

Workplace romance is topic of research

By Amanda Cuda
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Romance in the workplace. It's a topic that's been written about in books, laughed about on sitcoms and dramatized on film.

But, surprisingly, there's been little clinical research on this hot topic, said Amy Nicole Salvaggio, assistant professor of industrial organizational psychology at the University of New Haven in West Haven. "It's very common," Salvaggio said of relationships between co-workers. "It's talked about in literature, TV and movies a lot. [But] it's not commonly studied."

She's hoping to change that. Salvaggio is seeking couples to participate in a study about how one's work life affects his or her love life -- and vice versa. She's looking to speak with couples who work together, and with couples who toil at separate workplaces. In both instances, she'll ask the couples to speak confidentially about their personal relationships and work attitudes.

Salvaggio began her research last year, while working at the University of Tulsa. She said she wanted to study the topic of work and relationships, because nearly everyone struggles with balancing his or her professional and personal lives. "Work and love do kind of make up the cornerstones of our existence," Salvaggio said.

She's particularly interested in talking to couples who are co-workers, mainly because it hasn't been studied much. That's probably because

relationships, being so unpredictable, are considered a bit scary to those in the field of workplace psychology, Salvaggio said.

"Workplace psychology focuses on rationality in the workplace," she said, adding that romantic relationships are inherently irrational, and can intimidate some researchers.

Yet, even though she plans to focus on couples who work together, she said even those with separate places of employment can feel the impact of their job on their relationship. This phenomenon is called "spillover," meaning that one's feelings about the job, both positive and negative, can leach into your personal life.

"We're looking at [answering questions such as] 'If you're satisfied with your job, does that relate to whether or not you're satisfied with your partner?'" Salvaggio said.

Couples in the study will fill out an online survey that asks questions about both their job and their relationship. Salvaggio will then follow up with subjects three more times: at one month, three months and six months after the initial survey. Couples need not be married to participate -- they need only define themselves as being in a relationship. The study is also open to couples of all sexual orientation. All the information gathered through the survey will be kept confidential, and couples will not see each other's responses.

Ultimately, the goal is to help companies and couples navigate the intersection of work life and love life. Salvaggio said, just as couples struggle with a job or jobs that put stress on their relationship, employers suffer when a worker's romantic relationship hurts his or her job performance. "We want to offer some guidance beyond common sense," she said.

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Salvaggio is seeking couples over the age of 22 who work more than 20 hours a week. Compensation for completion of the entire study will be in the form of gift cards valued at a total of \$90 per couple. Interested couples can reach Salvaggio at 932-7381 or at asalvaggio@newhaven.edu

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