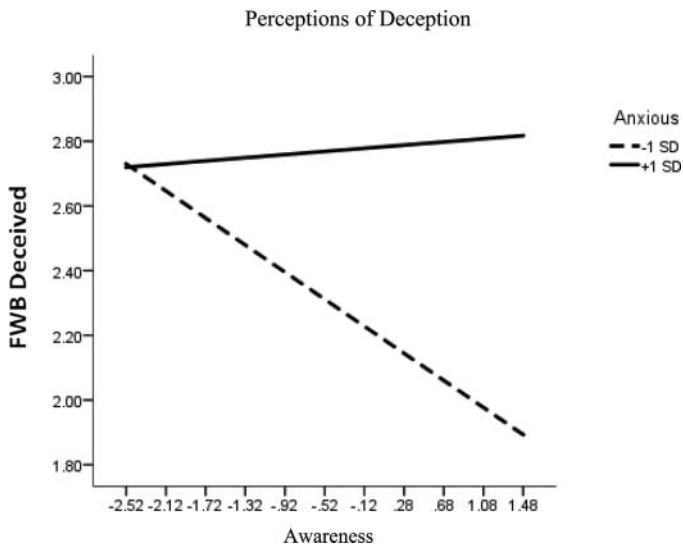


FIGURE 1 Anxious attachment as a moderator for the association between awareness and perceptions of deception. Anxious = Anxious Attachment scores. −1 SD/+1 SD = 1 standard deviation below and above the mean for anxious attachment scores. FWB Deceived = FWB Perceptions of Deception Scale scores. Awareness = RAS, awareness of relational risk factors.

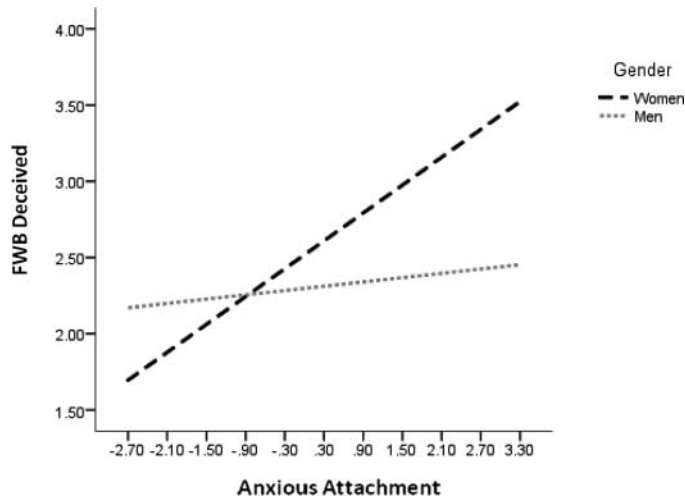


FIGURE 2 Gender as a moderator for the association between anxious attachment and perceptions of deception. Anxious attachment = Anxious Attachment scores. FWB Deceived = FWB Perceptions of Deception Scale scores.

Hypothesis 3 was supported. There was no significant interaction effect for Avoidant attachment and Awareness of relational risk factors predicting Friends With Benefits–Deception Scale and the interaction between gender and awareness were not statically significant ( $p_s > .10$ )

## DISCUSSION

Given the prevalence of FWBs relationships coupled with ambiguous levels of commitment in these relationships, it is important to understand how young adults discern partners' motivations. In particular, we focused on young adults' perception that their FWBs partner was being misleading or misrepresented their feelings/intentions. Attachment styles were a key predictor of young adults' perceptions of deception. For those with greater anxious or avoidant attachment, perceptions of deception were higher as compared to those reporting more secure attachment. It may be that these salient interpersonal motivations preoccupy individuals and cause them to miss cues that the relationship may be progressing in an undesirable direction. Although not predictive in the overall model, awareness of relationship risk factors was related to perceptions of deception at the bivariate level. Consistent with relationship decision making theories (e.g., Stanley et al., 2006), we found that young adults who were more aware of relationship risk factors were less likely to be deceived by their FWBs partner. Therefore, it seems that young adults who had more awareness of relational risk factors were better able to select partners or navigate the FWBs relationship in a way to avoid deception. Future research is needed to understand how the awareness of relational risk factors and perceived deception relates to decisions to select and communicate with FWBs partners.

Interestingly, anxious attachment also affected young adults' awareness of relational risk factors for the likelihood of perceiving deception in their FWBs relationships. Specifically, for young adults who were more anxiously attached, greater awareness of risk factors in relationships was not associated with perceptions of being deceived. Potentially, young adults higher in anxious attachment may experience greater fear of the dissolution of their FWBs relationships and may therefore continue the relationship in spite of clear negative characteristics (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Schachner & Shaver, 2004). Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, we were not able to determine the direction of effects for this relationship. Accordingly, it is also possible that awareness of relationship danger signs and attachment anxiety may have been impacted by the experience of feeling deceived. However, consistent with previous studies of awareness and attachment theory, it would seem those with higher levels of anxious attachment may be less aware of danger signs and more attuned to cues related to perceptions of being deceived (e.g., Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005).

The association between anxious attachment and perceptions of deception was also influenced by gender. Although women reported a greater likelihood of being deceived in FWBs relationships than men (a small-sized effect), the gender interaction with anxious attachment was significant. That is, men's level of anxious attachment was not associated with their perceptions of deception. However, women with more anxious attachment were more likely to report feeling deceived by their most recent FWB partner. It may be that gender socialization plays a role in shaping the relative importance and influence of other factors in these relationships. For example, Collins and Read (1990) found that gender moderated the association between attachment styles and romantic relationship variables in ways consistent with traditional gender roles (i.e., partner's comfort with closeness was more important for anxiously attached women whereas the need for security was more important for men higher in anxious attachment). Further Owen and Fincham (2010) found that women hoped that their FWBs relationships would progress into a committed relationship, more so than men. From this perspective, it makes sense that the ways in which anxious attachment influence perceptions of deception may vary for men and women. For example, women who are more anxiously attached may be more apt to tune into the feelings of being betrayed and may also be more likely to report being deceived. On the other hand, men's anxious attachment may be overshadowed by stereotypic gender roles resulting in less inclination to attend to or express perceptions of deception. Stated otherwise, it may be that men's and women's anxious attachment affects perceptions of deception in different ways. Importantly, it seems that women who are more anxiously attached report greater instances of perceptions of deception and could therefore be at greater risk for negative outcomes (e.g., increased distress or poorer relationship adjustment with FWB partner).

We also examined relationship adjustment with the FWBs partner. As anticipated, perceptions of being deceived were associated with less favorable reports of relationship adjustment. Consistent with this finding, depressive symptoms correlated positively with perceptions of being deceived. Again the cross-sectional nature of the data, does not allow us to draw firm conclusions about the directionality of this finding. Thus, it may be that young adults who felt more deceived by their FWBs partner experienced greater negative reactions resulting in more depressive symptoms and lower relationship adjustment (Owen & Fincham, 2011). Alternatively, young adults who were more depressed may have wanted companionship and subsequently entered a FWBs relationship that did not meet their expectations. Future studies with prospective designs are needed to understand the direction of effects. Nonetheless, what is clear is that young adults'

perceptions of deception with their FWBs partner either contributes to their psychological distress or young adults who were more distressed and engaged in FWBs relationships felt deceived by the partner.

### Limitations and Implications

The merits of the present study should be understood within its methodological limitations. The correlational design limits our ability to confidently draw conclusions about the directionality of the relationships discussed. Also, the use of university students as participants limits our ability to generalize results to the greater population, especially those young adults who do not attend college. In addition, our sample comprised 71% women and thus overrepresented in the sample relative to the university population (57% are female students). Thus, future research would be wise to explore psychological and relational variables connected to FWBs deception with a more representative sample of young adults, both with regard to nonstudent populations and a more balanced gender ratio. In addition, gaining the perspective of both FWB partners would bolster the identified correlations and would allow much more balanced understanding of deception in FWB relationships. To our knowledge, no studies have addressed this issue, and some of the inherent emotional distance and lack of investment within FWB makes this type of data difficult to collect. Last, it is impossible to know whether individuals were truly deceived or whether they simply perceived deceptive intentions or actions on behalf of their FWBs partner. However, regardless of how accurate individuals were in responding, Friends With Benefits–Perceptions of Deception Scale scores exhibited significant correlations and interactions that are important in the continued understanding of this relational style.

Despite its limitations, the present study expands current understanding of the continually evolving FWBs relational style. Psychological and relational consequences are complex, leading some young adults to feel deceived while others feel more positively (Owen & Fincham, 2011). There are various avenues to assisting young adults successfully navigate the FWB relationships process as relationship education interventions have been developed for this population (Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2011). On the basis of the findings of the present study, young adults who decide to enter a FWBs relationship may benefit from having a good sense of relational risk factors, such as being aware of consistent and clear messages from their partner about their intentions for the future. For young adults who are more anxiously attached, it may be important to focus not only on awareness of relationship danger signs, but also help them bolster their self-confidence, self-assurance, and security. In bolstering these psychological dynamics, young adults who are more highly anxious avoid potentially upsetting FWBs relationships outcomes. In addition, we suggest that young adults explore their expectations and desires to enter ambiguously committed FWBs relationships to adequately prepare them for diverse possible outcomes. For example, young adults who reported more favorable attitudes about ambiguous commitment in their romantic relationship reported better relationship adjustment, regardless of the perceived deceit by their FWBs partner. It is clear that there is more to be understood about the dynamics of FWBs relationships, but how young adults navigate this relational style may have important consequences for their psychological well-being and the future of those friendships.

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