

Taking casual sex not too casually: Exploring definitions of casual sexual relationships

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Abstract: Researchers are beginning to explore the variety of casual sexual relationships that individuals engage in. These relationships, and the subtle nuances that differentiate them, have not been studied collectively. The purpose of the present study was to qualitatively examine casual sexual relationships (CSRs), ranging from a single encounter to an ongoing sexual relationship with a friend. Male and female focus group participants identified a number of implicit and explicit rules that guide the initiation, maintenance, and termination of four types of casual sexual relationships: One Nights Stands, Booty Calls, Fuck Buddies, and Friends with Benefits. Participants identified these rules regardless of gender or whether they had previous personal experience with any of these CSRs. The results suggest that each of these relationship types can be placed on a continuum of casual sex according to various dimensions, including frequency of contact, type of contact (sexual and/or social), personal disclosure, discussion of the relationship, and friendship. Participants' shared understanding of CSRs suggests that young adults may have common cultural knowledge of these relationships and a fluid conceptualization of what constitutes a relationship.

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Introduction

Sexual encounters outside committed relationships, often referred to as casual sexual relationships (CSRs), are common for young adults in Western countries, especially among college and university students (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005; Puentes, Knox, & Zusman, 2008). Media references to CSRs are widespread and the formal academic literature on CSRs has steadily increased over the last decade (e.g., Jonason, Li, & Cason, 2009; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Owen & Fincham, 2011a). Few studies, however, have systematically investigated definitional caveats with regards to various forms of casual sexual interactions ranging from one-time encounters to ongoing sexual relationships. In the available literature, definitions of "casual sex" differ significantly from study to study making interpretation of the results problematic and generalizability of findings limited. The objective of this study was to examine whether various casual sex encounters follow specific patterns that make it

possible to reliably differentiate distinct forms of CSRs along a continuum.

Researchers have used various terms to describe CSRs. Earlier terms include permissiveness without affection (Reiss, 1960), premarital coitus (Hunt, 1975), or premarital sex (Tavris & Sadd, 1975). More recent terms include sex that occurs only once (Kilman, Boland, West, Jonet, & Ramsey, 1993), sex outside a committed relationship (Regan & Dreyer, 1999), non-relational sex (Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009), or the commonly used One Night Stand (ONS; Cubbins & Tanfer, 2000; Montoya, 2005). The ONS is often used as the representative term for a range of non-committed sexual relationships (Forster, Ozelsel, & Epstude, 2010; Greitemeyer, 2007; Zeigler-Hill, Campe, & Myers, 2009), but the term fails to capture the temporal variations and specificities that exist within CSRs that extend over more than "one night." Another increasingly popular term for CSRs is hooking up (Bogle, 2008). This term is currently used to describe single, episodic, or ongoing sexual activity between individuals who

are not in a committed relationship (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2011).

Regardless of terms used to describe various forms of casual sex, it is often unclear what form of sexual activity determines the definition (e.g., intercourse vs. kissing), the temporal characteristics (one encounter vs. ongoing), or the degree of intimacy in the relationship (none vs. sharing activities/revealing emotions). Prevalence rates for casual sex differ significantly if researchers use any sexual activity (75%; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000) versus sexual intercourse (15-35%; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, & Mewhinney, 1998; Weaver & Herold, 2000). Without clear definitions, it is difficult to determine actual prevalence and how individuals engage in, manage, and terminate different CSRs. Studies have noted a number of consequences of casual sex, such as greater likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Cho & Span, 2010), differences in attachment styles (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004), feelings of regret (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008), emotional distress (Fielder & Carey, 2010), or depression and/or loneliness (Owen & Fincham, 2011b) after sexual activity. However, these and other such factors are difficult to interpret in the absence of a fuller understanding of the specific context in which the encounters occur.

Friends with Benefits

Friends with Benefits (FWB) is a commonly used term to describe a sexual relationship that develops between friends. FWBs have been investigated with regards to negotiation of rules (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005), varying sub-categories of FWBs (Williams, Shaw, Mongeau, Knight, & Ramirez, 2007), gender differences in FWB experiences (Owen & Fincham, 2011a), and men's sexual scripts (Epstein et al., 2009). The prevalence of FWB relationships is estimated at approximately 50% in studies of college or university participants (e.g., Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, et al., 2005; Owen & Fincham, 2011a). In Afifi and Faulkner's survey study of 315 university participants, 51% reported having ever engaged in at least one FWB relationship. Of these individuals, 49% had engaged in more than one FWB relationship. In Bisson and Levine's (2009) survey study, 60% of 125 university

participants reported having ever engaged in a FWB relationship (36% of whom were currently in a FWB relationship). Hughes and colleagues' (2005) survey study examined participants' self-reported rules for FWB relationships. The complexity of maintaining a sexual relationship within the context of a friendship appears to be facilitated by following a number of rules (e.g., not telling other friends, not becoming too emotionally involved). Recently, Weaver and colleagues (2011) interviewed 26 university students with FWB experience. Although participants noted that FWB relationships have their "benefits" and are relevant to college/university life, FWB partners may not communicate their feelings explicitly in regards to attachment or sexual involvement outside the FWB, resulting in complications. Despite research on FWBs, a consistent definition of a CSR with a friend has not emerged. Furthermore, no definition is available for an ongoing sexual relationship between two individuals who are not otherwise friends.

Booty Call

A meeting for impromptu sex is sometimes referred to as a Booty Call (BC). In a study on the sexual practices of African American and Puerto Rican young adults, Singer and colleagues (2006) categorized the BC as an uncommitted and non-monogamous relationship in which one person calls the other for sexual purposes. In a more formal study on BCs, Jonason, Li, & Cason (2009) defined a BC as "communication initiated towards a non-long-term relationship partner with the urgent intent either stated or implied, of having sexual activity and/or intercourse" (p. 4). In their survey of 61 university students, these authors found that 64% of participants had engaged in a BC that resulted in some type of sexual activity. The telephone was the most common method used to contact a BC. In the second part of this study, both male and female participants ($N = 42$) reported that the top reason for accepting or rejecting a BC was the physical attractiveness of the partner. In a subsequent study, Jonason, Li, and Richardson (2010) compared the BC relationship to both ONSs and serious romantic relationships. Emotionally intimate acts (e.g., hand holding, kissing partner's face) were restricted in BCs compared to romantic relationships, suggesting that participants had an implicit understanding of the appropriate behaviour for a BC. In a recent study on African American adolescent mothers, the term

“Booty Call” described the person contacted for the purpose of immediate sexual activity or was the verb used to describe arranging the sexual encounter (Nelson, Morrison-Beedy, Kearney, & Dozier, 2011). Additional examination of BCs is required to independently validate these initial BC studies with larger samples and determine where BCs are situated on the continuum of CSRs.

Operational definitions of CSRs and goals of the present study

The existing literature suggests that the different types of CSRs cannot be captured by one single definition. CSRs are complex forms of non-committed sexual relationships that vary in emotional and sexual involvement and range from one-time encounters to ongoing friendships that include a sexual component. In the literature to date, most researchers have failed to provide explicit descriptions or justifications for the operational definitions used for the relationship under investigation. This limitation has been identified as a problem for researchers examining data on self-reported sexual behaviour (Byers, Henderson, & Hobson, 2009). Use of the general term “casual sex” or one of the specific terms (e.g., ONS) without adequate description leaves participants at liberty to interpret the constructs. The result is data that is difficult to compare across studies.

The present study represents the first step in an attempt to simultaneously delineate definitions for various CSRs in order to: identify subtle differences and similarities, clarify temporal characteristics, assess emotional involvement, and examine possible rules of engagement, management, and termination. Given the heterogeneous nature of the existing literature, our first step decision was to use focus groups to document current cultural knowledge of CSRs. It was expected that participants would be able to differentiate between different casual sexual encounters on a number of dimensions including temporal patterns, CSR management strategies, and relationship termination. We anticipate that CSR patterns identified here will provide a basis for subsequent validation studies with larger samples.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-three individuals participated in one of four separate focus groups (male, female, mixed-gender, and sex educators). For the sex educator group, a total of six sexuality organizations (e.g., Planned Parenthood, university peer sexual health educators) were contacted in person with letters of invitation to participate; individuals from four of these organizations accepted. Individuals from these organizations were invited to participate because they are involved in sexual health education for younger adults and are familiar with current terms used to describe CSRs. Non-sex educator participants were recruited through the participant pool for course credit at a large, urban university in Eastern Canada ($n = 12$) and through campus poster advertisements ($n = 6$). Inclusion criteria included fluency in English and being 18 to 24 years of age; there was no age restriction for the sex educator group. If there is indeed a general cultural understanding of terms and behavioural scripts for different kinds of CSRs, individuals with and without casual sex experiences should be cognizant of those scripts; therefore, previous CSR experience was not required.

Measures

Participants completed a background questionnaire before the focus group discussions began. Demographic information included age, gender, ethnicity, age at first intercourse, and lifetime number of both committed and casual sexual partners. This information was used to characterize the participants as a group but was not used in any way that identified an individual participant.

The letter of invitation to participate in the study made it clear that the purpose was to discuss CSRs. Discussion in each of the four focus groups was semi-structured. The facilitators began each discussion group with the same specific lead-in question: “What are some of the names that are used to describe casual sexual relationships?” After participants had generated a list of specific terms, each term was put on its own poster board and participants were asked to describe each relationship (e.g., “Tell me how this relationship works.”). When necessary, the facilitator asked participants to provide details on how each

relationship starts, whether the individuals know each other before engaging in any sexual activity and if so, what is the nature of their relationship, how the relationship is managed and terminated, and what happens post-termination. Facilitators wrote participants' responses on the poster boards and asked participants to share as much detail as they wished in regards to the various relationships regardless of whether they had such personal experience. Facilitators also sought to stimulate a rich and varied discussion by encouraging participants to comment regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with other group members.

Procedure

Participants contacted the laboratory for further information and discussion of the study details. The groups were facilitated by a same-sex facilitator and by a male and female facilitator for the mixed gender group. Upon arrival, participants reviewed the consent form and filled out a demographics form that was filed independently from the information shared in the focus groups for anonymity. To further protect privacy, participants chose a pseudonym that would replace their own name for citation of quotes. The authors subsequently changed those pseudonyms during transcription to names that were not the real name of any participants or the pseudonym used by any other participant. Group discussions were initiated with the lead-in question regarding the different casual sexual terms. The terms generated by the group were written on separate poster boards and participants were prompted to provide further detail. Discussions took an average of 90 minutes and concluded with the distribution of a sexuality resource brochure. The Research Ethics Board at the university approved the study.

Analysis

The audio files were transcribed in full and then analyzed by two female researchers. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to thematically code the data from the focus groups, an approach used to identify salient themes that emerge from the data (Braun, Terry, Gavey, & Fenaughty, 2009; Hogarth & Ingham, 2009). In Phase 1, the data was transcribed verbatim. The female coders read all the transcripts and separately noted initial ideas regarding common ideas and thoughts expressed in the focus groups. In Phase 2, the coders discussed the initial ideas together. In Phase 3, the coders independently re-read the transcripts to search for the identified themes. In Phase 4, the coders reviewed the themes together to discuss how the various themes reflected the data. In Phase 5, the themes were revised until a final list of themes was identified and mutually agreed upon. And finally, in Phase 6, extracts were identified to illustrate the identified themes. The purpose of this inductive qualitative approach was to ensure that participants' conceptualizations of the various CSRs were presented accurately and not guided by previous research.

Results

Participant characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the sample reported in Table 1 include age and number of both committed and casual sex partners. With the exception of two participants who described themselves as European Canadian, the majority of participants ($N = 21$) self-described as having a Canadian/Caucasian cultural background. One male participant reported no sexual intercourse experience. Of the participants who had engaged in sexual

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Focus group (number of participants)	Age (<i>M</i>)	Committed sexual partners (<i>M</i>)	Casual sexual partners (<i>M</i>)
Sex Educator Group (5)	22.40 (range = 19-27)	3.20 (range = 1-6)	3.00 (range = 0-8)
Mixed Group* (5)	19.40 (range = 19-20)	1.80 (range = 0-3)	6.80 (range = 0-12)
Female Group (7)	19.42 (range = 18-24)	1.86 (range = 1-4)	4.00 (range = 0-9)
Male Group (6)	19.83 (range = 18-21)	1.50 (range = 0-4)	3.50 (range = 0-11)

*One male participant reported no sexual intercourse experience

intercourse, 19 participants (81%) reported at least one casual sex partner (*Mdn* = 3.00).

Participants identified a number of specific CSRs. The specific relationships that were discussed in each respective group are listed in Table 2. The terms identified consistently by all four focus groups were: BC, FWB, Fuck Buddy (FB), and ONS. Furthermore, participants often used one of these CSRs to describe the range of interactions and temporal patterns of the other CSRs. Thus, these four CSRs are the focus of the following analysis.

Qualitative analysis

Participants readily identified the code of conduct that guides individuals' behaviour, including detailed hypothetical situations to illustrate the typical scripts for the four common CSRs (i.e., BC, FWB, FB, and ONS). The majority of the participants' discussion involved heterosexual interactions as indicated by the gender roles discussed. However, numerous participants stated that these sexual relationships were not limited to heterosexual individuals. The detailed conversations of the focus groups resulted in a final list of 11 themes and related subthemes and second-order subthemes. The analysis that follows focuses on five of those themes, chosen because they were clearly related to the initiation, management, and termination of the four types of CSRs under consideration (Table 3). There were six other themes

(three with related subthemes) footnoted in Table 3 but not included in the analysis.

Theme 1: Initiation

The initiation theme had two subthemes related to starting CSRs and the role of alcohol with such relationships.

How the relationship begins

With the exception of ONSs, the other three CSRs involve individuals who know each other, either as friends or acquaintances. Participants agreed that BCs know each other prior to engaging in the actual "booty call" because they have one another's contact information, but are not necessarily former sexual partners and are not friends. Participants mentioned that compared to FBs, the friends aspect in FWBs is much stronger because these individuals are friends prior to engaging in sexual activity. However, in regards to FBs, these individuals may become friends as a result of engaging in sexual activity with each other. One participant drew the following distinctions:

I think Friends with Benefits implies someone you were friends with before, whereas Fuck Friends [FBs] is someone you would have met just to fuck and then you would continue. But Friends with Benefits implies that there was a friendship to begin with. (Kristen, female group)

Table 2 Names of various casual sexual relationships discussed in focus groups

	Male Group	Female Group	Mixed Group	Sex Educator Group
Booty Call	X	X	X	X
Boy Toy	X	X		X
Casual Dating		X		
Dick 'Em and Dump 'Em	X			
Fling				X
Fooling Around	X	X		
Friends With Benefits	X	X	X	X
Fuck 'n Chuck	X		X	
Fuck Buddy(Buddies)/Fuck Friends	X	X	X	X
Hit It and Quit It	X			
Hook-ups/Hooking Up		X	X	X
Last Call			X	
No Strings Attached	X	X		X
One Night Stand	X	X	X	X
Part-Time Girlfriend/Boyfriend	X			
Use 'Em and Lose 'Em	X			

Table 3 Final themes and sub-themes related to four types of casual sexual relationships*

Theme**	Subthemes and second-order subthemes**
Initiation	How the relationship begins Alcohol/drugs
Code of Conduct	Explicit rules Discussion of what the relationship is Discussion of monogamy Discussion of ending relationship Rules of the relationship Implicit rules Arranging interactions Monogamy
Communication	Communication within relationship Intimate disclosure Method of planning interactions Tacit communication Communication outside relationship Secrecy Terminology
Interaction	Frequency Sexual or non-sexual activity
Termination	Other relationship for one individual Level of interest Too attached Loss of interest Contact after the relationship

* The four CSRs that focus groups discussed were: **Booty Call, Friends with Benefits, Fuck Buddies and One Night Stands.**

** The six other themes that emerged (**Progression [between different relationships, test relationship], Sexual Activity [type of sexual activity, orgasm], Reasons for Interaction [filling the void/boredom, sexual desire, fall back plan], Attachment, Power Dynamics, and Regret**) are not included in the analysis.

Participants' comments indicated a fluid progression of becoming sexually involved with someone, especially if the individuals were friends or previous sexual partners. In regards to FWBs, a mixed group member stated:

Well...say, if you're in elementary school and everyone progresses and develops. And all of a sudden you guys just hang out one day and sex just happens, right? It's just a random act

and then you guys just keep doing it. Or, it could just be a hook up that two friends put together. Like if I went out with friends and I was like "Hey, I have a friend, meet him." And then you have that hook up. And then you become good friends. And then it turns into Friends with Benefits. And then after X amount of time, it stops. (Paul, mixed group)

Participants indicated that either gender can initiate any CSR. However, men in the male group commented that men were more likely to initiate the ONS.

Alcohol/drugs

All groups agreed that alcohol is involved in the initiation of ONSs. BCs commonly involve alcohol due to the context in which the individuals contact each other (e.g., late at night, after one individual has been drinking). In regards to BCs, a female participant stated "I always think of the 'middle of the night drunk dial'" (Kate, sex educator group). Alcohol was only mentioned in the context of the very first time FWBs engage in any sexual activity because of the unique and potentially awkward shift from a platonic friendship to a sexual relationship. As one group member noted: "I think Friends with Benefits could be started by a really intoxicated night because it's not something you would normally do with that friend." (Kristen, female group)

Theme 2: Code of conduct

The Code of Conduct theme was divided into Explicit Rules and Implicit Rules, which were further divided into subthemes. Participants in each of the focus groups agreed that some rules were explicitly discussed between the individuals (Explicit Rules), while there were other scripted rules that the individuals were expected to know/follow even if not discussed (Implicit Rules).

Explicit rules: Discussion of what the relationship is
All four groups unanimously stated that FWBs discuss the relationship with one other. Ben stated: "With the Friend with Benefit, there is definitely more communication and you talk about where both of you stand and what you want out of this" (male group). Participants noted that FBs, BCs, and ONSs do not have this discussion with one another.

Discussion of monogamy

Given the temporally limited nature of ONSs and BCs, participants stated that discussions regarding monogamy are unnecessary. However, the discussion regarding sexual monogamy is very important for FWBs in regards to whether or not condoms are used. Female participants in the sex educator group discussed the negotiation of monogamy in FWBs in the following exchange:

Kate: The one thing I wanted to add to Friends with Benefits would be that you're not necessarily monogamous. But I would see it as when you're together, you're just sleeping with each other and you have to inform your Friend with Benefit if you became involved with someone else.
Candace: I agree.

Female facilitator: Does everyone agree with that? [agreement from everyone]. So if one partner starts sleeping with someone else...

Kate: Uh-huh. So you're open to possibilities of dating other people, because you are only Friends with Benefits, but you're basically filling the void until something better comes along.

Female facilitator: But there should be disclosure of that with each other?

Kate: Yes. Yes, because if you weren't having that kind of disclosure, then you'd be Fuck Buddies, not Friends with Benefits.

Allison: Talking about partial monogamy there, that could almost be stemming from wanting to be safe sexually, not exposing yourself to too many different viruses and whatnot. So if you're Friends with Benefits, that may be better than One Night Stands. Not even just the disclosure, but actually less exposure to new viruses.

Participants were clear that discussing whether or not people were sexually active outside the context of the FWBs relationship is an essential component of the FWB script, making the FWB relationship the most sexually exclusive. Monogamy rules are less stringent for FBs, but participants from all groups stated that a person usually only has one FB at a time due to the frequency of the sexual activity.

Discussion of ending the relationship

Participants stated that there is no need for a formal termination conversation for ONSs, BCs, and FBs. For the ONS, one woman said: "To me, by definition, it almost ends before it starts" (Tara, female group). In the case of BCs and FBs, female group participants indicated that they would either stop contacting the person or stop responding to the other's efforts to contact them when they were no longer interested in continuing the sexual relationship. The following conversation in the female group discussed how a BC relationship ends:

Nicole: A Booty Call could just disappear.

Heather: One of them starts casually dating [someone else] or some other bigger and better Booty Call comes along.

Angela: You just kind-of move on or you just stop talking to that person. It doesn't have to be spoken that we're not gonna do this anymore. It is just kind-of done.

Tara: I also think there's the potential for animosity to develop if one person turns down the other person at a given point.

Kristen: I think when a certain person stops being available, then a Booty Call is easily replaced.

In the context of FWBs, there are specific rules regarding appropriate behaviour (i.e., termination of the sexual aspect of their friendship) if the relationship ends because one of the partners starts dating someone else.

Rules of the relationship

A discussion of the rules was commonplace for FWBs, including how public their relationship is within their group of friends and what happens when the relationship ends. One woman observed:

I think it's something where you have to have rules, like ground rules with the person. They have to be set in stone, what you think. If you're in a Friends with Benefits relationship, if you go from being friends and the one friend goes to another relationship obviously nothing, right? There are ground rules. (Sarah, mixed group)

This theme also included rules in regards to posting information about the relationship on social networking sites, such as Facebook. For example, FWBs and FBs would be added to Facebook. However, partners explicitly agree that neither person will post information on the other's Facebook that alludes to their sexual relationship.

Implicit rules
Arranging interactions

Participants discussed general rules such as when to contact the person and when someone stays overnight. Some relationships involve an understanding that sexual activity occurs separately from social interactions. A male participant noted that: "You can go to a Booty Call and then go drinking with your buddies afterwards, whereas with a One Night Stand, you probably wouldn't" (Adam, male group). Others mentioned that it is not acceptable to contact a FWB late at night after the bar, whereas this behaviour is commonly associated with a BC or FB. In this sense, FWBs indicates a greater sense of commitment regarding the quality of time spent together. Participants unanimously agreed that staying overnight is acceptable for a ONS. To avoid potentially awkward situations, it was expected that the person leaves in the morning. "You wake up and leave. You don't stay and have coffee and breakfast or anything like that" (Allison, sex educator group).

Monogamy

Participants discussed whether or not individuals are monogamous within the various CSRs. For FWBs, monogamy is expected unless stated otherwise, whereas for the FB, there is an unspoken understanding that the relationship is not monogamous given that it is possible (although not common) to have more than one FB at a time. There was a similar understanding for BCs: "You have to assume that if you're Booty Call'ing her, there's probably someone else Booty Call'ing her, too" (Adam, male group).

Theme 3: Communication
Communication within relationship

Intimate disclosure

Many of the participants' comments indicated that FWBs include more disclosure of personal details compared to any of the other relationships. For example: "I think your friendship with your Fuck Buddy would be on a more superficial level than say

a Friend with Benefit" (Nicole, female group). The FB is considered a better friend than the BC because the BC is only contacted in order to engage in sexual activity, whereas it is possible that FB have sex and do something social (e.g., watch a movie).

Another issue related to the disclosure of personal information is whether or not an individual would be added to Facebook. A male participant commented on the secrecy involved with having anyone on Facebook: "They're all back-door Facebook. You just don't write anything about the sex." (Paul, mixed group). Participants agreed that FWBs are likely to have been friends on Facebook before the sexual relationship started. FBs would likely be added to Facebook, but again, individuals would discuss what is deemed appropriate information to share publicly on Facebook. Participants stated that a long-standing BC may be added to Facebook, but that this was an exception because BCs are not considered true friends. All participants were in agreement that a ONS would not be added to Facebook unless the ONS took place between friends.

Method of planning interactions

The method of contact used depends on the relationship. With the exception of FWBs, whom individuals would most likely speak with on the telephone, participants said that text messaging (i.e., texting) is the most common method of contact for BCs and FBs because fears of rejection are minimized. If texting is not used, another form of instant communication (e.g., MSN, Facebook chat) is used to make arrangements. For example, "MSN or something like that. Anything that is more instant. You don't have to wait on a reply" (Travis, male group). A "Booty Caller" would sometimes make a telephone call if the caller was too intoxicated to compose a legible text message or if a text message notification would not be loud enough to wake the other individual. One male stated: "If you're drunk at three in the morning, you'll probably call instead of text" (Eric, mixed group).

Tacit communication

Participants discussed the manner in which individuals communicate with each other and noted that the context of the invitation effectively communicates the person's intentions for both BCs and FBs. Individuals

arranging BCs may not explicitly discuss whether or not they were going to engage in any type of sexual activity. As one woman put it:

I'd say after twelve, a text, that's just like "Come over" or "What are you doing?" or "Where are you?" type of text. You know what they're getting at. (Sarah, mixed group)

The sex educator group also discussed tacit communication in relation to BCs.

Mike: I don't know if the indication is like "Come over, let's do it." It's more like "How about you come over?" It's not exactly really descriptive. But each party knows what they are getting into. It's insinuated what's going to happen. Allison: I don't think it's just girls who are discrete about it. I think guys are discrete about it too.

Female facilitator: So it's not explicitly stated in the invite?

Jason: Yeah, I think it's all about the context in which you get the invite. You know what to expect when you go there, if you go.

In relation to BCs, the sex educator group's comments indicated that type and level of communication varied depending on the type of relationship.

Discussion within the female group concerning the differences in communicating with a FB/FF and a FWB yielded the following exchange:

Kristen: I think with Fuck Friends there is more fucking in the relationship and that's it.

Jennifer: I think the difference between Fuck Friends [Fuck Buddies] and Friends with Benefits is when you hang out with a Friend with Benefits, it is not expected that you are going to have sex or do anything. But with Fuck Friends, it's guaranteed that you are going to do it [have sex].

Kristen: Yeah, that is what you are there for.

Communication outside relationship

Secrecy

The only CSR that was discussed in regards to secrecy was FWBs. Individuals may terminate the sexual component of their friendship if mutual friends within their group of friends learned of the sexual activity because this may ruin group dynamics. In the context of friends finding out about FWBs, a male participant noted that the repercussions may be more negative for the female:

You'd be more worried about that happening to the girl. For the guy, it's almost glorious in a way. You know... "You're the man!" or "Way to hook up!" Meanwhile, for the girl, it's like... It's that whole thing: "Dude, you're a pimp" (for hooking up) and then you say to the girl "You're a slut." (Mike, sex educator group)

Terminology

Participants identified a number of terms to describe the various CSRs (as detailed in Table 2). Not all participants were familiar with all of the terms identified and these differences appeared to be gender related. For example, Fuck 'n Chuck was identified by men in the mixed gender group and in the male only group while the terms Dick 'em and Dump 'em, Hit It and Quit It, and Use 'em and Lose 'em were identified only by the male group. Last Call was identified only by the mixed gender group.

Also in relation to terminology, the male group was the only group to discuss whether or not FWBs and FBs are two terms describing the same relationship. The following exchange in the male group reflects this discussion:

Ben: I'm mixed up between Friends with Benefits and Fuck Buddies. I always felt they were a synonym. I just thought Fuck Buddy was the word used between the guys and Friends with Benefits was how you establish the relationship with her." (agreement from the room)
Male Facilitator: So you're saying that when girls hear us talk, it's a Friend with Benefits. And if you're talking to guys, you're just gonna say Fuck Buddy?
Ben: I agree. It's all about the presentation.

Adam: Or you just say that “chick” (instead of calling her FB).

Trevor: There isn’t really a difference. I wouldn’t see a difference between both of them. It’s just terminology.

Adam: I think there are kinda the same, they are on the same spectrum, but one is kind-of a gentler one than the other.

As the conversation proceeded, the men’s group discussed the ways in which the terms FWB and FB denote two specific relationships: for example, FWBs respect one another compared to FBs who do not and FWBs always start with friendship first, whereas for FBs the friendship is formed from the sexual relationship.

The other three groups also discussed FWBs and FBs. For example, the sex educator group considered why some people used the FWBs and FBs terms interchangeably. One group member stated:

I don’t think when people say them (FWB or FB), they’re thinking about all these different distinctions. But when they say them, it comes out as to how much they respect the person, whether they call them a *friend* with a benefit of just a *fuck* friend (emphases made by person). (Allison, sex educator group)

In the female group, a member noted: “I really think it’s important, in the title of Fuck Friend (FB) or Friend with Benefit, the implication of whether the fuck comes *first* or the fuck comes *after*. I do think that their names define them” (emphases made by person) (Nicole, female group). Other than these excerpts, participants discussed the terms as distinct relationships.

Theme 4: Interaction

Frequency

The frequency of contact often determines the type of sexual relationship. Participants unanimously agreed that a ONS is usually one night and no further contact (sexual or otherwise). Even if the individuals have sex multiple times or the following morning this would still be considered a ONS. However, if individuals who had previously had a ONS meet for sex again, this would be considered a BC.

Frequency of contact also determines whether an interaction is called a BC or a FB as reflected in the following quote:

The more often the Booty Call, then you actually wouldn’t call it a Booty Call. You would call it a Fuck Buddy. I think a Booty Call is once in awhile. If it’s more often than that, say a couple times in a week or more than that, then I think you would call it a Fuck Buddy (agreement from room). (Travis, male group)

Sexual or non-sexual activity

FWB is the only relationship among the four under consideration here to be demarcated by non-sexual activity. Because there is an existing friendship with FWBs, these individuals may spend time together and not engage in any type of sexual activity. This is an important distinguishing feature between FWBs and FBs as reflected in the observation that follows:

I think with Fuck Buddies, the only time you would see that person is when you’re having sex. But with Friends with Benefits, you could possibly hang out with them and there would not necessarily be sex. You could hang out with other mutual friends or just have a night without sex (sex educator group).

Theme 5: Termination

Other relationship for one individual

An important factor in the termination of one of these four relationships is whether someone enters into a new relationship. In the case of FWBs, the relationship ends if one of the individuals starts dating someone else: “It would stop. If the person said they were dating someone, it would stop” (Candace, sex educator group). Participants had similar expectation for FBs whereas BCs were thought to be more fluid in their initiation and termination. For example, a BC may end when either partner simply ceases to respond to/send text messages. As one female group members stated: “You just kinda move on or you just stop talking to that person. It doesn’t have to be spoken that ‘We’re not gonna do this anymore.’ It’s just kinda done” (Angela, female group).

Level of interest*Too Attached*

Participants indicated that each of the four CSRs could be successful if neither individual is emotionally attached: “For a Friend with Benefit, yeah, that brings attachment into it. Like if one person’s gonna fall for the other one and it just ruins it and it’s not the same for both sides anymore.” (Jessica, mixed group). An exchange between two women in the sex educator group reflects these views about attachment in FWB relationships:

Allison: I think it can sometimes be when someone just becomes too invested and isn’t getting enough out of it.

Candace: And hopefully, from the other side, the person who is less invested senses that the other person is more invested and they will cut it off.

Similar comments were made in regard to FBs and BCs. Interestingly, participants were steadfast in their belief that either partner is responsible for ending any relationship if one of the partners becomes too attached—either the individual who becomes too attached or the individual who observes the other individual becoming too attached.

Loss of interest

There was a general understanding among the participants that the four relationship types under consideration are temporary and can end at any time. However, none of the participants discussed losing interest in FWBs, which suggests that the friendship aspect of FWBs may sustain both individuals’ interests (at least until someone starts a relationship with someone else). For FBs and BCs, communication often simply ends, signalling to either individual that the relationship is over. For example, “Fuck Buddies are more likely to just drift apart. Communication stops. Just goes poof over time” (Mike, sex educator group). The same is true for BCs as they are easily replaced.

Contact after the relationship

Participants were divided on whether or not FWBs would remain friends once they were no longer engaging in sexual activity. None of the participants in any group provided a clear answer on this issue. The following discussion took place between three

women in the female group regarding what would happen after FWBs are no longer having sex:

Kristen: It could end with you losing a friend.

Heather: It could also end with just staying friends. You could just be friends because it’s better that way.

Kristen: It could also be an awkward friendship afterwards. [agreement around the room]

Angela: Your friendship would kind-of change.

Kristen: Yeah, I don’t think it would ever be the same. You know, you started fooling around then “Okay, we shouldn’t.”

Heather: I also think you could always go back to them somehow. Maybe you’ll cut it off and then there will be a time when you are both available, you might go back to them. I think Friends with Benefits are more likely to go back to than all the others.

Participants indicated that one of the key differences between FWBs and FBs was the difference in the relationship status once the individuals ceased engaging in sexual activity. In general, they thought that individuals who stopped being FWBs could maintain some type of friendship post-sexual activity. In contrast, FBs were considered unlikely to maintain any form of friendship post-sexual activity. One participant expressed it this way:

I think with Fuck Friends you stopped fucking and it didn’t really become anything and no reason to hang out with each other after. But with Friends with Benefits, there’s the possibility that you’ll stay friends after. (Jennifer, female group)

In the case of ONS and BC, participants indicated that the possibility of staying in contact would depend on how any relationship ended.

Discussion

CSRs are increasingly common in both media representations and in the academic literature (Owen & Fincham, 2011a; Bogle, 2008; Weaver et al., 2011). While prevalence rates suggest that these

sexual relationships are common expressions of non-committed dyadic sexual interactions in young adults (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Jonason et al., 2009), clear definitions of these various casual sexual interactions have eluded the research field. In this exploratory qualitative analysis, a number of different types of CSRs were identified and discussed with remarkable agreement both across focus groups and between focus group members. Discussing multiple CSRs in one study marks an important step in defining and distinguishing multiple CSRs along a continuum specific to casual sex.

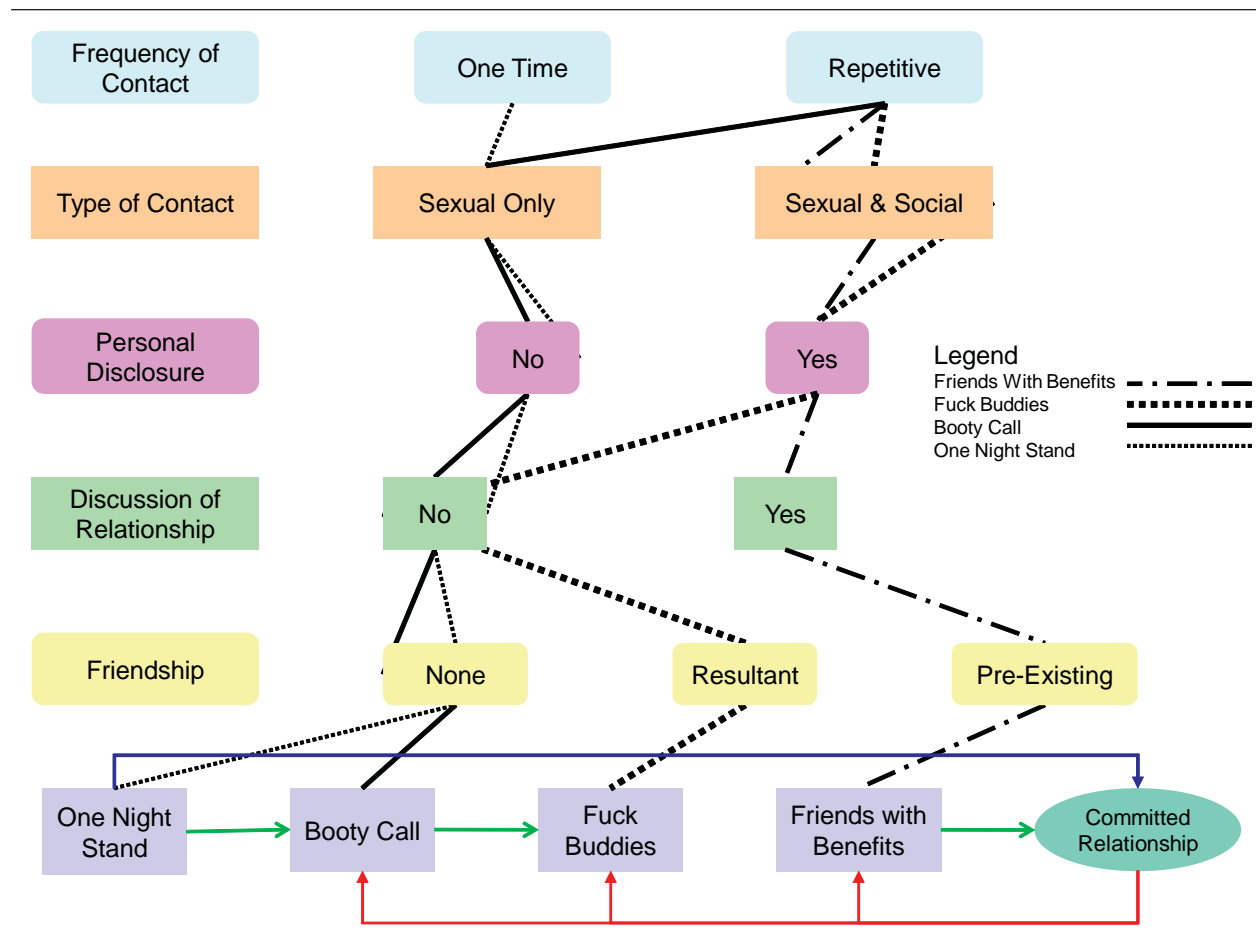
Participants provided elaborate hypothetical scenarios to demarcate these sexual relationships including the degree of friendship and/or familiarity between the individuals (e.g., how the individuals meet or know each other), the extent to which the individuals discuss the relationship with one another (e.g., whether or not the individuals discuss initiation,

termination, or monogamy), the amount of personal disclosure (e.g., whether or not individuals add each other to Facebook), the type of activity between the individuals (e.g., sexual or non-sexual activities), and the frequency of contact (e.g., whether or not sexual activity occurs once or repeatedly). See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of the four CSRs.

There was consensus among the various focus groups on appropriate and/or inappropriate behaviour for each CSR. The participants' shared understanding of the implicit and explicit rules that govern these relationships, regardless of participant gender, focus group assignment, or previous experience with any CSR, suggests common cultural knowledge of these sexual relationships.

ONSs represent the least emotionally intimate CSR because of the limited amount of time the partners know each other before engaging in sexual

Figure 1 Flow chart of casual relationships



intercourse. The ONS most often involves strangers or brief acquaintances (e.g., individuals who meet at a bar or party), occurs only once (even if the individuals engage in sexual activity multiple times during the course of the interaction), and ends when the individuals part company. The environment where the individuals meet is an important factor for ONSs. College students in Bersamin and colleagues' (2011) large survey study ($N = 7,414$) reported that fraternity/sorority house parties, residence-hall, and off-campus house parties were the most commonly reported settings for students (especially if under the legal drinking age) to engage in sexual intercourse with a stranger while under the influence of alcohol. The purpose of the ONS is not to lead to a romantic relationship; thus, an important rule of the ONS is that neither individual become attached. However, while this is the general rule, partners involved in an ONS may choose to continue meeting either for ongoing sexual activity without attachment (BC or FB) or to develop a romantic relationship. Interestingly, as partners meet more than once for sex, the possibility of a dating relationship decreases.

The purpose of the BC is to engage in repeated sexual activity with an acquaintance. According to participants, BCs usually occur between individuals who contact each other for sex by texting. Individuals participating in a BC do not stay overnight, share minimal affection, and participate in no other shared activities (other than possible group activities such as attending class). Jonason and colleagues' (2009) participants reported that BCs were arranged via the telephone. Similarly, participants in the present study were very clear that texting was the main method of communication unless the person was too inebriated to compose legible text messages. Although BCs can be arranged for later the same evening, they are not planned in advance. The unpredictability and spontaneity with which BCs are initiated and terminated are defining features of this relationship.

Individuals in a BC relationship do not consider each other friends (e.g., a BC would not be added to Facebook); these individuals are convenient, transient sexual partners with no emotional investment. Our results contrast the findings of Jonason and colleagues (2009), who suggested that the BC involves a certain degree of investment and/or longevity that includes

an underlying friendship. Based on our participants, the unemotional, perfunctory manner in which BCs are initiated and terminated points towards the lack of an existing friendship between these individuals. Our participants stated that if a BC becomes too regular and/or frequent (i.e., every week), it would be considered a FB, suggesting a limit in regards to the frequency of BCs.

The FB relationship represents a new addition to the continuum of CSRs in the academic literature. Scientific exploration of the FB relationship is sparse in the existing literature. One study exploring homosexual identity in older males briefly used the term FB to refer to "friendships largely limited to sexual interaction" (Sullivan & Reynolds, 2003, p. 154). Williams and colleagues (2007) suggest that FBs may be a variation of the "Just Friends" FWBs. Participants in Weaver and colleagues' (2011) study used the terms FWB and FB interchangeably with some participants stating that FB has a more negative connotation compared to FWB. According to participants in the present study, FBs often develop between individuals who are either previous acquaintances or individuals who have been involved sexually with one another, such as a former ONS or a previous BC. An important component of the FB relationship is that the individuals always engage in sexual activity with each other even if they also engage in social activities. This is in contrast to both the ONS and BC, which are centred strictly on sexual activity. FBs often develop a friendship as a result of repeated sexual activity between the individuals. For the FBs, the sexual activity that these individuals engage in is the very reason they may develop a friendship, which is an interesting variant of mere exposure theory (i.e., individuals to whom one is repeatedly exposed are more likely to become friends and/or romantic partners; Zajonc, 1968) and proximity theory (i.e., individuals with whom one is in contact are more likely to become friends and/or romantic partners; Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2008; Priest & Sawyer, 1967). While FBs may develop a friendship as a result of spending time together, this friendship is superficial and ends with the termination of the sexual relationship. Additional research is necessary to understand the specific components of FBs and determine how FBs compare to other CSRs.

The participants identified individuals who have an existing friendship prior to sexual activity as FWB. These relationships are the most complicated CSR to negotiate, maintain, and terminate. In line with previous research (Hughes et al., 2005), our participants identified various rules specific to FWBs relationships. FWB is the only CSR to include formal discussions on initiation of the sexual relationship, sexual monogamy, and termination of the sexual component of the relationship and the only relationship in which the partners are likely to continue contact after the sexual aspect of the relationship has ended. The extensive discussion of participants in this study regarding communication in a FWB relationship contrasts with Owen and Fincham (2011a) who suggest that participants who require explicit discussion of relationship transitions (e.g., engaging in sexual activity for the first time) would not engage in FWB relationships. Participants in our study stated that explicit discussions are one aspect that specifically differentiate FWB from the other types of CSRs, which contrasts with Weaver and colleagues' (2011) finding that FWB engage in minimal direct communication. According to our participants, FWBs genuinely respect and care for one another, which is likely due to the friendship that exists prior to the individuals engaging in any sexual activity. This pre-existing friendship may explain why these individuals place a high value on ensuring both partners "agree" to the FWB rules of engagement.

Findings from this study suggest that the FB relationship, albeit similar to the FWB relationship, has its own distinct characteristics. Participants identified a number of key differences: FWBs commence with an existing friendship which then leads to sexual activity while FBs commence with sexual activity which then leads to a friendship that ends with the termination of sexual activity. Following termination of the benefits aspect of FWBs, individuals often remain friends. The pre-existing friendship and respect in FWBs may explain why participants stated that FWB is the most likely to lead to a committed romantic relationship. We postulate that both FWBs and FBs represent discrete relationships along the continuum of CSRs.

There were minimal gender differences noted in this study. Male and female participants identified the same code of conduct including implicit and explicit rules that guide the expected behaviours of the various CSRs. Regardless of group, men stated that men are more likely to initiate a ONS. An additional gender difference observed was in regards to the names that (some) men identified in reference to CSRs that occur only one time. These names are only used with other men (i.e., not used in front of the female partner) in order to retain the possibility of future sexual liaisons. Gendered patterns for various CSRs need to be further examined to identify gender roles.

Due to the asymmetrical time devoted to parental investment (Trivers, 1972), women should be more discerning when engaging in short-term mating. According to Buss and Schmitt's (1993) Sexual Strategies Theory, women use short-term mates to assess potential long-term mates. In line with this theory, Jonason and colleagues (2009) suggest that men use BCs to gain increased sexual access to women, while women use BCs to evaluate potential romantic partners. However, participants in this study, regardless of gender, stated that not only are they *less* interested in pursuing a relationship with a BC partner, but are more likely to date an individual with whom they have had a ONS. Engaging in repeat sexual encounters where sexual activity is the primary reason for spending time with one another (i.e., BCs, FBs) seems to negate the possibility of a committed relationship developing. The findings from this study appear to blur some of the traditional gender differences in regards to why men or women engage in casual sex and points toward a genderless code of conduct for some CSRs.

Limitations and concluding observations

This research sheds important light on the rich and distinct nuances of CSRs, but limitations of the study should be noted. Given the exploratory nature of this first study, four focus groups were conducted in order to create preliminary definitions to be validated in a subsequent study. Both the sex educator and student participants live in a modern Canadian city and therefore, results may not be generalizable. Participants self-selected for this study, and therefore, individuals with positive experiences or specific expectations of CSRs may have chosen to

participate (even though previous experience was not required) resulting in an overly optimistic account of these sexual relationships. Conversely, participants with no experience with CSRs participated (as indicated by five participants with zero casual sexual partners) and only shared hypothetical accounts of the relationships. Thus, further examination of individuals with varying experience of CSRs (positive, negative, no experience) is needed to determine how experience affects participants' conceptualizations. Exploring how various groups (men and women, older individuals, lesbian/gay/bisexual) conceptualize these CSRs is also needed.

Young adults appear to be developing broader conceptualizations of what constitutes a relationship. Subsuming different types of non-committed sexual relationships under the term "casual sex" oversimplifies and obscures the varied CSRs that exist. It also prevents researchers from further differentiating these relationships from one another. Future research should continue to examine how CSRs, including ONSs, BCs, FBs, and FWBs, are conceptualized, negotiated, and ultimately experienced by the individuals who engage in them. Researchers, clinicians, and sexuality educators should incorporate these forms of sexual interaction into their discussion of CSRs to more accurately reflect the reality of sexual relationships among young adults.

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