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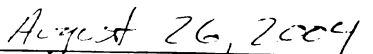
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**“HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO”: NEGOTIATING A  
FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS RELATIONSHIP**

**By**

**Melissa A. Bisson**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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## ABSTRACT

### “HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO”: NEGOTIATING A FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS RELATIONSHIP

By

Melissa A. Bisson

Evidence exists of a new type of relationship known as “friends with benefits.” Friends with benefits are two people who are otherwise just friends but have sex. Friends with benefits fit neither the traditional definition of a friendship nor a romantic relationship. A conceptual framework was developed for “friends with benefits” relationships. Study one (N = 125) investigated the prevalence of these relationships, how sex can complicate a friendship, and why individuals engage in this relationship using an open-end questionnaire. The results indicated that a majority of individuals (60.0%) have had this type of relationship, that sex complicates friendships by bringing forth desires for commitment, and that these relationships are desirable because they incorporate trust and comfort while avoiding romantic commitment. A second study was conducted to determine what relational negotiation strategies are used by participants in these relationships. A sample of 90 undergraduate students who had a friends with benefits relationship responded to a questionnaire investigating relational negotiation in these relationships. The results indicated that people in friends with benefits relationships most often avoid relational negotiation. These results are discussed along with limitations and conclusions.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Common to literatures spanning several disciplines is an accepted distinction between friendships and romantic relationships (e.g., Davis & Todd, 1985; Fehr, 1996; Brogan, 2002). Recently, however, evidence of a new type of relationship has been obtained that neither fits the traditional definition of a friendship nor a romantic relationship, yet has characteristics of both. This unique relationship has become known as a “friends with benefits” relationship.

Mongeau, Ramirez, and Vorell (2003) describe the nature of friends with benefits relationships as “attempt[ing] to combine the communicative and psychological intimacy (i.e., warmth and closeness) of a friendship with the sexual intimacy of a romantic relationship while at the same time eschewing the ‘romantic’ label” (Mongeau et al., 2003, p. 3). People in friends with benefits relationships opt to engage in sexual activity with a friend as opposed to a “hook-up” characterized by “a sexual encounter between two people who are brief acquaintances or strangers, usually lasting only one night without the expectation of developing a relationship” (Paul, McManus & Hayes, 2000; Paul & Hayes, 2002) or beginning a romantic relationship. This unique relational type is a category all its own and challenges the previous conceptual definitions of friends and romantic partners and the distinction between the two. Labeling this new type of relationship a friendship is consistent with the fact that these individuals are not romantically committed and do not share a romantic love for one another. But, consistent with romantic relationships, these people engage in repeated sexual activity, which has traditionally been linked to a romantic relationship.

Although friends with benefits relationships are apparently widespread and recent research has investigated this phenomenon (Mongeau et al., 2003), the existing research concentrates on initial exploratory issues of the nature of friends with benefits and its prevalence. Mongeau et al. (2003) call for future research to provide a more detailed description and explanation of the nature, birth, life, and death of friends with benefits relationships.

Given that sexual activity is typically unexpected in friendships (Werking, 1997), this can create a considerable amount of uncertainty about the relationship state (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998), and having a sexual relationship can complicate friendships (Sapadin, 1988). Why some people chose to engage in sexual activity with a friend will be explored to determine why individuals prefer to engage in a friends with benefits relationship as opposed to beginning a romantic relationship. Further, little is known about how these potential complications affect relationship dynamics and communication patterns. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate how individuals negotiate friends with benefits relationships.

Toward this end, a conceptual framework is developed and conceptual definitions of “friendship”, “romantic relationship”, and “friends with benefits” are first provided. Second, the existing research on friends with benefits relationships is reviewed. Third, the paper will investigate how sex can complicate a friendship and determine why individuals chose to engage in a friends with benefits relationship as opposed to a romantic relationship or hook-up with a stranger. Data investigating these issues is reported from the first study. Finally, a second study determines what relational negotiation strategies are used by participants in these relationships.

### *Definition Issues*

Some definitions of friendship do not clearly identify the boundaries between friendships and romantic relationships. For example, Sapadin (1988) describes a friend as someone whom we are intimate, someone we trust, depend on, care for, and are close to, is accepting, sharing, and one whom we enjoy. In another example, “friends are described as providing encouragement, emotional support, empathy, and bolstering one’s self-concept, all of which made possible by an underlying sense of trust, loyalty, and commitment” (deVries, 1996, p. 252). Thus, friendship is built on trust, support, commitment (decisions to devote oneself to a relationship and work to maintain it), acceptance, engaging in shared activities and depending on one another. However, romantic relationships also exhibit these qualities. Thus, according to these definitions, “friendship” could easily be substituted for “romantic relationship” or even “family.” Therefore, definitions such as these do not distinguish between types of relationships.

More typically, however, definitions of a friendship explicitly exclude “romantic love” and “sexual desire” to differentiate friendships from romantic relationships. For example, friends have a liking for one another and lovers love one another (Brehm, Miller, Perlman & Campbell, 2002), friendships involve an “attraction of the spirit and not the body” (Werking, 1997, p. 30) and friendship is a “non-sexual relationship of two people, based upon shared experience and characterized by mutual personal regard, understanding, and loyalty” (Armstrong, 1985, p. 212). These definitions specify that friends are not sexually intimate. As Werking (1997) asserts, “sexual activity in a friendship signals the end of the ‘friendship’ and the beginning of a love relationship

since romance and sexuality are so closely aligned in romantic ideology” (Werking, 1997, p. 30).

Another aspect to consider in the definition of friendship and romantic relationship is exclusivity. According to Brehm et al. (2002), romantic relationships, as opposed to friendships, involve a fascination with one’s partner and a desire for exclusiveness (Brehm et al., 2002). However, exclusivity is a central component of best friend relationships in that they choose to be exclusive with one another in relation to other friends (Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1999). Nevertheless, exclusivity is a criterion that often separates friends from romantic partners.

In sum, friendships and romantic relationships are more similar than different (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Both types of relationships involve interdependence, trust, enjoyment of the other’s company, engaging in shared activities, and mutual acceptance. Exclusivity, romantic love, and sexual desire and activity distinguish the two types of relationships according to some scholars, but these criteria are not universally accepted or universally applicable.

One limitation in all the definitions reviewed thus far is a tendency to use criteria that define these terms as categorical rather than as varying in degrees. Taking into account both gradations in relational constructs and people’s own understanding of the qualities of their relationships might allow for a more flexible conceptual approach conclusive for understanding a non-traditional relationship type like friends with benefits. Sternberg’s (1986, 1987) triangle theory of love offers this type of flexibility.



### *Sternberg's Triangle Theory of Love*

Sternberg (1986, 1987) proposed three building blocks which determine different types of love and that are useful in distinguishing some types of relationships from others. These building blocks are intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy includes the feelings of warmth, understanding, communication, support, and sharing. Passion is characterized by physical arousal and desire. Finally, commitment includes decisions to devote oneself to a relationship and the desire to maintain it. Moreover, these three categories can be further described as the emotional (intimacy), physical (passion) and cognitive (commitment) elements that form a loving relationship.

In Sternberg's theory, intimacy, passion, and commitment are each one side of a triangle that describes the love individuals can share. These sides of the triangle range in intensity and this can be visually depicted by varying the length of each side of a triangle. Thus, with all these high and low combinations of the three building blocks, various triangles are formed. Figure 1 demonstrates a few examples.

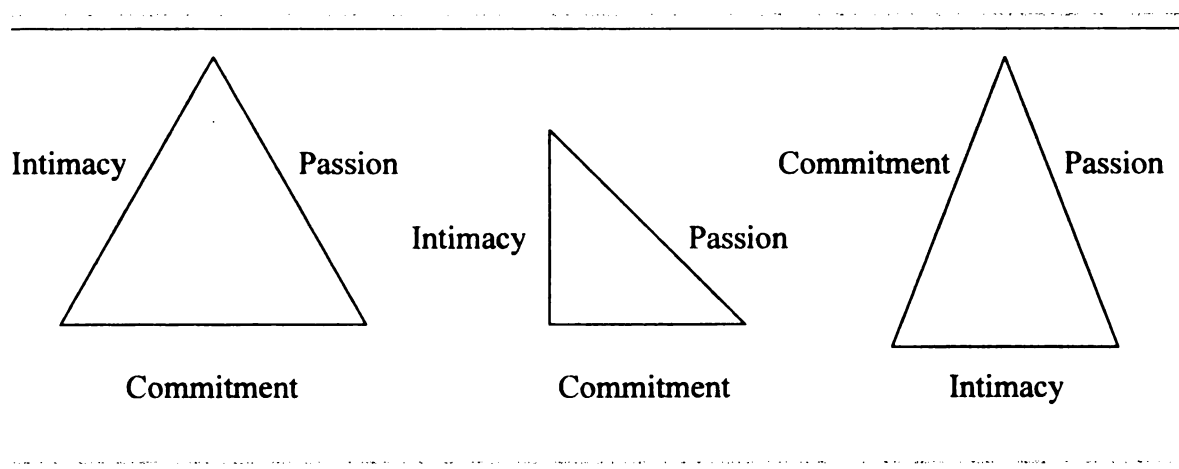


Figure 1

### Select Examples of Sternberg's Triangles of Love

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According to Sternberg's theory, relationships differ based on the level of intensity of intimacy, passion, and commitment. The first triangle in the above example displays equal intensities of intimacy, passion, and commitment. The sides of the second and third triangles are not equal. The second triangle (or relationship) has a greater intensity of passion as compared to intimacy and commitment. The third triangle displays intensified levels of passion and commitment in relation to intimacy. Hence, these three triangles represent different relationships from each other. As these intensities change, a total of eight different relationships are formed. Table 1 contains a listing of these eight types of love in relation to the level of intensity of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Table 1

Sternberg's Types of Love

	<i>Building Blocks</i>		
	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment
<i>Type of Love</i>			
Non-love	Low	Low	Low
Liking	High	Low	Low
Infatuated love	Low	High	Low
Empty love	Low	Low	High
Romantic love	High	High	Low
Companionate love	High	Low	High
Fatuous love	Low	High	High
Consummate love	High	High	High

Sternberg does not categorically differentiate friendships from romantic relationships, but rather, he differentiates the two by the intensity of these three characteristics. The building blocks of intimacy, passion, and commitment can exist in varying degrees in relationships, and some degree of one does not entail some degree of

another. Romantic relationships typically differ from a friendship in the level of these building blocks, especially passion and commitment. If select characteristics of a romantic relationship (i.e., interdependency, commitment, trust, sexual activity, exclusivity, and love) were placed into a friendship with lower intensity, this relationship, according to Sternberg, would be a friendship. On the contrary, if these characteristics were placed into a friendship with high intensity, this friendship would be a romantic relationship.

Friends with benefits relationships are a hybrid of friendships and romantic relationships. Using Sternberg's Triangle Theory of Love as an aid, a traditional friendship is a relationship comprised of moderate to high intensity levels of intimacy and low intensity levels of commitment and passion with an overriding aspiration for a companion. Alternatively, a romantic relationship is a relationship comprised of moderate to high intensity levels of intimacy, commitment, and passion or the desire for, utilizing passion as a means of expressing physical and emotional affection. Friends with benefits relationships have levels of passion consistent with romantic relationships, but lack the romantic commitment typical of romantic relationships.

### *Conceptual Definition of Sex*

Friends with benefits relationships are comprised of two major terms: "friends" and "with benefits." The benefits refer to the sexual activity that occurs in an otherwise platonic friendship. However, a lack of empirical data on how Americans as a population define what constitutes as having "had sex" and what counts as engaging in sexual activity is still a current public debate (Sanders & Reinisch, 1999). Determining which

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behaviors individuals consider as having “had sex” is important because sex is an essential element in defining a friends with benefits relationship.

Sanders and Reinisch (1999) show that individual attitudes vary regarding behaviors defined as having “had sex.” More than half (59%) of respondents indicated that oral-genital contact did not constitute having “had sex” with a partner. Few (19%) responded similarly regarding penile-anal intercourse. These findings support the view that Americans hold widely divergent opinions about what behaviors do and do not constitute as having “had sex.” For the scope of this research, “had sex” and sexual activity will be defined as including genital touching, oral intercourse, penile-vaginal, and penile-anal intercourse. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that what counts as a friends with benefits relationship depends on the definition of having sex.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Friends with Benefits*

Friends with benefits relationships were defined as “cross-sex friends in an otherwise platonic friendship (i.e., not defined as dating or romantic relationships) engage in some degree of sexual intimacy on repeated occasions” (Mongeau, et al., 2003, p. 3). Research has found that a considerable percentage of university students are engaging in sexual activity with a friend (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Mongeau, et al., 2003; Reeder, 2000). Afifi and Faulkner (2000), for example, report that fifty-one percent of their college student sample reported having had sex with a cross-sex friend with whom they had no intentions of dating at the time of the sexual activity. Moreover, thirty-four percent of the participants reported engaging in sexual activity on multiple occasions with the same friend. “In other words, for one-third of individuals, having sex in cross-sex friendships was more than a one-time ‘experiment’” (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000, p. 217). Also reporting substantial levels of prevalence, Mongeau et al. (2003) found that over half (61.7%) of their college student sample in Ohio had engaged in a friends with benefits relationship and nearly half (48.5%) did so in Arizona.

In addition, Mongeau et al. (2003) found the average length of time friends knew each other before having sex was 3 months. Of the friends with benefits relationships that ended, it was reported that the lack of continuance was a result of distance (participant moved back home or vacation was over), relational issues (relationship evolved into a romantic one, individual found a romantic partner, ended the sexual relationship to save the friendship, or one wanted more out of the relationship than the other) and emotional issues (boredom or relationship was getting “old”). Finally, Mongeau et al. (2003)

concluded that attitudes toward friends with benefits relationships differed depending on participant experience with the relationship. If the participant had a positive experience, friends with benefits relationships were viewed in a more positive manner than those who had a negative experience with them.

#### *A Refined Definition of Friends with Benefits*

As stated earlier, friends with benefits relationships have been defined as “cross-sex friends in an otherwise platonic friendship (i.e., not defined as dating or romantic relationships) engage in some degree of sexual intimacy on repeated occasions” (Mongeau, et al., 2003, p. 3). This definition could be improved. First, friends with benefits relationships need not be cross-sex. Second, the “some degree of sexual activity” is ambiguous and can be specified more precisely and redefined based on results of study 1, reported later in this paper. Finally, from the current author’s perspective, the sexual activity need not take place on repeated occasions. Granted, in order for a relationship to exist there needs to be an ongoing state of being interrelated. Therefore, if these individuals only had one sexual encounter, this may not be an adequate example of a friends with benefits relationship, per se, but it does meet the criteria of friends having sex. Therefore, engaging in one sexual encounter with a friend may be a special kind of friends with benefits relationship. With these provisions, a refined definition is proposed. Friends with benefits relationships are defined as friends in an otherwise platonic friendship (i.e., not defined as dating or romantic relationships) who engage in sexual intimacy consisting of genital touching, oral intercourse, penile-vaginal, and/or penile-anal intercourse.



According to this definition, once friends engage in sex the relationship has evolved into a different relationship to the one previously held. The impact sexual activity has in these friendships becomes important in determining how to negotiate this relationship. Before relational negotiation strategies of friends with benefits relationships can be discussed, the impact sexual activity has on these friendships will be examined.

### *Impact Sexual Activity has on Friendships*

Pogrebin (1987) found that no pair of 150 cross-sex friends had mixed sex and friendship successfully. Consistent with this, a majority (79%) of Sapadin's (1988) respondents claimed, "having a sexual relationship complicates friendships" (p. 396). However, just how sex complicates a friendship has yet to be determined. In order to establish adequate relational negotiation strategies to a friends with benefits relationship, the foundation must be set to determine how sex complicates these friendships.

The contention that sexual activity makes friendships more complicated, difficult to manage, and creates increased pressure for involvement has been briefly addressed in few studies (e.g., Pogrebin, 1987; Sapadin, 1988; Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Reeder, 2000). Moreover, several studies have focused on general attitudes regarding casual premarital sex (e.g., Hunt, 1974; Sprecher, McKinney & Orbuch, 1987; Oliver & Hyde, 1993), sex with multiple partners (Gentry, 1998), and sexual satisfaction among dating couples (Byers, Demmons & Lawrance, 1998). Nevertheless, no research, to the author's knowledge, has sought to determine why individuals choose to engage in casual sex with a friend and precisely how friendships become more complicated. Moreover, if sex does complicate a friendship, what are the advantages of adding sex to a friendship and why would individuals choose to do so? These questions are really perceptions and based on

only one member of a dyad. With this in mind, the lack of empirical work in these areas justifies the following research questions pertaining to the perception:

**RQ1: How does having sex with a friend complicate the friendship?**

**RQ2: What are the advantages (if any) of a friends with benefits relationship?**

**RQ3: What are the disadvantages (if any) of a friends with benefits relationship?**

**RQ4: Why do individuals engage in friends with benefits relationships?**

**RQ5: Why do individuals choose not to engage in friends with benefits relationships?**

These five questions were addressed in study 1. This study also sought to replicate the results of Afifi & Faulkner (2000) and Mongeau et al. (2003).

## CHAPTER 3: STUDY 1

### Method

#### *Participants*

One hundred twenty-five undergraduates (65 females and 60 males) from communication courses at a large Mid-western university participated in the study. The sample was almost evenly split between the sexes (52% female and 48% male). The participants ranged in age from 17 to 40 ( $M = 20.26$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ). All participants received extra credit or course credit, depending on the instructor's wishes, in exchange for their participation.

#### *Procedure*

Upon arrival to the study, participants were informed that the research involved opinions regarding friends with benefits relationships and past or current involvement with them. The participants were then told their responses were to be as open and honest as possible taking into account the personal and possibly embarrassing nature of the topic and that the questionnaire would take approximately twenty minutes. After defining a friends with benefits relationship to the participants, which also was stated on the questionnaire as "friends who have sex", they completed a self-report survey containing open and closed-ended questions after they provided written consent (see Appendix A for consent form).

#### *Measures*

Participants were provided with a definition of friends with benefits, asked if they thought people could have sex while being just friends, and if they were currently in a friends with benefits relationship. Friends with benefits were defined as "when people

who are ‘just friends’ have sex.” Following those responses were specific questions to be completed by those who answered “yes” to engaging in a friends with benefits relationship. If a participant had never had this type of relationship, instructions were to complete the demographic information and the open-ended section of the questionnaire (to be discussed later). If participants had a friends with benefits relationship(s), questions ranged from inquiring the frequency of the sexual activity, what type of sex occurred in this relationship, the outcome of this/these relationship(s) and the sex of the partner. Finally, demographic questions were completed regarding the participant’s sex and age.

The back side of the questionnaire required all participants to respond to open-ended questions inquiring the major benefits (if any) of a friends with benefits relationship, the disadvantages (if any), why the participant believed individuals engage in these relationships, and why the participant believed individuals do not (see Appendix B for questionnaire).

### *Analysis*

Two trained coders independently coded all responses. Intercooder reliability was determined by the percentage of agreement and Cohen’s kappa was calculated for each question category. The intercooder reliabilities were adequate, with a mean percentage of raw agreement equal to 91% and a mean kappa of .84. Any disagreements were resolved by discussion and post-resolution data are reported. Results were analyzed on SPSS for Windows.

### **Results**

Determining if people can have sex and remain friends was crucial. If a majority of participants indicated that people cannot be “just friends” after having sex, then a

friends with benefits relationship could not exist. With two participants leaving this question blank, results indicated that over half (61.8%, or 76 participants) believe one can be “just friends” after having sex regardless if the participant had been involved in this type of relationship (42 males, 34 females).

All participants were asked if they had ever had sex with someone whom they considered “just a friend.” A majority (60.0%, or 75 participants) have had a friends with benefits relationship at some point in their life (40 males, 35 females).

Of the participants that had a friends with benefits relationship (75 participants), a majority (80.0%, or 60 participants) believe one can be just friends after having sex (34 males, 26 females), while few (18.9%, or 14 participants) say no (5 males, 9 females), with one participant leaving this question blank. Similarly, of the participants that have not had a friends with benefits relationship (50 participants), a majority (67.3%, or 33 participants) believe one cannot be just friends after having sex (12 males, 21 females), while few (28.6%, or 14 participants) say yes (7 males, 7 females), with one participant leaving this question blank.

The next question asked whether or not the participant was currently in a friends with benefits relationship. Of the 75 participants who stated they had been in this type of relationship, over one-third (36.0%, or 27 participants) were currently engaging in sex with “just a friend” (17 males, 10 females).

Of the individuals who had a friends with benefits relationship, the next item of information revealed was the frequency of the sexual activity. The options were to indicate the frequency of sexual activity in all the friends with benefits relationships they have engaged in regardless if it was one relationship or many. Results indicated that

relatively few people (18.7%, or 14 participants) who had a friends with benefits relationship had sex only once with their friend(s). A little more than half (54.7%, or 41 participants) had sex occasionally with their friend(s) and slightly less than one-third (29.3%, or 22 participants) had an ongoing sexual relationship with a friend(s). In sum, over two-thirds of individuals who have/had a friends with benefits relationship are/were engaging in sex on multiple occasions.

Participants indicated the type of sex they had in their friends with benefits relationship(s). Results revealed 3 participants identified open mouth to mouth kissing as the only “sex” engaged in. However, these individuals were not classified as having a friends with benefits relationship and were not used in the percentages reported above. Two participants (2.7%) engaged in oral sex only, 1 participant (1.3%) engaged in touching genitals only, 17 participants (22.7%) only had sexual intercourse, 6 participants (8.0%) engaged in all BUT sexual intercourse, 42 participants (56.0%) had all four sexual acts in their friends with benefits relationship(s), and the other 7 participants (9.3%) had some other combination of these factors.

Participants were asked to indicate the sex of their friends with benefits partner(s). Almost all (98.7%, or 74 participants) had sex with an opposite-sex friend and (1.3%, or 1 participant) indicated involvement with a same-sex friend. None of the participants indicated having friends with benefits relationships with both same and opposite sex friends.

The outcomes of these relationships were assessed. Of the possible outcomes, individuals could select any of four choices. Nearly one-third of participants (30.7%, or 23 participants) remained friends with benefits with their current partner. Additionally,

over one-third (38.7%, or 29 participants) remained friends, but no longer have sex. A small percentage (10.7%, or 8 participants) stated the relationship evolved into a romantic one. Lastly, almost one-third indicated they no longer had any type of relationship with this person (28.0%, or 21 participants). It was not uncommon for participants to indicate more than one outcome since multiple friends with benefits relationships occurred (therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%).

To code the open-ended responses, coders read all responses and identified characteristics that emerged. Distinguishable grouping characteristics focused on the individual (e.g., physical, emotional, and psychological), the couple (e.g., friendship), and third parties (e.g., society). The coders applied these characteristics to form categories for each open-ended response and added or removed distinct categories as they pertained to a particular question.

Of the responses, an overriding theme of advantages to engaging in a friends with benefits relationship was that no commitment or no strings attached was involved. Another related and prevalent response was that one could have sex. With one participant leaving this question blank, responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *no responsibility* (“no commitment/accountability/strings” and “don’t have to care about them”) at 35.6% responding, *physical* (“get to have sex”) at 33.2%, *comfort* (“it’s someone you know/trust/are comfortable with” and “they will be there for you”) at 12.5%, *social* (“you can still be single”) at 6.3%, *none* (“there are no advantages”) at 5.3%, *couple/partner* (“relationship could become serious” and “friendship may strengthen”) at 4.3%, *other* (“no teasing”, “helps if you are lonely”, “it is cheap”, and “you’ll never break-up”) at 1.9%, and the last category as *emotional* (“ego boost” and

“gain confidence as an attractive person”) at .01%. The majority of responses came from the no responsibility category while the least responses came from the emotional category.

It was not uncommon for participants to indicate more than one advantage (therefore the frequencies do not add up to the total number of participants for this research question nor the others that follow). Because of this, each coding category was treated as a separate variable and counted as present or not present. Cohen’s kappa was calculated on SPSS for Windows for each variable and averaged among them to determine the overall kappa for the category in this question and the others that follow. Table 2 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .83$ .

Table 2

Advantages of a Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 124)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Advantage Category</i>				
No Responsibility	74	59.7%	35.6%	.87
Physical	69	55.6%	33.2%	.95
Comfort	26	21.0%	12.5%	.93
Social	13	10.5%	6.3%	.80
None	11	8.9%	5.3%	1.0
Couple/Partner	9	7.3%	4.3%	.88
Other	4	3.2%	1.9%	.20
Emotional	2	1.6%	.01%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

A variety of responses were given to the question of why one may choose to engage in friends with benefits relationships. An overriding theme was that no



commitment or no strings attached was involved. Another related and prevalent response was that one can have sex. With one participant leaving this question blank, responses were categorized and percentages calculated for the motivation categories for *no responsibility* (“no commitment/accountability/strings” and “don’t have to care about them”) at 31.1% responding, *physical* (“get to have sex”) at 30.2%, *opportunity* (“convenient”, “have friends that are into it”, and “not currently in a committed relationship”) at 10.6%, *comfort* (“someone you know/trust/ are comfortable with”) at 8.5%, *couple/partner* (“one or both have feelings for the other” and “to get closer to your friend”) at 5.5%, *emotional* (“gain confidence” and “ego boost”) at 5.1%, *other* (“more fun”, “good practice to get better at sex”, and “sounds like a good idea”) at 3.4%, *outside factors* (“alcohol”, “experimenting”, “lonely”, and “a spur of the moment”) at 3.0%, and the last category as *social* (“society tells us to feel good”, “it’s the thing to do in college”, “become a player”, and “don’t want to be alone”) at 2.5%. The majority of responses came from the no responsibility category while the least responses came from the social category. Table 3 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .78$ .

Table 3

Reasons to Engage in a Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 124)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Motivation Category</i>				
No Responsibility	73	58.9%	31.1%	.90
Physical	71	57.3%	30.2%	.92
Opportunity	25	20.2%	10.6%	.71
Comfort	20	16.1%	8.5%	.92
Couple/Partner	13	10.5%	5.5%	.80
Emotional	12	9.7%	5.1%	.69
Other	8	6.5%	3.4%	.15
Outside Factors	7	5.6%	3.0%	1.0
Social	6	4.8%	2.5%	.91

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

An overwhelming reported disadvantage of a friends with benefits relationship is that one person could develop feelings for the other and this may not be reciprocated. Another frequently related response was the potential loss of the friendship. With one participant's response not included, responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *couple/partner* ("feelings develop for the other and it may not be reciprocated", "you get to know your friend too well", "difficult break-up", "can become serious", "puts stress on the friendship", and "gets weird/complicated") at 42.2% responding, *friendship* ("lose a friend" and "ruins friendship") at 18.3%, *emotional* ("hostility and jealousy", "hurt feelings", "loss of self-esteem", and "could feel used") at 17.8%, *no responsibility* ("you don't get to be in a romantic relationship" and "sex is meaningless") at 8.4%, *physical* ("pregnancy" and "AIDS/STD") at 6.3%, *other* ("you might not be the only friend with benefits") at 3.1%, *social* ("become a player", "people

gossip”, and “other friends would be disgusted”) at 2.6%, and the last category as *none* (“no disadvantages”) at 1.0%. The majority of responses came from the couple/partner category while the least responses came from the none category. Table 4 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .91$ .

Table 4

Disadvantages of a Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 124)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Disadvantage Category</i>				
Couple/partner	81	65.3%	42.4%	.85
Friendship	35	28.2%	18.3%	.92
Emotional	34	27.4%	17.8%	.86
No Responsibility	16	12.9%	8.4%	.88
Physical	12	9.7%	6.3%	.95
Other	6	4.8%	3.1%	.83
Social	5	4.0%	2.6%	1.0
None	2	1.6%	1.0%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

A variety of responses were given to the question of why one may not engage in these relationships. An overriding theme was the desire to share sex with someone that you have feelings for and that person reciprocates that feeling. Another related and prevalent response was that they do not want to lose the friendship. Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for the motivation categories for *responsibility* (“want to share intimacy with someone who feels the same way”, “not that kind of person”, “want to keep friends and lovers separate”, and “want a committed relationship”) at 25.6% responding, *friendship* (“don’t want to lose friend” and “don’t

want to ruin friendship”) at 20.0%, *couple/partner* (“don’t want to lose respect for the other”, “don’t want one to develop romantic feelings”, “don’t want to get attached”, and “don’t want to make things complicated/weird/awkward”) at 17.8%, *social* (“morality” and “religious”) at 16.7%, *emotional* (“don’t want hurt feelings” and “don’t want to feel used”) at 5.6%, *physical* (“risk of pregnancy/AIDS/STD”, “not attracted to friends”, and “don’t want to have sex”) at 5.0%, *opportunity* (“don’t have friends that are into that”, “situation never came up”, “don’t have the guts to put the moves on my friends”, and “one is in a romantic relationship”) at 4.4%, *other* (“they’re smart”) at 2.8%, and the last category as *psychological* (“not mature enough to handle this type of relationship”, “can’t see the consequences”, and “can’t separate friends and lovers”) at 2.2%. The majority of responses came from the responsibility category while the least mentioned responses came from the psychological category. Table 5 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .83$ .

Table 5

Reasons Not to Engage in a Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 125)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Motivation Category</i>				
Responsibility	46	36.8%	25.6%	.90
Friendship	36	28.8%	20.0%	.94
Couple/partner	32	25.6%	17.8%	.69
Social	30	24.0%	16.7%	.96
Emotional	10	8.0%	5.6%	.80
Physical	9	7.2%	5.0%	.88
Opportunity	8	6.4%	4.4%	.94
Other	5	4.0%	2.8%	.56
Psychological	4	3.2%	2.2%	.79

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

### *Summary of Results*

Over half of participants believe one can be “just friends” after having sex regardless of whether or not the participant had been involved in this type of relationship. Of the participants that had a friends with benefits relationship, a majority believe one can be just friends after having sex, while a majority of participants that have not had a friends with benefits relationship believe one cannot be just friends after having sex. A majority of participants have also had a friends with benefits relationship at some point in their life.

Of the 78 participants who stated they had been in this type of relationship, nearly one-third were currently engaging in sex with “just a friend.” Over two-thirds of individuals who have/had a friends with benefits relationship are/were engaging in sex on multiple occasions. Slightly over half of the participants had all four sexual acts in their friends with benefits relationship(s). Assessing the outcome once the sexual activity ends, roughly one-third remained friends and no longer have sex, and another one-third no longer had any type of relationship with this person.

RQ1 inquired about how having sex with a friend complicates the friendship. Findings report that sex complicates friendships by bringing forth desires for commitment.

RQ2 sought what the advantages were (if any) of a friends with benefits relationship. An overriding theme as an advantage to engaging in a friends with benefits relationship was to have sex with no commitment.

RQ3 sought to determine what the disadvantages were (if any) of a friends with benefits relationship. A disadvantage of a friends with benefits relationship is that one

person could fall in love or have feelings for the other while the other just wants to remain friends.

RQ4 inquired about why individuals would choose to engage in friends with benefits relationships. On average, a response as to why one may choose to engage in this type of relationship comes from being able to have sex with no commitment.

RQ5 sought to determine why individuals would not choose to engage in friends with benefits relationships. On average, a response as to why one may not engage in this type of relationship comes from the inability to experience commitment in these relationships when a committed romantic relationship is desired for sexual activity to occur.

## Discussion

According to study 1, a friends with benefits relationship is begun to enable the individuals to have “sex without meaning” with someone they know, trust and feel comfortable with. However, from the current author’s perspective, “sex without meaning” is not what romantic partners do. Romantic partners engage in sexual activity not only for the pleasure, but to express physical and emotional feelings for one another (cf., Hill & Preston, 1996). Therefore, the same sexual activity is not the same in both relationships, so friends with benefits may not be a hybrid between the two types of relationships initially. Consistent with this, an overwhelming majority of participants indicated the disadvantage of a friends with benefits relationship is that one person usually becomes attached and if the other does not feel the same, feelings become hurt. Initially the intent was to have “sex without meaning” but as the relationship continues, the sex becomes “sex with meaning” that can be linked to a romantic relationship. This

finding, too, suggests that friends with benefits relationships are different from romantic relationships.

One of the primary goals for this paper was to determine if and how sex can complicate a friendship. Findings from study 1 provide some answers to this question. First, sex can complicate a friendship by acting as a catalysis for romantic feelings brought forth by either one or both participants since some people regard sex as a romantic activity. Sex therefore causes hurt feelings if one partner does not feel the same. The “weirdness” or “awkwardness” could be accounted for by these hurt feelings. Further, since the most common reason for having a friends with benefits relationship is to avoid the commitment that is usually identified by a romantic relationship, moving in that direction would defeat the purpose. Second, some participants stated it was difficult to separate a friends with benefits partner from a lover and this caused confusion.

The question regarding why individuals chose to begin a friends with benefits relationship as opposed to a romantic relationship or hook-up with a stranger was also answered. Regarding the preference of engaging in sex with a friend as opposed to a hook-up with a stranger, participants responded that it was easy or safe to have sex with a friend because you trusted that person and were comfortable and familiar with them. Some mentioned the friend’s history was known so it made the fear of AIDS/STD’s diminish. Concerning choosing a friends with benefits relationship as opposed to a romantic relationship, the latter is not initiated because individuals “*want their cake and eat it, too.*” These individuals want to fulfill sexual needs or desires yet at the same time want a relationship that involves “no commitment”, “has low maintenance”, and “not time consuming.” A select few mentioned specific commitment issues as, “don’t have to

call them”, “don’t have to worry about their feelings”, and “doesn’t involve the hassle and time consumption of going out to dinner and remembering important dates.”

In reviewing the responses to all categories, some startling information was brought forth. First, a majority of individuals stated an advantage of a friends with benefits relationship is “get to have sex with no strings attached” while the overriding disadvantage is “one usually wants to be more than just friends.” However, this is a contradiction. If the advantage is to have no strings attached, why is the common theme regarding the disadvantage stating people get attached? There is a struggle in these relationships and it becomes evident that this relationship is not “fool proof” regarding attachment and commitment. The emotional attachment and desire for the partner to be committed by one person raises an interesting issue regarding relational negotiation. Once discrepancies between the individuals in a relationship become known (i.e., “Do we treat each other as friends or something more?”, “Is the relationship still a friendship or becoming a romantic relationship?”, or “I feel you want more out of the relationship than do I.”), relational negotiation strategies must be used to maintain this relationship. The next section of this paper will discuss relational negotiation strategies.



## CHAPTER 4: STUDY 2

### *Relational Negotiation Strategies*

Based on the initial information regarding friends with benefits relationships reported above (i.e., frequency, type of sex, outcome, advantages, and disadvantages), more intricate issues surrounding these relationships can be discussed. This next section will build on this initial exploration and attempt to make sense of the “life” of these relationships in relation to negotiation strategies. With this new relationship come questions about the roles in the relationship, relationship status, relationship expectations, and the communication in these relationships. As mentioned in the introduction, sexual activity is typically unexpected in friendships (Werking, 1997) and when it is introduced, this can create a considerable amount of uncertainty about the relationship state (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998). In order for the friendship to “not get weird”, these issues need to be determined and then addressed when sex is introduced by the individuals involved. No research, to the current author’s knowledge, exists on what issues must be dealt with in these relationships concerning the relationship state. Therefore, the first research question for study 2 is posed:

RQ6: Once sexual activity is introduced into a previously platonic friendship, what questions arise concerning the relationship as a result of this sexual activity?

The impact sexual activity has on a friendship can certainly be debated. Nevertheless, it plays an important role in this relationship that must be negotiated by the individuals involved. However, the relational negotiation strategies discussed by friends with benefits partners to deal with these concerns have not been addressed in previous research. This leads to the second research question:

**RQ7: What types of relational negotiation strategies are used in friends with benefits relationships?**

Assuming that friends typically have a greater sense of understanding, increased comfort around one another, feel free to talk more openly, and can be more blunt around one another than with a stranger or acquaintance may be a reason friends with benefits relationships are sought as opposed to hooking up with a stranger. In study 1, one reason individuals choose to engage in a friends with benefits relationship is due to the fact these friends have a bond and a trust for one another that strangers do not. Research on trust and trustworthiness suggests that the perceived trustworthiness of another will be positively related to willingness to negotiate with that person (Christen, 2001).

Baxter and Wilmot (1985) report that talking about a relationship tops the list of taboo topics for both platonic and intimate couples. Of their participants, only three stated they could talk about any topic with their partners. The rest of the participants indicated that some topics were better left unsaid, with more than two-thirds citing the relationship itself as the most taboo discussion topic. Most said that they avoided talking about the relationship with their partner if it was known that the two desired different levels of commitment within the relationship.

Additionally, Ward and Kahn (2003) found that many male partners consistently avoid or withdraw from negotiating important issues in intimate relationships. To determine if this trend also applies to males in a friends with benefits relationship, the next research question is posed:

**RQ8: Are there sex differences in relational negotiation strategies in friends with benefits relationships?**

Therefore, the relationship negotiation process is examined here. This study explores the relationships between negotiators' perceptions of the negotiation situation, their communicative behavior and the negotiation outcome expectations (i.e., maintaining good relations with the partner, joint gain, or seeking individual gain) (Olekalns & Smith, 2003). The negotiations of the friends with benefits partners will be examined to determine what is being said and what the desired outcomes are.

Moreover, the research questions regarding the negotiation strategies will focus on direct and indirect negotiations and if individuals are opting to openly discuss the issues directly, attempting to solve them in an indirect manner, or ignoring the issues completely.

As stated earlier, from the current author's perspective, the sexual activity need not take place on repeated occasions. If individuals in a friends with benefits relationship only had one sexual encounter, this may be a special kind of friends with benefits relationship. If this is indeed the case, this research seeks to determine if the relational negotiation strategies differ from the strategies of a friends with benefits relationship where the individuals engaged in repeated sexual activity. To explore this issue further, the final research question is presented:

RQ9: What are the differences between single instance occurrences of having sex with a friend and having an ongoing friends with benefits relationship in terms of relational negotiation strategies?

## Method

### *Participants*

Ninety undergraduates (47 females and 43 males) from communication courses at a large Mid-western university participated in the study. The sample was almost evenly split between the sexes (52.2% female and 47.8% male). The participants ranged in age from 17 to 31 ( $M = 21.28$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ). All participants received extra credit or course credit, depending on the instructor's wishes, in exchange for their participation. All participants provided informed consent (see Appendix C for consent form). Target participants were those that had engaged in a friends with benefits relationship on at least one occasion. Those who had not had this type of relationship filled out an alternative questionnaire for equivalent credit.

### *Procedure*

Upon arrival to the study, participants were informed the research involves relational negotiation in friends with benefits relationships. The participants were told their responses are to be as open and honest as possible taking into account the personal and possibly embarrassing nature of the topic and that the questionnaire takes approximately thirty minutes. After defining a friends with benefits relationship to the participants, which was also stated on the questionnaire, if they had been in a friends with benefits relationship and were willing to participate, the self-report surveys were completed. If this type of relationship had not occurred for the participant, they were instructed to complete the supplementary questionnaire. Both consent forms and surveys (i.e., for the current study and the alternative) were given to all participants to ensure privacy. The uncompleted survey and consent form was returned along with the

completed ones. Once all surveys were complete, participants were debriefed on the nature of the study.

### *Measures*

Participants completed a self-report survey containing open and closed-ended questions in which they indicated how they negotiated issues in their friends with benefits relationship. Demographic information and the Triangle Love Scale (Sternberg, 1988) constituted the closed-ended questions. The open-ended section of the questionnaire sought to discover what relational negotiation strategies individuals in friends with benefits relationships use (see Appendix D for questionnaire).

Participants were provided with a definition of friends with benefits, asked if they have ever been involved in this relationship and if so the number of friends with benefits partners, sexual occurrence, length of friendship before sex was added, and the friends with benefits relationship longevity. Friends with benefits relationships was defined as “when people who are just friends have sex.” If the participant had multiple friends with benefits relationships, instructions were to refer to their current or most recent relationship to complete the remainder of the questionnaire. Next, the Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1988) was presented. Finally, specific questions were asked pertaining to relational negotiation strategies and outcomes were included. These questions addressed if having sex was openly discussed, who initiated the talk, if ground rules were established, if so, how they were negotiated, if complications arose, how these were negotiated, and about the current state of the relationship.

### *Love Scale*

The 45-item Sternberg (1988) Triangular Love Scale was used. The scale consisted of three dimensions with fifteen items for each. The dimensions are intimacy, passion, and commitment. The participants rated their agreement with the statements on a scale of one to nine, where 1 means “not at all” and 9 means “extremely so.” This instrument has been found to be both valid and reliable in previous research, with alpha coefficients for the three components at .83 for passion, .85 for intimacy, and .93 for commitment (Aaron & Westbay, 1996). For each component (intimacy, passion, and commitment) there are fifteen questions which yield sub-scores for each component. An example of a question assessing intimacy is question 7, “I am actively supportive of my friend’s well being.” An example of a question measuring passion is question 22, “Just seeing my friend excites me.” An example of a question measuring commitment is question 37, “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my friend.”

### *Analysis*

Two trained coders independently coded all responses. Inter-coder reliability was determined by the percentage of agreement and Cohen’s kappa was calculated for each question category. The inter-coder reliabilities were adequate, with a mean percentage of raw agreement equal to 90.9% and a mean kappa of .91. Any disagreements were resolved by discussion and post-resolution data are reported. Results were analyzed on SPSS for Windows.

### *Results*

Of the individuals who had a friends with benefits relationship, the first item of information revealed was the number of friends with benefits partners. With one

participant leaving this question blank, results indicated that the range was between 1 to 15 friends with benefits partners, the average being three partners ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ ). Participant's number of friends with benefits partners and sex was submitted to a two independent samples t-test to assess sex differences. The mean number of partners for males ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ) was significantly higher than females ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ),  $t(87) = 2.60$ ,  $p = .01$ , two-tailed.

The next question (and the remainder of the questionnaire) was to be answered only using the information from the participant's current or most recent friends with benefits partner. This question sought to determine how long the individuals were friends before adding sex. With one participant leaving this question blank, the average length of time the friends knew each other was slightly over one year, or 14 months ( $M = 14.23$ ,  $SD = 19.78$ ). The range was between not knowing each other to being friends for 11 years.

The next question asked how long the friends with benefits relationship lasted. With 10 responses not included due to the relationship with their partner being currently intact, the average length of time was six months ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $SD = 7.48$ ). The range was one day to four years.

The next questions pertained to the Sternberg (1988) Triangular Love Scale. According to the scale, a score of one through five indicates a low rating, six through seven indicates a moderate rating, and eight through nine indicates a high rating Sternberg (1988). The average intimacy score was moderate ( $M = 6.44$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ), the average passion score was low ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ), and the average commitment score was low ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ). Averages among the items for intimacy, passion, and

commitment revealed participants have moderate intimacy feelings toward their friends with benefits partner, low passion, and low commitment. This, according to Sternberg, indicates the majority of friends with benefits participants experienced the liking type of love for their friend, concluding that the individuals were “just friends” at the time of sexual activity. These results were consistent with previous research using friendships and the love scale (cf., Harris, 1983).

The average intimacy, passion, and commitment scores were submitted to matched pairs t-tests. When participants rated their intimacy, passion, and commitment for their friends with benefits partner, intimacy was significantly higher than passion  $t(89) = 11.42, p < .01$ , two-tailed and commitment  $t(89) = 13.27, p < .01$ , two-tailed. Passion and commitment however were not significantly different from one another  $t(89) = -0.19, n.s.$ , two-tailed.

Among the rating categories, intimacy had roughly a third of the participants in each category. Passion had most of the participants (71.1%) scoring in the low category. Finally, commitment had a majority of the participants (71.1%) scoring in the low category. Table 6 lists these findings.



Table 6

Intimacy, Passion, and Commitment in a Friends with Benefits Relationship

	Low	Rating Moderate	High
	<i>Percentages</i>		
<i>Triangle Love Category</i>			
Intimacy	30.0%	37.8%	32.2%
Passion	71.1%	25.6%	3.3%
Commitment	71.1%	23.3%	5.6%

The next question asked which best reflected the frequency of the sexual activity in the friends with benefits relationship. The categories were: had sex only once, had sex more than once but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship, or the sex was intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship. Results indicated that few (6.7%, or 6 participants) had sex only once with their current or most recent friend. A little more than half (51.1%, or 46 participants) had sex more than once with their friend but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship. Finally, less than half (42.2%, or 38 participants) indicated the sex was intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship. On average, most participants had sex more than once with their friends with benefits partner, but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship.

The first research question sought to discover once sexual activity was introduced into a previously platonic friendship, what questions arose concerning the relationship as a result of this sexual activity. The responses were almost evenly split between

indicating, yes, there were questions that arose (48.9%, or 44 participants), and no there were not (51.1%, or 46 participants).

To code the open-ended responses, coders read all responses and identified characteristics that emerged. Distinguishable grouping characteristics focused on the individual (e.g., feelings), the couple (e.g., future, friendship, and maintenance), and third parties (e.g., other friends). The coders applied these characteristics to form categories for each open-ended response and added or removed distinct categories as they pertained to a particular question.

Of the participants that indicated that questions arose, several responses were given. An overriding theme was the uncertainty of the title or role of the individuals in this new relationship. Another related and prevalent response was how the relationship was to be maintained. Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *title* (“what does this mean” and “what are we”) at 25.9% responding, *maintenance* (“who can we/are we going to tell”, “how committed are we going to be”, “are we going to see other people”, “how are we going to make this work”, and “how are we supposed to act afterwards”) at 22.4%, *future* (“will we start a romantic relationship”, “will I continue my current romantic relationship”, and “should we continue to do this”) at 20.7%, *feelings* (“how do you feel about what we did”, “are we too close”, “how much do you like me”, and “how long had we been attracted to each other”) at 10.3%, *friendship* (“will this ruin the friendship”) at 8.6%, *other* (“have you been tested for STD’s”, “is this right”, “did we cheat on our partners”, and “do you do this with anyone else”) at 6.9%, and the last category as *why* (“what are the intentions” and “why did we do this”) at 5.2%. The

majority of responses came from the title category while the least mentioned responses came from the why category.

It was not uncommon for participants to indicate that more than one question arose (therefore the frequencies do not add up to the total number of participants for this research question nor the others that follow). Because of this, each coding category was treated as a separate variable and counted as present or not present. Cohen's kappa was calculated on SPSS for Windows for each variable and averaged among them to determine the overall kappa for the category in this question and the others that follow. Table 7 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen's kappa per variable. Average  $k = .87$ .

Table 7

Questions that Arose in the Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 44)

<i>Question Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
Title	15	34.1%	25.9%	1.0
Maintenance	13	29.5%	22.4%	.89
Future	12	27.3%	20.7%	.82
Feelings	6	13.6%	10.3%	1.0
Friendship	5	11.4%	8.6%	.75
Other	4	9.1%	6.9%	1.0
Why	3	6.8%	5.2%	.65

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

The next question asked if the sexual activity was “unexpected” and seemed to “just happen” for the individuals in their friends with benefits relationship. The possible answers were: the sexual activity was “unexpected” and seemed to “just happen”, we

were intentionally having sexual activity, or the sexual activity was sometimes intentional and sometimes “unexpected.” Results indicate that the average sexual activity was sometimes intentional and sometimes “unexpected.” Several (34.4%, or 31 participants) indicated the sexual activity was always “unexpected”, about one fourth (24.4%, or 22 participants) stated the sexual activity was always intentional, and the remainder (41.4%, or 37 participants) revealed the sexual activity was both intentional and “unexpected.”

Next, a question was asked concerning if the participant and their friends with benefits partner openly discussed having sex together, and if so, who initiate it and what was talked about. The responses were almost evenly split between indicating yes sex was discussed (46.7%, or 42 participants), and no it was not (53.3%, or 48 participants).

Of the participants that indicated sex was openly discussed, several responses were given. Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for who initiated the conversation, how it was brought up, and what was talked about. Only 31 participants indicated who initiated the conversation. An overriding theme rested in that the other partner initiated the discussion of sexual activity (no sex differences were discovered). Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *other* (“other initiated it”) at 14.4% responding, *both* (“we both initiate it”) at 10.0%, *self* (“I initiated it”) at 7.8%, and the last category as *mixed* (“other initiated and I initiated at times”) at 2.2%. The majority of responses came from the other category while the least mentioned responses came from the mixed category. Since the overall percents and categorical percents would have resulted in identical outcomes due to participants stating only one response each, the overall percent was replaced with the percent of the sample to include the total number of

participants. Table 8 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen's kappa per variable. Average  $k = .88$ .

Table 8

Initiating Discussion in the Friends with Benefits Relationship

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Discussion Initiator</i>				
None	59	--	65.6%	--
Other	13	41.9%	14.4%	.90
Both	9	29.0%	10.0%	.75
Self	7	22.6%	7.8%	.92
Mixed	2	6.5%	2.2%	.66

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants in the category (N = 31). Percent of sample was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants (N = 90).

Additionally, responses included how the conversation was initiated. Only 14 participants indicated how the discussion of sexual activity was brought up. An overriding theme rested in that the discussion was brought up by making jokes to lighten the mood. Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *joking* ("jokes were made to lighten the mood") at 8.9% responding, *first sexual activity* ("it was brought up after the first sexual encounter") at 3.3%, *hinting* ("I told other how I thought it would be cool to find someone who enjoyed sex as much as I did") at 1.1%, *past relationships* ("we were discussing past relationships") at 1.1%, and the last category as *wondering* ("wondered what sex would be like with that person") at 1.1%. The majority of responses came from the joking category while the least mentioned responses came from the hinting, past relationships, and wondering categories. Since the overall percents and categorical percents would have resulted in identical outcomes due to participants stating

only one response each, the overall percent was replaced with the percent of the sample to include the total number of participants. Table 9 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen's kappa per variable. Average  $k = .85$ .

Table 9

How Discussion was brought up in the Friends with Benefits Relationship

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>How Discussion was brought up</i>				
None	76	--	84.4%	--
Joking	8	51.7%	8.9%	.93
First Sexual Activity	3	21.4%	3.3%	.85
Hinting	1	7.1%	1.1%	1.0
Past Relationships	1	7.1%	1.1%	.66
Wondering	1	7.1%	1.1%	.66

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants in the category (N = 14). Percent of sample was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants (N = 90).

Few (N = 31, 34.4%) participants stated what was talked about regarding sexual activity in these relationships. An overriding theme rested in that the discussion focused on the expectations of the sexual activity. Responses were categorized and percentages calculated for *expectation* ("limits", "comfort level", and "frequency") at 30.6% responding, *effects on relationship* ("do we want this to go anywhere" and "jealousy of other friends") at 19.4%, *justifying sexual activity* ("we are both adults" and "this would have happened earlier if not in a romantic relationship") at 16.7%, *approval* ("making sure other was okay with the situation") at 13.9%, *other* ("friends" and "recently getting out of a relationship with a friend of the partner") at 5.6%, *performance* ("how good it was") at 5.6%, *protection* ("protection" and "other sexual partners") at 5.6%, and the last

category as *continuance* (“to see if we’d keep having sex”) at 2.8%. The majority of responses came from the expectation category while the least mentioned responses came from the continuance category. Table 10 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .94$ .

Table 10

What was Discussed in the Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 31)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Sexual Activity Topic</i>				
Expectation	11	35.5%	30.6%	.95
Effects on Relationship	7	22.6%	19.4%	.82
Justifying Sexual Activity	6	19.4%	16.7%	.82
Approval	5	16.1%	13.9%	.90
Other	2	6.5%	5.6%	1.0
Performance	2	6.5%	5.6%	1.0
Protection	2	6.5%	5.6%	1.0
Continuance	1	3.2%	2.8%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

A question inquired if any ground rules had been established for the friends with benefits relationship. A majority (65.6%, or 59 participants) indicated no ground rules were established, while the remainder (34.4%, or 31 participants) answered yes.

Of the participants indicating ground rules were established, an overriding theme of rules pertained to disclosing the relationship and establishing the acceptance to see other people. Responses were categorized and percentages derived for *third party* (“don’t tell anyone/ex’s”, “we can see other people”, “we should let people know what was happening”, “no other friends with benefits relationships”, and “be honest about sexual activity with others”) at 47.4% responding, *maintenance* (“no talk of future”, “have to

disclose if one develops romantic feelings”, “no emotional attachment”, “no jealousy”, “if others found out we would end it with no questions asked”, “we’d do everything romantic couples do, just don’t have a title”, and “I can only call her, but she can’t call me”) at 34.2%, *sexual activity* (“how far we would go”, “no loud sex if others are around”, “sex can’t be a regular thing”, and “no public displays of affection”) at 13.2%, and the last category as *friendship* (“this will not effect our friendship”) at 6.7%. The majority of responses came from the third party category while the least mentioned responses came from the friendship category. Table 11 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .90$ .

Table 11

Ground Rules in the Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 31)

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Ground Rule Category</i>				
Third Party	18	60.0%	47.4%	1.0
Maintenance	13	43.3%	34.2%	.91
Sexual Activity	5	16.7%	13.2%	.88
Friendship	2	6.7%	5.3%	.80

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

The second research question sought to discover what types of relational negotiation strategies are used in friends with benefits relationships. Of the participants indicating they established ground rules, the next question asked how these rules were negotiated. Since only 31 participants established ground rules, which is the maximum number of participants that can use negotiation, this leaves 59 participants not negotiating due to no ground rules established. With 7 participants leaving this question blank (total



now 66 participants not using negotiation), results indicate that few friends with benefits partners are negotiating the rules of the relationship. The majority of responses came from the mutually agreed category. Since the overall percents and categorical percents would have resulted in identical outcomes due to participants stating only one response each, the overall percent was replaced with the percent of the sample to include the total number of participants. Table 12 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen's kappa per variable. Average  $k = .97$ .

Table 12

Negotiating the Ground Rules in the Friends with Benefits Relationship

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Bases for Agreement</i>				
None	66	--	73.3%	--
Mutually Agreed	10	41.7%	11.1%	.88
I set the rules, other agreed	4	16.7%	4.4%	.88
Talked	4	16.7%	4.4%	1.0
Mutual Understanding	2	8.3%	8.3%	1.0
Compromised	1	4.2%	2.2%	1.0
If you won't, I won't	1	4.2%	2.2%	1.0
Negotiated	1	4.2%	2.2%	1.0
Other set the rules, I agreed	1	4.2%	2.2%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants in the category ( $N = 24$ ). Percent of sample was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants ( $N = 90$ ).

The third research question sought to discover if sex differences emerged when negotiating these relationships. Since little relational negotiation is occurring in these relationships, no sex differences were discovered. The fourth research question sought differences between single instance occurrences of having sex with a friend and having an ongoing friends with benefits relationship in terms of relational negotiation strategies.

Again, no discoveries were revealed. Of the participants that had sex only once in their friends with benefits relationship (6 participants), no instance of establishing ground rules were reported, and therefore no negotiation occurred.

A question was asked if the participant experienced any issues or complications in their friends with benefits relationship, and if so, how these issues were dealt with. The responses were almost evenly split indicating issues had been experienced (53.3%, or 48 participants), and none were evident (46.7%, or 42 participants).

Of the participants that experienced issues, an overriding theme was the status of the relationship. With one participant's response not included, responses were categorized and percentages derived for *status* ("should we begin a romantic relationship or stay just friends", "our future", "relationship started to evolve into a romantic one", "I/partner wanted more", and "couldn't agree on the level of commitment") at 35.6% responding, *maintenance* ("lack of communication", "mixed signals on comfort level", "sex put strain on the friendship", "what the relationship entailed", "fought a lot", "how the friendship operated outside the sex", and "limits were set, but problems arose in the grey areas") at 20.3%, *feelings* ("insecurity", "jealousy", and "felt used") at 18.6%, *other* ("I/other began a romantic relationship with someone else") at 17.0%, *partner* ("other became standoffish", "other got annoying", "other pressured a romantic relationship", "wondering if other relationships were happening") at 6.8%, and the last category as *third party* ("gossip from other people") at 1.7%. The majority of responses came from the status category while the least mentioned responses came from the third party category. Table 13 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen's kappa per variable. Average  $k = .89$ .

Table 13

Issues in the Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 47)

<i>Issues Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
Status	21	44.7%	35.6%	.91
Maintenance	12	25.5%	20.3%	.85
Feelings	11	23.4%	18.6%	.95
Other	10	21.3%	17.0%	.73
Partner	4	8.5%	6.8%	.88
Third Party	1	2.1%	1.7%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

Of the participants that indicated what issues were experienced, responses were given as to how they dealt with them. The theme concentrated on opting to change the status of the relationship. Responses were categorized and percentages derived for *change of status* (“made the relationship official”, “ended all contact”, and “went back to being just friends”) at 35.8% responding, *discussion/negotiation* (“negotiated new terms of action”, “discussions or arguments”, and “I compromised”) at 24.5%, *nothing* (“stayed friends with benefits instead of more”, “kept it to myself”, “didn’t care about the issue”, and “summer vacation was over [time ran out]”) at 20.8%, *avoidance* (“avoided topic”, “avoided each other”, “denied everything”, and “ignored it”) at 13.2%, and the last category as *other* (“still dealing” and “poorly”) at 5.7%. The majority of responses came from the change of status category while the least mentioned responses came from the other category. Table 14 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .93$ .

Table 14

**Dealing with Issues in the Friends with Benefits Relationship (N = 48)**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>Overall %</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>Dealing Category</i>				
Change of Status	19	40.0%	35.8%	.90
Discussion/negotiation	13	27.1%	24.5%	1.0
Nothing	11	22.9%	20.8%	.82
Avoidance	7	14.6%	13.2%	.93
Other	3	6.3%	5.7%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants. Overall percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total frequency.

The question was asked if the participant was currently friends with benefits with this person. With one participant leaving this question blank due to uncertainty if their friends with benefits relationship was still occurring, a majority of responses indicated the friends with benefits relationship was not continuing. Almost all participants (77.5%, or 69 participants) were not in a friends with benefits relationship with this person, and few (22.5%, or 20 participants) were currently in a friends with benefits relationship with this person.

The next question asked if the friends with benefits relationship was no longer occurring, what the outcome was. The categories were: we went back to being just friends, we became a romantic/dating couple, we went our separate ways and no longer have any relationship, or other. With one participant leaving this question blank due to uncertainty if their friends with benefits relationship was still continuing, results indicated a third (34.8%, or 31 participants) went back to being just friends with their friends with benefits partner. Responses were almost evenly split between going their separate ways

resulting in no longer having any type of relationship (21.3%, or 19 participants) and other (18.0%, or 16 participants). A few (3.4%, or 3 participants) became a romantic/dating couple. These findings are consistent with study 1.

The “other” category was explained by the participant. These topics ranged from the friendship is not what it used to be, lost contact, met someone else, became acquaintances, to went on a break but are now friends. The majority of responses came from the friends, but not the same category while the least mentioned responses came from the went on a break but are now friends category. Since the overall percents and categorical percents would have resulted in identical outcomes due to participants stating only one response each, the overall percent was replaced with the percent of the sample to include the total number of participants. Table 15 provides a summary of these frequencies, percentages, and Cohen’s kappa per variable. Average  $k = .90$ .

Table 15

Outcomes of the Friends with Benefits Relationship

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorical %</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>	<i>k</i>
(N = 89)				
<i>Relationship Outcome</i>				
Still Friends with Benefits	20	--	22.5%	--
Remain Friends	31	--	34.8%	--
Went Our Separate Ways	19	--	21.3%	--
Became Romantic	3	--	3.4%	--
Other	16	--	18.0%	--
(N = 16)				
Friends, but not the same	7	43.8%	7.9%	.85
Lost contact	3	18.8%	3.4%	1.0
Met someone else	3	18.8%	3.4%	1.0
Acquaintances	2	12.5%	2.2%	.66
Went on a break, now friends	1	6.3%	1.1%	1.0

*Note.* Categorical percent was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants in the category (N = 16). Percent of sample was calculated by the variable frequency over total participants (N = 89).

The final question inquired about the sex of the friends with benefits partner. The responses were almost evenly split between the sexes (52.2% male and 47.8% female).

Two participants indicated a friends with benefits relationship with someone of the same sex.

### *Summary of Results*

The typical participant engaged in a friends with benefits relationship with three partners. The average length of time the friends knew each other before adding sex was slightly over one year, or 14 months. The average length of time the friend with benefits relationship lasted was six months. Most participants had sex more than once with their

friends with benefits partner, but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship. Additionally, the sexual activity was often sometimes intentional and sometimes “unexpected.” Few participants were currently in a friends with benefits relationship with this person and went back to being just friends with their friends with benefits partner.

The majority of friends with benefits participants indicated experiencing moderate intimacy with their friend, while the passion and commitment scores were low. Therefore, according to Sternberg, the participant experienced the liking type of love for their friend, concluding that the individuals were just friends at the time of sexual activity.

For questions regarding if the participant experienced a rise in questions about the friendship once sexual activity was added, if an open discussion of sexual activity occurred, and experienced any issues or complications within the friends with benefits relationship, the responses were almost evenly split. When asked if ground rules were established, a majority indicated that there were none.

RQ6 asked once sexual activity is introduced into a previously platonic friendship, what questions arise concerning the relationship as a result of this sexual activity. An overriding theme of the questions that arose due to the addition of sexual activity was the title of the relationship (i.e., are we a romantic couple, are we still just friends, or are we friends with benefits).

A common theme revealed by participants when asked who brought up the issue of sexual activity was that the other partner was initiating the discussion, it was brought up by making jokes, and the discussion focused on expectations concerning the sexual

activity. Of the participants indicating that ground rules were established, an overriding theme was third party concerns pertaining to disclosing about the relationship and establishing that they were allowed to see other people. Of the participants that experienced issues, the theme concentrated on the status of the friends with benefits relationship. A majority of responses indicated participants were not trying to work out the issues that arose and opted to simply change the status of the relationship.

RQ7 sought to determine what types of relational negotiation strategies are used in friends with benefits relationships. Results indicate friends with benefits partners are most often not negotiating the rules of the relationship, therefore, no strategies were reported.

RQ8 inquired if there were sex differences in relational negotiation strategies in friends with benefits relationships. Due to little relational negotiation emerging in these types of relationships, no sex differences were reported.

RQ9 sought to determine what were the differences between single instance occurrences of having sex with a friend and having an ongoing friends with benefits relationship in terms of relational negotiation strategies. Because only 6 participants indicated having sex once with their friends with benefits partner, no differences were reported.

## Discussion

Study 1 revealed that friends with benefits relationships are currently prevalent among college students. One interesting question concerns how long these relationships have been around and trends in prevalence over time. Since these relationships have not been studied until recently, it is unclear how long these relationships have been in



existence and if they had always been called “friends with benefits.” Speculatively, the relationship type, although less prevalent, has probably long existed, but the label is more recent.

The finding that little relational negotiation is occurring in these relationships is unsettling. If a majority of participants indicate a potential problem of friends with benefits relationships is that one usually develops more feelings than the other and the relationship becomes “weird,” it is puzzling why these individuals do not discuss these issues once they become a problem. On average, most participants had sexual activity more than once with their friends with benefits partner, but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship. Given that the sexual activity was not intended, may perhaps be why few participants reported negotiating the relationship. Also, the answer may rest in why the relationship was begun. Study 1 suggests that friends with benefits relationships are often formed out of a desire for a relationship with no strings attached. Once sexual activity and ground rules are discussed, perhaps that becomes a “string” that these individuals do not want. If this relationship is supposed to be a fun thing and nothing more, deliberating over rules might take the fun out of it. If sexual activity and rules are discussed, that could make the relationship “real,” which may not be what the friends are searching for. This begs the question of whether or not friends with benefits relationships could ever work from a communication standpoint.

Baxter and Wilmot (1985) report that talking about a relationship tops the list of taboo topics for both platonic and intimate couples. Two-thirds of their sample cited the relationship itself was the most taboo discussion topic and they avoided talking about the relationship with their partner if different levels of commitment were revealed. Results of

study 2 are consistent with these findings. Discussing the relationship, the rules, or the issues that emerged were not common among the responses. Also, since the desire for commitment in these relationships can become lopsided resulting in different levels, perhaps this is why discussion is not occurring.

Parks (1982) has challenged the view that disclosure is not necessarily good and intimacy is not always the goal in interpersonal communication. Parks argued that there were plenty of effective interpersonal communication relationships that were not based on intimacy and disclosure but which were based instead on social necessity. Perhaps friends with benefits relationships are not doomed because they are not communicating; it could be the case that intimacy and disclosure is not needed to maintain these relationships.

According to the responses, it appears as though partners had implicitly established ground rules to not negotiate. It could be that no negotiation is needed. Since these individuals are friends, perhaps they already agree because friends usually like the same things. Since very little negotiation is occurring in these relationships, it could be due to idiosyncratic negotiation between friends. It could also be that the friendship was not worth long deliberation of the rules. If a difficult issue arose, perhaps the friendship was disposable from the beginning and trying to establish ground rules to protect that friendship is not worth the effort. The participants may also seek this relationship as a short-term investment, so establishing rules is not needed. Consistent with this are findings from the Sternberg (1988) Triangle Love Scale that commitment is low.

Study 2 was consistent with Sternberg's claims that friends experience low passion for one another. In friends with benefits relationships, the friends are engaging in

sexual activity, but the sex is geared toward convenience and physical satisfaction rather than as a means of passion exhibited for one another.

Terminated friendships due to previously being friends with benefits (i.e., partners went their separate ways and not longer have any type of relationship) can be unrepresentative when assessing outcomes of friends with benefits relationships. To conclude the friends with benefits relationship caused the friendship to be terminated can be misleading. All the participants were college students. It could be possible that they no longer have any type of relationship because people move away and relationships during these years get lost due to loss of contact. Further exploration is needed to determine what caused the individuals to dissolve all contact.

The results of study 2 demonstrated that males report more partners than females. Why this is the case is unclear. It could be a reporting bias with males padding their numbers or females decreasing theirs to appear less promiscuous. It could also be that women view love differently and where a male might consider a partner to be friends with benefits, a female might consider it a hook-up or a dating relationship. This difference in reporting the number of sexual partners is consistent with previous research (e.g., Thornhill & Gangestad, 1994).

It appears that upper classman reported less friends with benefits relationships than lower classman. Since the questionnaire asked to report all friends with benefits partners throughout their life, the numbers should be relatively the same or upper classman should have been reporting more since they typically are older. The reverse seemed to be true, however. It could be that over time and exposure to communication courses, these older individuals separate once classified friends with benefits

relationships into other categories. A percent cannot be provided since the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects did not allow reporting of those that did not have this type of relationship. This was a general observation by the author.

It is interesting to note that the established rules for the friends with benefits relationship focused on how the individuals were to keep the relationship from evolving into something more, yet no rules were established to keep the relationship from lessening back into a platonic friendship. Examples of these rules could entail the individuals referring to the relationship as a friends with benefits relationship and not just a friendship, or establish minimum sexual activity to maintain the status.

Finally, study 1 and study 2 exhibit commonalities. First, the frequency and outcomes of the relationships were consistent. Second, the themes of engaging in sexual activity as a means of feeling comfortable with a friend while still fulfilling sexual desires without romantic commitment were evident in both studies.

### Limitations

The research procedure in study 2 required participants to self-report, which can lead to errors in recall and biases (Harvey, Christensen, & McClintock, 1983).

Participants had to recall how they felt about their friends with benefits partner at the time of the sexual activity. Therefore, the responses to the scale may not be completely accurate. Because only one partner of the dyad was responding, critical concerns, issues, questions, and rules may not have been reported. An important further step would be to assess a friends with benefits relationship with both partners while the relationship is current. Recall tasks may be difficult and could be avoided if participants noted the rise in questions or issues as they occurred.

College students were used as participants, thus excluding an older population. Since little negotiation strategies were discovered, it could be due to the fact younger individuals do not employ these strategies where older individuals may. The next step is to use a non-college sample to clearly determine if relational negotiation occurs in these relationships or not.

The current study focused on comparing the communication in a friends with benefits relationship to that of a romantic relationship as supported by Baxter and Wilmot (1995). This excluded the communication comparison of these individuals to that of friends not engaging in these relationships. Perhaps the communication in friends with benefits relationships (or lack there of) is more consistent with a friendship than with a romantic relationship.

### Conclusion

Since friends with benefits relationships are understudied in communication research, I feel the results of this study will serve as a foundation to aid in further exploration. The results of these studies are a useful beginning in the long overdue exploration of non-typical relationships. Light has been shed on the dangers of previously held concepts of friendships and romantic relationships. I believe this research demonstrates the potential strengths and weaknesses of these relationships and as well as how they “live.”

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

***Title of Study: Friends with Benefits***

**Researcher:** Dr. Timothy R. Levine  
Department of Communication  
Michigan State University

e-mail: levinet@msu.edu  
Office: CAS 482  
Phone: 432-1124

***Information***

We are interested in people's experiences with and opinions about a type of relationship that might be called "friends with benefits." Friends with benefits are when friends have sex. You will be asked to fill out a very short questionnaire containing several open and closed-ended questions. You will not be identified on the questionnaire, and responses will only be reported in aggregate. All answers are CONFIDENTIAL, and your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The questionnaire should take less than 20 minutes to complete, and is only two pages long.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty.

While this study is not expected to yield any immediate benefit to the individual participants, it will add to the general store of Communication knowledge. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation, but some questions ask about sex and may be embarrassing.

You will receive extra-credit in your class in exchange for your participation if your instructor has previously agreed to provide extra-credit. If you would receive extra-credit in exchange for your participation, you can get an equivalent amount of credit by doing an alternative should you choose not to participate in this study.

The final results of the study will be made available, probably by the end of Spring of 2004. To obtain the report, please contact Tim Levine at the above address.

For questions regarding your rights as a human subject of research, contact UCRIHS Chair: Ashir Kumar, M.D.,  
Telephone: (517) 355-2180, Email: ucrihs@msu.edu

**I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your instructor's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Class and section you are receiving extra or research credit in

## APPENDIX B

## Friends with Benefits Questionnaire

*Recent research has studied a phenomena called "Friends with Benefits." Friends with benefits are when people who are "just friends," have sex. Please answer the following questions about friends with benefits. Please answer as honestly and accurately as possible.*

1. If you have sex with someone, can you be just friends?    Yes    No
2. Have you ever had sex with some one who you considered “just a friend” at the time of sex (circle one)?

**Yes**

**No (If no, skip to question #8)**

3. If yes, are you currently in a “friends with benefits” relationship?      Yes      No

- 4. Was/is the sex in your “friends with benefits” relationship(s) (circle all that apply)?**

**A) a one time only thing**

**B) an occasional thing**

**C) an ongoing thing**

5. What types of “sex” did you have with your friend (circle all that apply)?

**A) Open mouth to mouth kissing**

### C) Touching genitals

## B) Oral Sex

### D) Sexual intercourse

- 6. What happened to your friends with benefits relationship(s) (circle all that apply):**

**A) We remain friends with benefits**

**B) We remain friends, but no longer have sex.**

**C) We became a romantically involved couple (i.e., the relationship evolved from a friendship into a romantic relationship).**

**D) I am no longer in any kind of relationship with this person.**

- 7. Was/were your friends with benefits relationship(s) (circle one)**

### A) Same Sex

### B) Opposite Sex

**C) Both**

8. Your sex:                      Male                      Female

- 9. Your Age:**

*Please turn the questionnaire over and continue on the back*

*Now, please provide us with some of your opinions about “friends with benefits.”*

10. What are the major advantages (if any) of “friends with benefits” relationships?

11. Why do you think some people engage in “friends with benefits” relationships?

12. What are the major disadvantages (if any) of a “friends with benefits” relationship?

13. Why do you think some people do not engage in “friends with benefits” relationships?



## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

***Title of Study: Friends with Benefits***

**Researcher:** Dr. Timothy R. Levine                      e-mail: levinet@msu.edu  
Department of Communication                      Office: CAS 482  
Michigan State University                      Phone: 432-1124

***Information***

We are interested in people's experiences with "friends with benefits" relationships. Friends with benefits are when friends have sex. If you are participating in this study then you are currently in or have had a friends with benefits relationship. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire containing several open and closed-ended questions. You will not be identified on the questionnaire, and responses will only be reported in aggregate. All answers are CONFIDENTIAL, and your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The questionnaire should take about 30 minutes to complete, and is eight pages long.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

While this study is not expected to yield any immediate benefit to the individual participants, it will add to the general store of Communication knowledge. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation, but some questions ask about sex and may be embarrassing.

You will receive extra-credit in your class in exchange for your participation if your instructor has previously agreed to provide extra-credit. If you would receive extra-credit in exchange for your participation, you can get an equivalent amount of credit by doing an alternative should you choose not to participate in this study.

The final results of the study will be made available, probably by the end of Spring of 2004. To obtain the report, please contact Tim Levine at the above address.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact - anonymously, if you wish - Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, e-mail address: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

*I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your instructor's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Class and section you are receiving extra or research credit in

## APPENDIX D

### Friends with Benefits Questionnaire Study 2

*This study is interested in a relationship known as “friends with benefits” and how they are negotiated by the individuals involved. A friends with benefits relationship is when “just friends” have sex. Sex is characterized as genital touching, genital-oral intercourse, and sexual intercourse (penile-vaginal or penile-anal). Please answer the following questions as openly and honestly as possible.*

1. According to the definition above, have you ever had a friends with benefits relationship?

a) Yes

b) No (If no please proceed to next questionnaire)

2. How many different friends with benefits relationships have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

*If you've had more than one, please refer to your current or most recent friends with benefits relationship to answer the remainder of the questionnaire.*

3. How long were you friends before you first had sex with your friend? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long did this friends with benefits relationship last? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Your sex:

a) Male

b) Female

6. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please answer the next questions with your current or most recent friends with benefits relationship in mind. Please rate and circle the importance of each statement on a scale of 1(not at all) to 9 (extremely). Be sure to score each question as honestly as you can.*

1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5.....	6.....	7.....	8.....	9
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	---

not at all.....moderately.....extremely so

7. I am actively supportive of my friend's well being.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

8. I have a warm relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

9. I am able to count on my friend in times of need.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

10. My friend is able to count on me in times of need.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

11. I am willing to share myself and my possessions with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

12. I receive considerable emotional support from my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

13. I give considerable emotional support to my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

14. I communicate well with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

15. I value my friend greatly in my life.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

16. I feel close to my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

17. I have a comfortable relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

18. I feel that I really understand my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

19. I feel that my friend really understands me.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

20. I feel that I really can trust my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

21. I share deeply personal information about myself with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

22. Just seeing my friend excites me.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

23. I find myself thinking about my friend frequently during the day.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

24. My relationship with my friend is very romantic.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

25. I find my friend to be very personally attractive.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

26. I idealize my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

27. I cannot imagine another person making me as happy as my friend does.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

28. I would rather be with my friend than with anyone else.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

29. There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

30. I especially like physical contact with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

31. There is something almost “magical” about my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

32. I adore my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

33. I cannot imagine life without my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

34. My relationship with my friend is passionate.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

35. When I see romantic movies or read romantic books I think of my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

36. I fantasize about my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

37. I know that I care about my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

38. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

39. Because of my commitment to my friend, I would not let other people come between us.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

40. I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

41. I could not let anything get in the way of my commitment to my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

42. I expect my love for my friend to last for the rest of my life.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

43. I will always feel a strong responsibility for my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

44. I view my commitment to my friend as a solid one.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

45. I cannot imagine ending my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

46. I am certain of my love for my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

47. I view my relationship with my friend as permanent.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

48. I view my relationship with my friend as a good decision.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

49. I feel a sense of responsibility toward my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

50. I plan to continue my relationship with my friend.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

51. Even when my friend is hard to deal with, I remain committed to our relationship.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

52. In your current or most recent friends with benefits relationship, which best reflects the frequency of sex?

- a) We had sex only once      b) We had sex more than once, but it was not intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship
- c) The sex was intended to be an ongoing part of the relationship

53. Once sexual activity was introduced into the friendship, did any questions arise concerning the relationship as a result of this sexual activity?

- a) Yes      b) No

If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_

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54. Was this sexual activity “unexpected” and seemed to “just happen”?

- a) Yes      b) No, we were intentionally having sex
- c) Sometimes intentional and sometimes unexpected

**55. Did you and your friend openly discuss having sex together?**

**a) Yes**

**b) No**

**If yes, how did it come up (who initiated it) **and** what was talked about?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**56. Were any “ground rules” established?    a) Yes            b) No (If no skip to #58)**

**If yes, what?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**57. If yes to #56, how was this negotiated (how did you settle on what you did)?**

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**58. Did you experience any “issues” or “complications” with your friends with benefits relationship?**

**a) Yes**

**b) No (If no skip to #60)**

**If yes, what were they?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**59. If yes to #58, how did you deal with these “issues” or “complications”?**

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**60. Are you currently in a friends with benefits relationship with this person?**

**a) Yes**

**b) No**

**61. If no, what happened to the relationship after you stopped having sex?**

**a) We went back to being just friends**

**b) We became a romantic/dating couple**

**c) We went our separate ways and no longer have any relationship**

**d) Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**62. The sex of your friends with benefits partner that was used to answer the following questions:**

**a) Male**

**b) Female**

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