Qualitative Interviews with Adolescents about “Friends-with-Benefits” Relationships

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ABSTRACT Objective: To describe the thoughts, reflections, and experiences of friends-with-benefits relationships among a group of Swedish adolescents. Design and Sample: A qualitative study with an explorative and descriptive design. Eight adolescents, aged 16–18, were interviewed. Measures: Individual in-depth interviews were undertaken. Data were analyzed using latent content analysis. Results: The informants involved themselves in Friends-with-benefits (FWB) relationships to find physical and psychological intimacy without any expectations or demands. FWB relationships were perceived to have more advantages when the partner was a close friend with whom an informant felt comfortable. There was ambivalence about the legitimacy of romantic feelings in an FWB relationship, although it was quite common. Sexual concurrency was common and often accepted. Sexual risk-taking behavior involving the use of alcohol and a lack of contraception was considered common in FWB relationships. Informants requested more education and support as regards their sexual behavior. Conclusions: FWB relationships were often initiated to find physical and psychological intimacy with no expectations or demands. Advantages such as sexual concurrency and no demands were central. A deeper understanding of how adolescents think and reason about sexuality and relationships can make a difference when working to improve young peoples sexual and reproductive health.

Key words: adolescents, risk behaviors, risk prevention, sexual behaviors, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Background A national Swedish report based on more than 90 studies about sexual behavior among adolescents concludes, among other things, that there is an increased number of lifetime partners, an increase of casual sexual partners, and an increased openness for Friends-with-benefits (FWB) relationships (Forsberg, 2006). Swedish surveys show that adolescents of today have a liberal attitude toward their sexuality and there has been a change over time in sexual behavior (Edgardh, 2002a; Häggström-Nordin, Hanson & Tydén, 2005; Lewin, Fugl-Meyer, Helmius, Lalos & Månsson, 1998; Magnusson & Häggström-Nordin, 2009; Makenzius, Gillander- Gådin, Tydén, Romild & Larsson, 2009). Helmius (1990) documented that a change of “the love ideology” was in progress. This transformation implies that adolescents do not always combine sex with romantic feelings. Results from Forsberg report (2006) showed a reduction of people who considered sex as something that only occurs in a romantic relationship. In a national survey, an increasing number of
adolescents were of the opinion that having a sexual relationship without romantic feelings is legitimate (Lewin et al., 1998). Several kinds of non-romantic relationships have been defined in varied ways in previous U.S. studies (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Epstein, Calzo, Smiler & Ward, 2009; Grello; Lehmliller, Vanderdrift & Kelly, 2011). Casual relationships, hook-ups, one-night stands, and friends-with-benefits relationships are examples of this type of relationship. Definitions differ, but the sexual encounters without commitment co-occur. FWB is a relatively new concept, but is most likely not a new phenomenon (Forsberg, 2005). In this study, the concept of FWB relationships will be defined as Forsberg (2005) described the phenomenon; “a relation that consists for a short or a long period and where partners meet for sexual activities. In the relationship partners can be friends or acquaintances, but not necessarily. Sometimes partners had had a romantic relationship with each other before, or it could be that their only contact was on a sexual basis. FWB relationship is a non-romantic relation where sexual activity is central”. Epstein et al. (2009) and Häggström-Nordin et al. (2005) had a similar definition of FWB; an expectation of love was not legitimate in these kinds of relationships. Swedish male adolescents’ liberal attitudes toward sexuality may have an influence on the rising numbers of sexually transmitted infection (STI) and unplanned pregnancies (Makenzius et al., 2009). This liberal attitude may also have an impact on increasing risk-taking sexual behavior, such as a variety of sexual relationships and expressions (Magnusson & Häggström-Nordin, 2009). Makenzius et al. (2009) showed that alcohol consumption was common in relationships involving sexual intercourse. Alcohol consumption seems to have an impact on sexual behavior and sexual risk taking. In both qualitative and quantitative studies from the U.S., nonromantic sexual involvement such as FWB relationships, hookups, and casual relationships were often associated with the use of alcohol (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Downing-Matibag & Geisinger, 2009; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Grello, Welsh & Harper, 2006; Owen & Fincham, 2011; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley & Fincham, 2008; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Furthermore, alcohol consumption has often been combined with unprotected intercourse, as found in studies among Swedish adolescents (Edgardh, 2002b; Häggström-Nordin, Hanson & Tydén, 2002; Larsson, Tydén, Hanson & Häggström-Nordin, 2007).

U.S. adults involved in an FWB relationship often had concurrent sexual partners (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Drumright, Gorbach & Holmes, 2004; Paik, 2010), but tended to misjudge their partners’ concurrent relationships. Sexual concurrency has been described as a nonmonogamous relationship (Paik, 2010). Awareness of a partner’s concurrency is one significant factor in preventing STI (Drumright et al., 2004; Lenoir, Adler, Borzekowski, Tschann & Ellen, 2006). Concurrent sexual partners proved to be significantly associated with an increased risk of contracting an STI (Drumright et al., 2004; Jennings, Glass, Parham, Adler & Ellen, 2004; Manhart, Aral, Holmes & Hoxman, 2002; Paik, 2010; Rosenberg, Gurvey, Adler, Dunlop & Ellen, 1999). Sexual and reproductive health is a global health issue, and is given top priority by the World Health Organization, UNFPA (2011). In Sweden, 2 of 11 public health domains include sexual and reproductive health education (The Swedish National Board of Health & Welfare, 2009), and Youth Centers all over the country with multiprofessional staff strive to achieve these goals for visiting adolescents (Sweden’s Youth Centres’s, 2011). Moreover, teachers and school nurses are engaged in sex and relationship education in Swedish schools. Adolescents’ sexuality is in transformational phase because of liberal attitudes toward sexuality and a higher level of risk taking than earlier. Nonromantic relationships, such as FWB relationships, are a general concept and sex without love is accepted among adolescents. Alcohol use, concurrent sex partners, and inadequate use of contraceptives are common in these sexual contexts, making the prevalence of STIs progressing. This study therefore aims at describing thoughts, attitudes, and experiences of friends-with-benefits relationships among a group of Swedish adolescents.

Methods

Design and sample

This study uses a qualitative approach and an explorative and descriptive design. The study was conducted in 2010, in a medium-sized city in Sweden, and involved eight adolescents, aged 16–18 years, two young men, and six young women.
The informants were recruited in places where adolescents locate, in a youth center, and in a high school. Personnel at the youth center and in the high school were contacted, and approval for the research was requested and granted. The inclusion criteria were adolescents aged 16–18 years with an experience of an FWB relationship.

**Measures**

To gain a deeper understanding of adolescents’ thoughts, attitudes, and experiences of the FWB phenomenon, an interview guide with open-ended questions was prepared. The guide contained questions about FWB; experience, relationships, advantages and disadvantages, contraceptive use, STIs, concurrent sexual contacts, alcohol use, and sexual education and other kinds of support. An initial pilot interview was conducted, and as no changes were made to the interview guide, these data were included in the result. Two of the authors conducted four individual interviews each. The interviews took place at the University hospital, in a quiet and neutral environment and lasted about 45 min each.

The interview guide aligned with the aim of the study and was designed to ensure as much information as possible was gained. It was important to allow sufficient space for the informants' own thoughts. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into written text (Kvale, 1997).

**Analytic strategy**

The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis in line with Graneheim and Lundman (2004). The method involves a systematic identification of meaning units, condensed meaning units, codes, subcategories, and categories. (Table 1) The analysis is based on meaningful statements in the interviews and constitutes the significance of the result (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The aim of the procedure is to abstract the content to a logical level and to enable reflection of data. The transcribed interviews were processed repeatedly to enable comprehension of the context and to evolve a sense of the substance of the content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A discussion was held between the researchers until consensus was reached, increasing the credibility. Data analysis resulted in six categories and 24 subcategories explaining informants' thoughts, reflections, and experiences of FWB relationships. Identified categories were *Friends-with-benefits partner, Initiating a relationship, “The invisible contract”, Romantic emotions, Unaware of sexual risks involved,* and *Support in sexuality* (Table 2).

Both verbal and written information about the procedure for the study was given to all informants. Participation was voluntary and the informants could withdraw at any time if they so wished. Approval was granted by the local Ethical Committee.

**Results**

**Friends-with-benefits partner**

The majority of the informants preferred to have a close friend as an FWB partner. Positive aspects such as trust, easy access, safety, comfortableness, an open-up relationship, and mutual experiences were prevalent. With a close friend, there was an awareness of how the other partner felt and reacted, and it was possible to hang out “just as friends”. An FWB relationship with an acquaintance or stranger did not figure that often, but there were experiences presented by some of the informants, especially in a context where alcohol was consumed, when it appeared to be more common. However, it was the attraction that was central when it came to choosing an FWB partner. Attraction was involved in mainly two different qualities; personality and appearance.

“For me an FWB-relationship is...you meet someone you enjoy being with, someone you feel safe with” (Girl, 18).

With the unknown person it is more...now we are having sex...haven’t got so much to talk about and then things go quiet...then you leave immediately afterwards...it is not fun either (Girl, 17).

**Initiating a relationship**

FWB relationships were similar to romantic relationships in many ways. It was not only about the sexual commitment but also about the friendship, the intimacy, and the opportunity to have a good time. An FWB relationship could, according to some of the informants, be a substitute for a romantic relationship, or at least close to it, whereas others claimed the opposite. The difference between an FWB relationship and a romantic relationship was clear when it came to requirements and
independence, no strings attached. For that reason, several informants chose an FWB relationship as a substitute, when a good alternative to a romantic relationship was wanted. However, the informants stated that the intimacy in an FWB relationship could not be compared with the closeness in a romantic relationship. Most of the informants had positive experiences of FWB relationships and would consider getting involved in a new FWB relationship. On the other hand, several informants preferred a romantic relationship, but were not prepared to make the effort. The sexual need and intimacy were factors of importance when entering an FWB relationship. An FWB relationship satisfied sexual needs without romantic commitment. There was an opportunity to experience both excitement and security while avoiding a life partner. On the other hand, psychological intimacy in the form of sympathy, appreciation, affirmation, comfort, and support were elements of equal importance. “Some want to be affirmed, some want intimacy, some are just into the sex” (Girl, 16).

Table of Analysis Process of In-Depth Interviews, with Adolescents (n = 8) about Friends-with-Benefits Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning unit</th>
<th>Condensed meaning unit</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Better and more personal with a friend rather than with someone you don’t know”</td>
<td>Better with a friend than someone unknown</td>
<td>More personal with a friend</td>
<td>Close friend</td>
<td>Friends with benefits partner</td>
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</table>

The majority described starting an FWB as something that just happened; it was not a planned incident. Having had earlier negative experiences from romantic relationships were other reasons for entering an FWB relationship. Some informants talked about having a fear of romantic relationships because of the demands and consequences.

…not only sex and then you leave…we used to have a nice time together, do regular stuff and then it always ended up with sex…we usually spoke to each other afterwards (Boy, 18).

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…a romantic relationship can ruin so much…it’s like getting married…you are pressured to be so close, you are pressured to like and love this person…there are many unwritten rules (Girl, 18).

**“The invisible contract”**

“The invisible contract” concerned the expectations of how to act in an FWB relationship. There was an agreement that both partners should be equal, and be honest with and loyal to each other. Another understanding was that the relationship should be undemanding, independent, and off the record. Mutuality was very important when it came to setting rules for the present relationship. To avoid misunderstandings and hurt feelings, everything was expected to be on equal terms.

…after a while if it happened several times you have to talk about it, like what to do. Then you talk and come to an agreement about things, whether to keep on like it is or to finish it, or whatever …because you can’t keep on forever without discussing things… (Boy, 17).

The majority of the informants seemed to believe that FWB relationships were mostly about...
having sex without commitments. The simplicity and lack of demands and restraints were emphasized as favorable aspects. Feelings of liberty and independence gave opportunities to meet on terms of their own; however, some informants mentioned that FWB relationships were not completely without demands.

Because some don’t want to have romantic relationships, they don’t want to get attached, but still you feel like you want to have fun, have sex and so on (Girl, 16).

**Romantic emotions**

When it came to emotions, there was inconsistency. FWB relationships were figures with or without romantic feelings, and it was not unusual for informants to be ambivalent.

Unrequited emotions and jealousy were common. FWB relationships with or without emotions were equally common among informants, as well as opinions on whether emotions were legitimate or not. Sex without romantic feelings occurred, but it seemed rather common to gradually develop romantic feelings. There was distance between sex and emotions, but there was still a connection. One informant mentioned that one was expected to have some kind of romantic feelings for a sexual partner, and others felt that sex was better when feelings were not involved. Several informants were of the opinion that the relationship became impaired when romantic emotions developed. There was an obvious risk of consequences in an FWB relationship such as jealousy, hurt feelings, bad reputation, and feelings of being exploited when romantic emotions were not returned. Different expectations with or without unreciprocated feelings could result in disappointment.

After a while I fell in love with him…but he never fell in love with me…I became very jealous and sad, felt very bad…he was pretty mean actually because he kept having sex with me even though he knew I was in love and felt bad (Girl, 18).

**Unaware of sexual risk-taking behavior**

The initiation of an FWB relationship did not always involve the use of alcohol, although the use of alcohol was frequent, particularly when it came to initiating an FWB relationship with an unknown person. Alcohol was not necessarily involved, but it was commonly connected with a festive occasion. “I wasn’t affected by alcohol at all…it was still a festive occasion…maybe it wouldn’t have happened otherwise” (Girl, 18).

There was awareness of the risks of contracting a STI or unplanned pregnancy, but this knowledge was apparently not enough to prevent a sexual relationship developing. The same applied to the use of contraceptives and knowledge of prevention.

In general, informants experienced anxiety and a fear of sexual transmitted diseases, and getting an undesirable infection. There was a variation in attitudes regarding openness about STI in FWB relationships. Some pursued openness, whereas others considered it a private matter. There was consensus among informants on unplanned pregnancy as a bigger threat and a greater risk, compared with getting an STI.

The informants had some knowledge about STIs, but it was often perceived as inadequate. Chlamydia was perceived as an STI that could be cured and was easily diagnosed. There was unawareness about the prevalence of STIs. Some informants knew that it was important to be careful, whereas most of the informants felt “it will not happen to me”.

...you know that diseases exist. I believe that the main disease you hear about is like Chlamydia and diseases like that, and it's possible to take pills and then it's gone (Girl, 18).

The informants stated that being in an FWB relationship generated a false sense of security and that using contraception was always important regardless of the kind of the sexual relationship. The use of condoms or other contraceptives depended mainly on whether you trusted your sexual partner or not. The issue of trust differed depending on your partner and the type of relationship. Usually, there was less sense of trust with an unknown person and in a “one-night-stand relationship” than in an FWB relationship. It happened that the partner in a romantic relationship was usually more trustworthy than an FWB partner. The aspect of trust was important when it came to the choice of contraceptive. Most informants were of the opinion that a condom was necessary with an unknown partner or when there was a lack of trust. In relationships when one trusted one another, contraceptives like birth control pills or the contra-
ceptive ring were considered sufficient. Many informants explained that they knew about the importance of using a condom, though there was a gap between theory and practice. Different reasons for not using a condom were mentioned, such as the risk of ruining the moment, awkwardness, lack of condoms, laziness, discomfort, or other birth control contraceptives already being used.

...we did not use condoms even though I knew that he could have sex with other girls, but I knew him that well...but when you think about it maybe it was kind of stupid...I believe it's more common to skip using a condom when you know the person (Girl, 18).

There was no doubt among informants that polygamy existed as a phenomenon in FWB relationships. However, there was a discrepancy concerning the legality of sexual concurrency in FWB relationships. Some believed it was a personal matter, whereas others wanted an agreement on the issue. Some accepted polygamy, whereas others tried to remain strictly monogamous. “...you don’t need the other’s approval to do it, but what you do is a personal matter” (Girl, 18).

According to informants, there was a distinct divergence between genders when it came to gossiping and rumors. The majority explained that girls exposed themselves to a greater risk of negative gossip, whereas boys often got a favorable reputation. Overall, informants could not explain the phenomenon, but found it wrong and unfair. “Girls become whores, boys become cooler. I find that so damn rotten, because it’s so unfair” (Girl, 16).

Support in sexuality
There was a consensus among informants on the importance of adequate sexual education, but there was disagreement on whether or not the education had been satisfactory. The majority were of the opinion that the education they had received had been insufficient. Some of the informants believed that they would have acted differently in their sexual behavior if they had received adequate education. “If you knew a bit more maybe you would have thought a little more before doing anything” (Girl, 18).

Common information sources mentioned by the informants were youth centers, friends and siblings. Internet, television, and porn were other information sources of significance. Porn was mentioned as an origin of a misrepresented perception of sexuality. Parental support was desirable, but not something to count on. Learning by doing was also mentioned as source of sexual development.

...I believe it is a little bit more awkward at a younger age...because you don’t dare to approach an adult to ask them to explain things to you. So if you want to know something then it’s the internet or older friends who have had sex (Girl, 18).

Discussion
When choosing a friends-with-benefits partner, the result clearly indicated the advantages of choosing a close friend. Results from Bisson and Levine (2009) showed that the fact that it was a close friend “justified sex”, something that was also mentioned in this study. According to Grello et al. (2006), it was more common to choose a close friend than an acquaintance or an unknown person as an FWB partner. Aspects such as security, easy access, and knowing the person as someone fun to spend time with were important reasons for choosing a close friend. A recurrent important quality was attraction, in terms of both personality and appearance. Regardless of relation to the person, attraction seemed to be a prerequisite to becoming involved in sexual commitment. Reeder (2000) discovered in her study that different qualities of attraction had an impact on relational development.

Overall, the results of this study indicated that informants, when initiating a relationship, had a desire for intimacy, both psychological and physiological, similar to results from Lehmiller et al. (2011). At the same time, there was a resistance to the type of demanding commitment that might appear in a romantic relationship. Bisson and Levine (2009) also mentioned the possibility of having a sexual relationship without commitments as a reason for entering an FWB relationship. An FWB relationship could be seen as a substitute for a romantic relationship. Someone described it as a “hybrid”, meaning a mixture between independence and commitment. An FWB relationship seemed to be a good substitute with the advantages of finding intimacy, affirmation, and friendship, but at the same time allowing for concurrency. Adolescents appear to be looking for the advantages of a romantic relationship, but are not willing to make the
The idea of an FWB relationship as a hybrid of friendship and romantic relationship was tested in Bisson and Levine’s (2009) study. Their result indicated that there was a small difference in intimacy, but a more pronounced desire for commitment. Bad experiences from romantic relationships and “distrust of love” were mentioned as possible reasons for entering FWB relationships. One can assume that this implied a fear of commitments. FWB relationships seems to be something that often “just happens” without reflection. Epstein et al. (2009) strengthens that result by describing the phenomenon as a “spur of the moment” happening.

The informants described the relationship as undemanding and without rules; but they still mentioned “unwritten rules”; the invisible contract. Owen and Fincham’s (2011) definition of an FWB: “friends with benefits is a relationship in which there are also psychical encounters, but no ongoing committed relationship”, seems to be accepted, but the question is whether it is possible in practice or not. Adolescents seemed to seek an agreement to keep the relationship without commitment, though different expectations and demands may arise over time. Different expectations were something studied by Owen and Fincham (2011). Findings revealed that it was common to have unequal expectations, something that could lead to negative emotions. The results indicated an agreement on openness in the relationship, which is contradictory, although the result also revealed the opportunity for privacy especially when it came to concurrency. One can presume that an agreement to keep the relationship off the record might arise, because of the risks of gossiping and to allow for continued polygamy.

As Häggström-Nordin et al. (2005) and Lewin et al. (1998) found, our results also showed that romantic emotions were not required when engaging in sexual encounters. This indicates the change of “the love ideology” as Helmius (1990) examined in her study. However, it was mentioned that sex was better if there were romantic feelings involved and that it actually was quite common that romantic feelings evolved. The question arises as to whether it is possible to keep a sexual relationship apart from romantic emotions.

There was a disagreement among informants about whether romantic feelings where legitimate or not. The majority seemed to have an idea about romantic feelings as something that impaired the FWB relationship and considered it in general as a negative aspect. One can assume that there is a fear of unreturned feelings, which might lead to jealousy and expectations, which thus jeopardize the relationship. The ambivalence about FWB relationships concerned a desire for the advantages of a romantic relationship, while at the same time keeping one’s freedom and not being hampered by demands. Bisson and Levine (2009) described the main advantage of FWB relationships as having sex with no commitment, while developing feelings, jealousy, and hurt feelings were seen as disadvantages. This study indicated that informants exposed themselves to sexual risk-taking behavior. To some extent, there was awareness about the risks, but mostly the adolescents seemed to be unaware of indulging in sexual risk-taking behavior. Most of the informants had some idea of responsibility and how to perform safe sex. However, there was a gap between knowledge and practice. Several aspects of sexual risk-taking behavior were mentioned by informants in this study. Alcohol use was common in the initiation of an FWB relationship, similar to findings from Owen and Fincham (2011) and Paul and Hayes (2002). Some adolescents were of the opinion that alcohol use had no significant impact on their judgment, something that could be questioned. Precaution against STIs and unplanned pregnancy is impaired when alcohol is used. Häggström-Nordin et al. (2002) indicated that the use of contraceptives was less common among those who had been drinking alcohol.

Informants had an awareness of and anxiety about STIs and unplanned pregnancy. However, knowledge of STIs was inadequate and attitudes such as “it will not happen to me” were common, which was also noted by Edgardh (2002b).

Contraceptive use seemed to be associated with a fear of pregnancy rather than of an STI. All informants knew about the importance of condom use, especially when being with someone they did not trust. Informants mentioned several factors that had a negative influence on the use of condoms, and the aspect of trust was possibly also an obstacle. Feelings of trust seemed to justify having sex without a condom; the question was how much one could trust an FWB partner. It seemed common to trust an FWB partner, but on the other hand, there
was a general acceptance of polygamy. Rosenberg et al. (1999) and Jennings et al. (2004) found that sexual concurrency increased the risk of contracting STIs. The phenomena of trust and legitimacy of sexual concurrency were mentioned as aspects of a “false security”.

The ongoing change of “the love ideology” gives the opportunity for an adolescent to have sexual contacts without commitments or romantic emotions (Helmius, 1990). Later on, this acceptance may lead to an increased legitimization of polygamy. We found that opinions about polygamy were divided. The majority of the informants seemed to accept polygamy in FWB relationships, and sometimes even found it positive, similar to results found by Epstein et al. (2009). Some informants mentioned the possibility of sexual concurrency as one reason for entering an FWB relationship. Paik (2010) found that a nonromantic relationship increased sexual concurrency. Most likely, there seemed to be an understanding that polygamy is acceptable in FWB relationships, although our result shows that there was no consensus on the matter.

Disagreement also arose concerning whether polygamy was a private matter or something to come to an interrelation agreement about. Regardless of whether or not there is openness about concurrency, it appears to be unacceptable to question it. Lenoir et al. (2006) as well as Drumright et al. (2004) found that it was common to underestimate the degree of a partner’s sexual concurrency. Probably, not knowing about an FWB partner’s sexual concurrency plays a big role in unawareness when taking sexual risks. McGinty, Knox and Zusman (2007) found that women defined the context of FWB as something rather more emotional than sexual to avoid being labeled as a “slut”. These authors also mentioned the “sexual double standard”, meaning that men and women have different sets of principles for similar situations, as a social learning theory, where women in FWB relationships were at greater risk of negative labeling, whereas men gained a favorable reputation. Aubrary (2004) investigated the portrayal of the sexual double standard and found that negative consequences were more common among women who initiated sexual activities as opposed to men. The same phenomenon appeared in our study, and informants had no explanation, but found it wrong and unfair. Presumably, it is rooted in the traditional gender order, whereas it is legitimate for men to have sex “just for fun”. Overall, although there seems to be awareness of the phenomenon, it still continues. Other aspects revealed in this study, such as unequal expectations, unreturned and hurt feelings, should also be accounted as sexual risk-taking behavior. Maybe, the greatest risk in an FWB relationship concerns the emotional aspect. The results clearly indicated ambivalence as regards FWB relationships and assumable adolescents are not always aware of the implications of the relationship. Even though informants have the idea of FWB relationships as something positive, many of them will probably end up with hurt feelings.

Informants emphasized the importance of adequate sexual education in school, and of support in sexuality, something that seemed to be missing. Some informants mentioned they would have probably acted differently if their knowledge had been broader. There is consensus on the request for more knowledge about sexuality, which was also found by Makenzius et al. (2009). It would be of great importance for adolescent’s sexual behavior if issues of feelings, relationships, self-esteem, and identity were developed beyond basic sexual education. Schools and youth centers have a responsibility for, and great influence on, adolescent sexual behavior through their sex and relationship education programs.

Other sources of information such as friends, siblings, parents, media, internet, and porn could immerse or impair adolescent’s sexual health. There is a risk of getting the wrong idea about sexuality and even increase sexual risk-taking behavior, as reported by Häggström-Nordin et al. (2005). Satisfactory sexual education may increase adolescent’s awareness of their responsibility to limit sexual risk-taking behavior.

In-depth interviews were used to collect data for this study. The advantages of in-depth interviews are that they make it possible to study the perception of life in a profound perspective as experienced by the informants. According to Kvale (1997), the informant gains an insight into the meaning of what she experiences during the interview. New connections are revealed in the world of
ideas and thus, new spontaneous descriptions appear.

Before the study proper took place, a pilot interview was conducted to examine the dependability of the questions as related to the aim of the study, and also to practice the interview procedure (Polit & Beck, 2008). After this preparatory exercise, the authors felt a greater confidence prior to the main interviews. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide, with the same questions used for all informants to enhance dependability (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Questions were geared to illuminate the phenomenon of FWB from different perspectives to examine transferability. The selection comprised adolescents, aged 16–18, two boys, and six girls. One limitation of the study might have been the unequal gender numbers among informants. This may have impacted the outcome of the results, but overall results did not indicate a difference from a gender perspective.

The analysis of data followed the approach of Graneheim and Lundman (2004). To achieve trustworthiness, the analysis was conducted by four involved researchers, two of whom were experienced and the other two less experienced. The researchers discussed issues until consensus was reached. The same codes and categories were recurrent in the interviews, which increased the credibility.

Suggestions for future research
The majority of previous studies have defined FWB relationships and its prevalence in different contexts. This study gave the participating adolescents’ an opportunity to speak open mindedly, describe their thoughts, attitudes, and experiences about the phenomenon.

FWB relationships were often initiated to attain physical and psychological intimacy without expectations and demands. Advantages such as sexual concurrency and a lack of demands were central. Overall, the adolescents experienced FWB as positive. Sexual risk-taking behavior was considered common in FWB relationships. The informants were not usually aware of this disadvantage. An aim of future investigation could be to explore possible gender differences within the phenomenon of FWB relationships among adolescents.

Implications for public health nursing
The rising trend of adolescent risk-taking sexual behaviors, such as concurrent sex partners, alcohol consumption, and unprotected coital experience might have a relation with rising numbers of STIs and unplanned pregnancies. In order for school nurses and personnel working with young people’s sexual health to be successful, a deeper knowledge and understanding about adolescents’ sexual behavior and relationships is crucial.

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