

# Phenomenological Study: Friends with Benefit (FWB) Decision Making Towards Interpersonal Relationships Through Online Applications

Rika Fuaturosida<sup>1</sup> [0000-0002-9398-9932], Yusuf Ratu Agung<sup>2</sup> [0000-0003-1187-7214],

Edvin Eka Nur Rochim<sup>3</sup>, and Alif Arifzan Anshari<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Islamic State University Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang 65144, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Islamic State University Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang 65144, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Islamic State University Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang 65144, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Islamic State University Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang 65144, Indonesia

**Abstract.** Friends with Benefits is a status less relationship between two people who are friends with various motives, including the release of sexuality, the desire to establish FWB, avoiding serious relationships, wanting a simple relationship, and establishing friendship. This study aims to determine the decision making of the friends with benefits relationship on the interpersonal relationship of the perpetrator. The method used is a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. The data collection technique used in this research is in-depth interviews with participants who have been in friends with benefits relationships. The participants in this study were 2 main subjects and 3 supporting informants. The analysis technique used in this research is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the stages of preparing interview transcripts, initial recording, formulating emergent themes, formulating superordinate themes, making patterns of experience between participants and reporting results. Based on the results of the study, it shows that the decision-making pattern of friends with benefits involves a distinctive impression, namely the sexual impression on each participant, the relationship pattern of friends with benefits is described variously, such as friends but intimate, sexual need satisfaction, and relationships limited to having fun. The interpersonal relationship in question is just a friend and the main point of agreement is only sexual activity.

**Keywords:** friend with benefits, interpersonal relationship

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The FWB phenomenon is one of the many phenomena that have begun to be discussed by the public. In Indonesia, the FWB phenomenon is quite often experienced and discussed, especially by teenagers or early adults in the form of sharing experiences, ex-

planations, and community discussions on matters surrounding definitions, characteristics, procedures, benefits, and various other discussions. FWB (friends with benefits) can be categorized as a casual sex relationship, which is formed from the integration of friendship with sexual intimacy or physical intimacy [18][19] [23]. FWBs consist of actions that describe a romantic relationship, such as sexual and physical arousal or desire, but are also accompanied by treatment or statements, either directly or indirectly, from the partner that the relationship is not romantic.

FWBs can be established through online introductions on dating apps or on the internet. The internet itself has become a space used by individuals to search for various things, especially friends, communities, romantic partners, and sexual partners [9]. The act of looking for partners or engaging in sexual activities online has been described previously. Through research conducted in 4 countries (Sweden, Canada Germany, and USA), there is a considerable amount, especially in the implementation of cybersex acts, which is at a value of 30.8% of a total of 2,690 respondents [12]. One of the platforms that offers dating services, having many users with various motivations is Tinder. Based on research in the Netherlands, one of the motivations for using the service is to find partners for casual sex [22].

Friendship is generally understood as a relationship that excludes feelings of romantic love and sexual contact to distinguish friendship from romantic relationships [5][6]. Friendship can also be referred to as "a non-sexual relationship of two people, based upon shared experience and characterized by mutual personal regard, understanding, and loyalty", or a non-sexual relationship between two people, based upon shared experience and characterized by mutual personal regard, understanding, and loyalty [1]. Furthermore, there is an exclusivity that distinguishes friendships from romantic relationships, where romantic relationships show a desire for exclusivity [6]. In other words, exclusivity, romantic love, and sexual desire and activity are the main differentiators between the two relationships.

FWBs combine the psychological closeness of friendships, with the sexual closeness of romantic relationships, without labelling the relationship as "romantic" [14][17]. FWBs can be labelled as friendships because the individuals involved are not romantically committed, and do not have romantic love for each other. But on the other hand, FWBs can also be labelled as part of a romantic relationship, evidenced by the couple's repeated or ongoing involvement in sexual activities.

Interpersonal relationships are often associated with interpersonal communication and the expectation of intimacy between individuals in the relationship. Interpersonal relationships can also be defined as a condition in which individuals feel a mutual or reciprocal attraction [24]. The process of interpersonal relationship formation shows the interaction between two or more individuals in which there is a continuous change of conditions.

Interpersonal relationships involve certain processes, including information exchange, emotional exchange, and behavioral reactivity between two or more individuals. These processes are carried out by individuals with other individuals outside of themselves, for example with family, friends, partners, co-workers, and many more. The exchanges that occur between individuals are not limited to giving each other, but also followed by good emotional understanding, supported by effective communication, and respect from and to everyone [9].

There are several types of interpersonal relationships based on certain boundaries. Family relationships are generally interpersonal relationships that involve common blood ties, or legal ties, that last a lifetime. It is also said to be the first relationship an individual experiences before being able to interact in other types of relationships outside of the family and is argued to shape one's style of interacting in society or in a broader scope [20]. Next, friendship relationships are generally social relationships that occur because of some perceived similarities between individuals, ranging from shared interests, fate, or struggles. These relationships can provide individuals with certain feelings, such as being voluntary, generating feelings of excitement and pleasure, providing certain social support, and supporting development in personal life, both in terms of career and hobbies [3].

Next, romantic relationships are relationships that involve romantic feelings and concepts. Romantic relationships are based on the concepts of romance, which are related to romance, love, and intimate relationships between two individuals, and involve affection and desire [2]. Finally, and in contrast to romantic relationships, casual relationships are relationships that tend not to have or involve commitment and are non-serious in nature. Casual relationships can include friendships that are not deep, dating the opposite sex that is non-binding or has no binding end goal, or social interactions in general (e.g., in public spaces) [17].

In professional interactions, interpersonal relationships are often linked to professional duties. These relationships serve to support the process of prevention or coping, with illness and suffering, and can also serve to find meaning in certain experiences. Interpersonal relationships can also be defined as relationships between two or more personnel or individuals in general. One concept that supports the understanding of interpersonal relationships that can distinguish between romantic and casual relationships is Plato's Symposium [15]. In the work, Symposium, Plato suggests that there are several types of love or feelings that one can feel in a relationship. Eros is a romantic feeling of love. *Storge* is a feeling of love that arises from a feeling of comfort and security, obtained from trusted people. Agape is the name given to the feeling of love shown to the universe. Ludus is a playful love that is shown to young couples. Mania is a term for infatuation that leads to obsession. *Philautia* is a condition in which one loves and accepts oneself as one is. Pragma is a term for feelings of love that are held for a lifetime. Finally, *philia*, is a feeling of love shown to the closest friend. Based on the phenomenon and data exposure above, the researcher is interested in describing the

phenomenon of friends with benefit couples, especially in decision making and the influence of interpersonal relationships of friends with benefit participants.

## **2 METHOD**

The research used is a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. This approach emphasizes a way of self-transcendence that connects consciousness with other objects, to reveal hidden aspects of individual experience [16]. The purpose of using this research approach is that the researcher tries to understand the description of the phenomenon of the participants under study by using appropriate logic and theory to see how the subject's experience makes the decision to do friends with benefits and the influence of friends with benefits on the subject's interpersonal relationships. The data collection technique used in this study is in-depth interviews with participants who have had friends with benefit relationships and use online applications to find friends with benefit partners. The participants in this study were 2 main subjects and 3 supporting in-formants. Participants have the criteria of someone who uses online applications, has done or has an FWB partner, is willing to be a research participant during the research. The data analysis technique used in this research is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the stages of preparing interview transcripts, initial re-cording, formulating emergent themes, formulating superordinate themes, making patterns of experience between participants and reporting results.

## **3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method show that each participant has his own reasons for making friends with benefits decisions in online applications. The male participant revealed that he had many FWB partners with the aim of fulfilling sexual desires that were not obtained by couples who had official relationships, so he had FWB as a means of getting biological satisfaction. The female participant said that her decision to do friends with benefits was because she was not ready to build a serious or committed relationship with another person on the grounds that life does not need to be controlled, live simply, and not be burdened with serious relationship patterns.

In the FWB relationship, the subject triggers the emergence of relationships related to interpersonal because of the attitudes that affect the subject's interpersonal. The female participant stated that in the FWB relationship she felt disappointed with her FWB partner for not fully appreciating me, but on the other hand the female participant had trust in her FWB partner so that the relationships built sometimes did not all go well. Therefore, participants revealed that before a worse problem occurred, they made an agreement as far as the limits that could be done and could not be done. Participants revealed that if the agreement was violated by one party, the FWB relationship could

be terminated. Participants stated that relationships that harm one party in FWB should be resolved as soon as possible so as not to prolong or involve the emotional side.

The male participant revealed that during his FWB relationship, he had felt in love with his FWB partner, but it was only 1-3 days, then he realized and made boundaries so that the love did not grow over time, the emotional side began to appear when the male participant met his FWB partner for the second time. Participants do various ways so that their emotional side with their FWB partner does not become a problem for their FWB relationship. One of the ways is by making meeting restrictions, restrictions in sexual intercourse, and limited intensity in communication.

During the interview process, we also had additional informants to support this research. FD revealed that during his FWB relationship he felt different about his interpersonal relationships, such as reduced trust in others and difficulty opening up to others. The next informant, EZ, revealed that during the FWB relationship he got biological satisfaction and inner satisfaction getting an ideal partner without the need to make a commitment, after he did FWB he felt that his interpersonal relationship in terms of tolerance had improved, the subject felt that this relationship was not only limited to FWB but also a relationship that could be strengthened towards a serious relationship. The last informant, KD, revealed that as long as he did FWB, the sense of affection given gave ED emotional satisfaction so that the FWB relationship was very profitable, but on the other hand ED felt he had difficulty finding the right emotional atmosphere, sometimes he could love his FWB partner and sometimes he had also started to get bored with his FWB partner.

People do have certain reasons for starting a FWB (Friends with Benefits) relationship, which usually involves a sexual relationship without romantic commitment. Based on the research mentioned, FWB relationships are desired for several reasons, including trust and comfort, as well as a desire to avoid the commitment of a romantic relationship. Both participants in this study, both male and female, had the same reason when deciding to start a FWB relationship, which was to avoid commitment. Commitment in a romantic relationship involves the intention to stay in the relationship, including long-term orientation and feelings of psychological attachment.

The female participant in the study stated that she basically disliked commitment in romantic relationships, whereas the male participant avoided commitment due to previous unsuccessful relationship experiences. This suggests that past experiences and personal preferences can influence one's attitude towards commitment in relationships. Erich Fromm, in his book "The Art of Loving", states that love is an act of faith. He says that to love is to commit oneself with no guarantees, to give oneself completely in the hope that the love will result in love in the loved one [13]. Love is an act of faith, and anyone who has a little faith also has a little love.

When someone loses faith in a relationship, they may rationalize the loss of faith. Avoiding the commitment of being in a romantic relationship may be a form of rationalization for the male participants' loss of faith in their previous romantic relationships. Overall, this study shows that the reasons for initiating FWB relationships can vary and are often related to past experiences, personal preferences, and feelings of fear or uncertainty towards love and commitment in romantic relationships.

Both participants have the same meaning in FWB relationships, which is the satisfaction of sexual needs. In addition, both had different meanings of FWB relationships. Participants described their FWB relationships as simply relationships for fun. Fun, the participants meant, is a friendly relationship that allows one to have fun without the limitations of status and commitment. Meanwhile, male participants described their FWB relationships as friends but familiar, i.e. the things they used to do with their FWB partners were the same as the things they used to do with romantic partners, but there was no attachment and emotions involved. FWBs lack exclusivity, commitment, and desire for romantic relationships and emotional attachment [14].

In terms of FWB partners, both participants considered FWB partners to be friends and sexual partners, although each participant had different intentions. The friends mentioned by the participants were all friends without feelings. As already explained, *baper* is an acronym for bringing emotions or can be interpreted as referring to emotions. For male participants, FWB partners were friends who would help when male participants needed help. Male participants felt a sense of love and care towards their FWB partners, but these feelings were limited to feelings of affection towards a friend. In addition, both participants also agreed that the meaning of FWB partner for them, apart from being a friend, also means as a sexual partner. If we consider what FWB partners mean to both participants, this is consistent with research assertions that FWB relationships combine the benefits of friendship with the benefits of sexual relationships, yet avoid the obligations and commitments commonly found in romantic relationships [14]. Results showed that each participant described their FWB relationship in a different way [17]. Although each participant's FWB relationship was different, the only unifying point was sexual activity. Each participant had their own interpretation of FWB relationships and FWB partners, but what they had in common was the sexual activity that occurred in FWB relationships.

The relationship between gender differences and motivations for engaging in FWB is further explained by Lehmler et al [26]. Each gender has different motivations as a reason for engaging in FWB, such as men, who generally want the benefits of sexual intercourse, while women generally want emotional connectedness in this relationship. In addition, the expectations of each gender also have significant differences, especially on the condition of future sustainability. Male respondents expect FWB to last in such a way forever, while in female respondents, there is an expectation to bring the FWB relationship into the realm of romance completely or return to a regular friendship re-

lationship. The expectations of male respondents are also supported by research by Epstein et al, which explains that men, especially university students, prefer non-relational sexual relationships [25].

In FWB relationships, the feeling of disappointment is a sign of dissatisfaction in the FWB relationship felt by the interviewees. This condition is an impact of the emergence of intimacy and feelings of jealousy, which arise from female informants. This is confirmed by Dewi & Sumantri's research, which states that there is a significant influence of two aspects, namely intimacy and feelings of jealousy on relationship satisfaction [11]. The female respondents in the study also felt dissatisfaction in the relationship due to the lack of emotional components offered in the FWB relationship.

Relationship restrictions, both in terms of intensity and type of relationship, which are often unclear, are often problematic in FWB relationships. Bisson et al mention that this problematic condition occurs due to the confusion and emotional development that arises over time between the two individuals bound in the FWB agreement [5]. This relationship then leads to everyone's tendency to expect romanticized actions or treatment; for women, the need for deep emotional attachment, and for men a more intense intimate relationship, each requiring a more explicit and clear relationship, compared to FWB which is limited to trust and comfort. This was seen to be quite prevalent in both subjects, where the female subject felt the need for certain rewards that the male subject did not provide, while it was the male subject who began to feel a sense of love as an emotional response in this relationship.

On the other hand, there is a termination process in FWB relationships. The termination of FWB relationship is done due to the will of everyone involved to stop the process of romance development. Adolescent romantic relationships are often considered important and contribute to the development of relational processes and can predict the quality of intimate relationships in the adult phase [7]. Generally, by 21-25 years of age, or in emerging adulthood, which is the age of transition between late adolescence and middle adulthood, individuals can engage in romantic relationships. Regarding work and education, individuals refer to the purpose of the FWB, this termination is done so that the individuals involved do not enter the spectrum of romantic relationships, which has the potential to interfere with the fulfilment of each other's needs, as well as bring up the needs and pressures of more stringent and binding romantic concepts.

Overall, based on the research participants, the emotional risk side shows that often one party can be emotionally involved and experience heartache when the relationship ends or when one party decides to commit to someone else. In addition to the emotional risks posed, other problems arise, as in this case in the form of interpersonal complications that trigger confusion in the subject's interpersonal relationship that lacks clarity in expectations, if one party expects more from the other, it can cause conflict and communication difficulties. Psychologically, the whole act of FWB will cause a negative

impact on participants' psychological well-being, especially if they are not prepared for the consequences that occur.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it explains that the participants have their own reasons for making the decision to do friends with benefit, based on the data exposure above, participants are reluctant to build commitments with partners or serious relationships, besides that participants show that they only want to fulfil their sexual needs. Participants who do friends with benefit sometimes feel in love or get caught up in the emotional side when doing FWB so that they make certain boundaries so as not to continue to something more serious, if violated then the relationship can be stopped. In undergoing a FWB relationship, the meaning of the FWB relationship of the participants displays different meanings for each participant. For participants, FWB relationships are relationships for having fun, relationships of friends but intimate, and relationships as satisfying sexual needs. Meanwhile, in interpreting FWB couples, the participants interpreted them as friends and sex partners.

## References

1. Armstrong, R. L. Friendship. *J. Value Inquiry*, 19, 211. (1985).
2. Aron, A., & Aron, E. N. Love and the expansion of self: Understanding attraction and satisfaction (pp. x, 172). Hemisphere Publishing Corp/Harper & Row Publishers (1986).
3. Berger, C. R. In an Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research (2nd ed.). *Interpersonal Communication*. Routledge (2008).
4. Berscheid, E. Interpersonal Relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 45 (Volume 45, 1994), Article Volume 45, (1994).
5. Bisson, M. A., & Levine, T. R. Negotiating a friends with benefits relationship. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 38(1), 66-73 (2009).
6. Brehm, S. S., Miller, R. S., Perlman, D., Campbell, S. *Intimate Relationships* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York (2002)
7. Connolly, J., McIsaac, C., Shulman, S., Wincentak, K., Joly, L., Heifetz, M., & Bravo, V. Development of romantic relationships in adolescence and emerging adulthood: Implications for community mental health. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 33(1), 7-19 (2014).
8. Cook, W. L. The comparative study of interpersonal relationships. *Family Science*, 1(1) (2010).
9. Couch, D., & Liamputtong, P. Online dating and mating: The use of the internet to meet sexual partners. *Qualitative health research*, 18(2), 268-279 (2008).
10. DeVito, J. A. *The Interpersonal Communication Book*. Pearson (2015).
11. Dewi, P. Y. T., & Sumantri, M. A. Menguji kepuasan hubungan melalui intimasi dan perasaan cemburu pada pelaku hubungan friends with benefits. *Jurnal Psikologi Teori Dan Terapan*, 10(2), 114-126 (2020).

12. Döring, N., Daneback, K., Shaughnessy, K., Grov, C., & Byers, E. S. Online Sexual Activity Experiences Among College Students: A Four-Country Comparison. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 46(6) (2017).
13. Fromm, E. *The Art of Loving*. 1<sup>st</sup> edn. Harper & Brothers, New York (1956).
14. Hughes, M., Morrison, K., & Asada, K. J. K. What's love got to do with it? Exploring the impact of maintenance rules, love attitudes, and network support on friends with benefits relationships. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69(1), 49-66 (2005).
15. Martin, A. M. *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*. Routledge (2019).
16. Matua, G. A., & Van Der Wal, D. M. Differentiating between descriptive and interpretive phenomenological research approaches. *Nurse Researcher*, 22(6), 22-27 (2015).
17. Mongeau, P. A., Knight, K., Williams, J., Eden, J., & Shaw, C. Identifying and explicating variation among friends with benefits relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50(1), 37-47 (2013).
18. Owen, J., & Fincham, F. D. Effects of Gender and Psychosocial Factors on "Friends with Benefits" Relationships Among Young Adults. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 40(2) (2011).
19. Owen, J., Fincham, F. D., & Manthos, M. Friendship After a Friends with Benefits Relationship: Deception, Psychological Functioning, and Social Connectedness. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 42(8) (2013).
20. Peterson, G. W., & Rollins, B. C. Parent-Child Socialisation. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Ed.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (pp. 471-507). Springer, US (1987).
21. Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 357-391 (1998).
22. Sumter, S. R., Vandenbosch, L., & Ligtenberg, L. Love me Tinder: Untangling emerging adults' motivations for using the dating application Tinder. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(1) (2017).
23. Wentland, J. J., & Reissing, E. D. Taking casual sex not too casually: Exploring definitions of casual sexual relationships. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 20(3), 75. (2011).
24. Wood, J. T. *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*. Cengage Learning (2015).
25. Epstein, M., Calzo, J., Smiler, A., & Ward, M. "Anything from Making Out to Having Sex": Men's Negotiations of Hooking Up and Friends with Benefits Scripts. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 46, 414-424 (2009).
26. Lehmler, J., VanderDrift, L., & Kelly, J. Sex Differences in Approaching Friends with Benefits Relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 48, 275-284 (2011).