

Workplace Romances on the Example of Partner Selection Among Teacher-Couples - Student Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Romantic relationships in workplaces have remained unexplored from the lovers' perspective even though the research on love, partner selection, and workplace romances is relatively extensive. The purpose of this study is to contribute an analysis of partner selection among colleagues, and student teachers were selected as an interesting target group because of the special nature of teachers' work. Two research questions were set for the study: how do teacher-couples start their relationship and what factors explain partner selection among them according to student teachers' perceptions and experiences? The purpose was to describe their opinions on why teacher-marriages are so common, how love begins, and what combines teachers. The data were collected in the form of essays through an email that was addressed to the members of Finnish student organizations in colleges of education. Altogether 32 replies were received. The essays were analyzed with a theory-based approach by categorizing answers into six pre-determined categories. The purpose was to find out how partner selection among teachers corresponded to the select types of partner selection. Homogamy and completion-based partner selection appeared the most common. In addition, teachers' role as emotional educators is pointed out and discussed in the light of the results of this study.

Keywords: Love, Romantic relationship, Partner selection, Teacher-couples, Teacher identity

1. Introduction

Love can be defined in numerous ways. According to Määttä and Uusiautti (2013), it is possible to distinguish romantic love, friendship, love for fellow humans, mother's and father's love, love for one's country, and pedagogical love from each other. Love as emotion and action creates hope and boldness (see, e.g., Määttä, 2010). Love, at its best, is manifested by the endeavor to make things develop, grow, and come forward, whether love falls on other people, art, science, ideas, or nature.

Thus, romantic love forms only one, but perhaps the most studied element of love. Likewise, partner selection and the arousal of love have interested researchers across the world (e.g., Hatfield, Benson, & Rapson, 2012). Love has been a popular research theme already for decades. For example, various theories of love have been introduced to describe the emergence and process of love: Tzeng (1992) created an octagon model, Shirley (1982) a vector model, Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) introduced a filter theory, Levinger (1983) an ABCDE model, and Walster, Walster, and Bercheid (1978) balance, exchange, and equilibrium theories – just to name few.

When discussing romantic love, we usually think about the partner selection and finding the right person. Who is it? Could the one be your co-worker? Workplace romances form yet another specific field of love. Actually, work-place romances make a topic widely discussed and commonly perceived, but still less studied (Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis, 1996) especially from the lovers' point of view (Burke, 2010). Mostly, the phenomenon raises several doubts and connotations, especially from the point of view of the employer (e.g., Schwartz & Storm, 2000), and of sexual harassment (e.g., Boyd, 2010; Pierce, Broberg, McClure, & Aguinis,

2004). Likewise, for example need for managerial involvement in workplace romances (e.g., Foley & Powell, 1999; Karl & Sutton, 2000) have been studied abundantly from various points of view. Often the interest has been in the influence of romantic relationship at work on employee productivity, favoritism, or protecting employees from sexual harm, violence, and employers from sexual harassment liability claims (see Boyd, 2010; Lickey, Berry, & Whelan-Berry, 2009).

In this study, the focus is directed in romantic relationships between colleagues, specifically teachers. Teachers form an interesting group of representatives of the people who fall in love with each other at work, because they work in a field in which they share a certain kind of values and worldview. Teachers also use their personalities at work. Everyone knows teachers but how often we think about teachers falling in love. Workplace romances among teachers thus make an interesting, yet challenging, research theme. The purpose of this study was to unlock the phenomenon by asking teacher students about their experiences and perceptions of love relationships among teachers. In addition, they were asked to describe how relationship with a teacher colleague could influence on teachers' professional identity. The theoretical basis of this study rests on two main ideas then: on the one hand, we talk about romantic relationships and love, specifically workplace romances, while on the other hand, the interest is also on a teacher's work and work identity. Next, we will shortly discuss these phenomena.

Workplaces are important places in which people spend a great deal of their everyday life. As such, they also provide an auspicious place for making friends, falling in love, and finding a partner. People spend time with their colleagues also in leisure. In addition, various trips, meetings, and in-service trainings set conditions for creating relationships between colleagues, also informally (Haavio-Mannila, 1988; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2001).

Workplaces are so-called closed fields in which people interact constantly with each other, get to know each other, and can become very close. Due to these close contacts, a colleague can seem attractive and fascinating. In addition, colleagues usually share similar interests, commitment, and effort toward the same goals. More often than not, a colleague may become a person who can listen and understand, because he or she has experienced the same. Also physical appearance at work is often spruce, which can make the colleague even more attractive (Kaivola, 2003).

According to studies, friendships between men and women at the workplaces are the more common the more they spend time in similar tasks. Collaboration increases the likelihood of having a fair or falling in love at work (Karl & Sutton, 2000; Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis, 1996). It can lead to informal interaction and to feelings of affection. Workplace romances can turn into dating and marriages. In all, both long and short-term romantic relationships between colleagues are fairly common (Haavio-Mannila, 1988; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2001).

A teacher's profession is one of those professions of which everyone has some kind of experiences, at least from the time of being a student. Previously in Finland, teachers' role as model citizens was emphasized, and they were expected to act irreproachably, decently, and composedly not only in the classroom but also in leisure (Paksuniemi, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013). High expectations are still aimed at teachers and, teachers as personalities have to be

courageous, spontaneous, initiative, hands-on, sensitive, and pedagogically creative (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013). The teacher's role and position involve many status-related demands that affect even modern teachers' work (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2012). Certainly, the traditional expectations are deeply rooted, but regardless of the time, teachers' work involves high responsibility related to their authority position and the example they are supposed to set (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Teachers are expected to be able to self-reflect and work with their professional identities (Heikkinen, 1999; Palmu, 1999), and various knowledge and skills to successfully manage educational and pedagogical tasks (Leino & Leino, 1997). Teachers' work has become more and more versatile and challenging (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006).

When it comes to studies of romantic relationships at workplaces, teachers are addressed merely from the view point of teachers' relationships with their students (e.g., Barbella, 2010) exemplifying a sort of hierarchical relationships (see also e.g., Jones, 1999). But studies of teacher-couples are fewer. Given the special nature of teachers' work and changes in it, and the lack of studies of workplace romances described by lovers themselves, it is interesting study how teachers describe their romantic relationships with other teachers.

2. Method

The purpose of this study was to analyze romantic relationships between teachers. Two research questions were set for the study: how do teacher-couples start their relationship and what factors explain partner selection among them?

The first intention was to recruit teacher couples in this research. However, the actual number of these couples is unknown. Also reaching these couples appeared very challenging. Therefore, it was necessary to turn to student teachers. They were asked to think of reasons why teachers fall in love with each other and what combines them. We asked about their own attitude and experiences of relationship with a teacher: could they think that their life companion would be a teacher and why?

The data were collected in the form of essays in order to highlight the respondents' perceptions and experiences. The title of the essay was "I would give my all to you and carry you in my arms. Is the teacher the right for me?" The recruitment letter also included some auxiliary questions that were to help writing. Questions were for example "Why are teacher marriages so common in your opinion?", "How do teachers fall in love and what combines them?", "What does love give and require when considering the careers, and development and coping in teacher profession?", "Do you think that you could have a teacher as your life companion or is this thought totally inappropriate to you? Why?" The data were collected through an email that was addressed to the members of Finnish student organizations in colleges of education. The email was sent to all Finnish universities providing education in the science of education. However, the researchers do not know how many students actually received the email because the task to forward the request was given to the student organizations. Altogether 32 replies were received, and 30 of them were women and two men. All Finnish universities were quite evenly represented in the data, except for one: of seven Finnish universities providing teacher training, only one participant came from the University

of Vaasa while other universities were represented by 4–7 participants.

During the research process, we were surprised of the teacher couples' unwillingness to talk about their love stories. Previous studies have brought out that teachers do not want to reveal their personal lives, and for example their political stands or religion (Clark, 1988; Kane, Sandretto, & Health, 2002; Pajares, 1992). They want to keep silent about these issues in order to maintain the neutrality toward pupils which makes an important part of a teacher's role (Patterson, Doppen, & Misco, 2012). As it became clear that we would not be able to recruit teacher couples, we also asked student teachers whether they considered this research theme relevant and worth studying.

Teacher students were selected as research participants because it would be difficult to track down actual teacher-couples. Teacher students in Finland usually have already experience of work life at school and in addition, they share the teacher's world view. Thus, they were considered capable of describing romantic relationships among teachers.

Indeed, the fundamental purpose of this kind of qualitative research is to provide a holistic and profound picture of the phenomenon (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007). The study focused on bringing out the research participants' voices and points of view (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002; Varto 1992).

The data were analyzed in a theory-bound manner (Mayring, 2000). The analysis structure was selected from Määttä's studies (see Määttä 1995; 1999). She had developed a theory that includes six categories of partner selection: (1) homogamy, (2) physical attractiveness, (3) a matter of coincidence, (4) arranged by outsider, (5) completion, and (6) ideal self and seeing the partner in self. These categories were considered as a suitable analysis frame for the data of this study. This method was chosen because it was considered relevant to use an existing theory of partner selection as the basis, and then find out how they appear in data focusing on teachers' romantic relationships. The analysis proceeded by looking for items in the essays, and then categorizing them under the predetermined categories. Although one of the purposes was to find which categories would be the most relevant in teachers' partner selection, the main interest was in *how* the participants described partner selection.

When evaluating the reliability of this research, several issues related to the data collection must be discussed: the eventual participants and their selection. Therefore the credibility, and trustworthiness can be criticized (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Seidman, 2012). On the one hand, we do not know how actively teacher trade unions forwarded the email requesting teacher couples to participate in this study, and therefore we cannot be certain of the teacher couples' actual willingness to participate in this study. On the other hand, we can be quite satisfied with the existing data. The essays were rich in content and seemingly honest. Some student teachers had experiences of dating with a teacher or student teacher, some did not have such experiences. All of them, however, knew the teacher profession and had an idea of the possible connection between the teacher marriage and profession. All of the participants considered the research theme important and interesting, and unique as they had not ran into the theme before during their teacher training.

In order to guarantee the credibility or internal validity of the study, the essays were analyzed carefully in the light of the research purposes. Description of the data and data collection in this research are to strengthen the dependability or trustworthiness of the study (see e.g., Shenton, 2004). In addition, excerpts from the data are added in the results section to support the researchers' interpretation and to provide the reader a picture of how the themes were discussed in and discovered from the data. Yet, it is relevant to emphasize that the data consist of personal experiences and descriptions of workplace romances. Therefore, there is no objective truth about how teachers perceive their workplace romances according to this study, nor was it even the purpose to find one. Instead, the written descriptions of the phenomenon provide a unique perspective on workplace romances among teachers.

3. Results

Teacher students brought out how mutual relationships can be quite natural and how easy it is for them to emerge in the framework of school: they have plenty of time to get to know and spend time with each other. The answers were categorized into six categories (see Määttä, 1995; 1999).

3.1 Homogamy

Homogamy, in other words, selecting the partner based on his or her similar characteristics, has been noted as a dominating criterion according to several previous studies (e.g., Carter & Glick, 1976; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, & Moorman-Eavers, 2006; Montoya, Horton, & Kirschner, 2008; Whyte, 1990), and in this study, this was the case too. Teachers emphasized similar values, education, and natural seeking of similar people to be with.

I think that a significant factor is often the strong personal characteristics that typify this profession, the stereotypes of teachers: social character, activity, playfulness, and perhaps childishness (at least in classroom teachers), creativity, openness, speaking skills, "stubbornness".... that you require from the other too. (Woman, No. 4)

People like their ilk. They fall in love with someone who resemble them. Similar values and attitudes, and education, social status, intelligence, life history, and even appearance combine people.

Teachers probably share similar – educational – worldview and basic values that makes it easier for them to become partners. (Woman, No. 1)

The same interests and characteristics, and common holidays, have an important role in teacher-couple's relationship:

At least teacher-couples have similar way of thinking and interests. In addition, they have their holidays at the same time. (Woman, No. 3)

Workplace can be seen an ideal place for finding a partner based on homogamy: it is easy to find someone who share same interests (see also Kaivola, 2003). Romances at work can be explained not only by shared interests but also working closely and spending much time

together.

3.2 Physical Attractiveness

Appearance is proven to be really important in partner selection, although there are certain differences between men's and women's perceptions (Buss, 1989; Garcia, Stinson, Ickes, Bissonnette, & Briggs, 1991; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Shebilske, & Lundgren, 1993; Waynforth, 2007). How a partner is selected based on his or her physical appearance is difficult to determine, but the physical appearance is often the factor that ignites the initial interest (cf., Barelds, Dijkstra, Koudenburg, & Swami, 2011; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Masters & Johnson, 1986). According to Määttä and Uusiautti's (2012) review, physically attractive features are among others the face, eyes, hair, the body, clothing, and height.

People do not always realize the way appearance influence on partner selection. This does not mean that just good looks would be enough for starting a relationship, but it can be among the first criteria that ignite interest. Other features, such as personality, intelligence, and pleasantness, will be noticed later (Kast, 2005).

I do not mean that when looking for a partner, I would especially look for teachers. (Woman No. 12)

In this study, the significance of physical attractiveness was not emphasized, and therefore it seemed that in teacher couples, this is not among the most important partner selection criteria.

3.3 A Matter of Coincidence

According to Määttä and Uusiautti (2012), two people who meet coincidentally may fall in love if they possess certain characteristics, if they fulfill each other's needs, and if are able to reveal something of themselves to each other that makes a deeper contact possible. The process in question may also proceed little by little or by osmosis. In order to create deeper contact, self-disclosure may be the key that finally lead to emerging love:

Teachers can find their partner perhaps – likely – at the university from lectures and evening gatherings. Why to change the spouse then? (Woman, No. 1)

I do not know if it is a question of being teachers but the fact that people you meet are also teachers. I have never been a girl who falls for a guy for example at bar but something else is required to get that started. These kinds of relationships begin during studies, at work, and in hobbies, and in the first two of these representatives of the opposite sexes are always teachers. (Women No. 11)

This study showed that coincidence can explain teacher-couples' falling in love. Teacher education is intensive and people meet each other by coincidence at universities. They get to know each other, and for example, lessons provide excellent chances of creating contacts with each other. Teacher studies make therefore a coincidence that is quite likely to ignite romantic love between teachers.

3.4 Arranged by Outsiders

Studies of the encounter situation have shown that a considerable number of couples find each other arranged by outsiders (see e.g., Knox & Wilson, 1981; Duck, 1991; Määttä, 1999). Friends can arrange for example blind dates, or introduce future loves to each other in parties, evening gatherings, workplace occasions, or hobbies.

...My partner and I followed our own paths. However, we were good friends. We had a circle of four friends playing card for all nights long although we should focus on studies. This was how our friendship got stronger. (Woman, No. 29)

Student teachers spend plenty of time with each other. It can be interpreted that couples who have met each other during teacher training were brought together by an event arranged by outsiders. Likewise, in teacher's profession, the work community is relatively close. In addition, their work involve numerous happenings taking place outside schools and in collaboration with colleagues from other education institutions; but in this study, dates arranged by others did not emerge from the data.

3.5 Completion

Partner selection based on completion is connected with homogamy: often people think that it is the similarity rather than the idea of completing each other what matters in a relationship. Supposedly, the oldest theory describing completion is Winch's (1958) theory of complementary needs. In the 1960s, for example, Levinger (1964) emphasized the significance of the partners' complementary needs.

Basically, completion in partner selection refers to a tendency of finding a partner who is different than oneself when considered from a certain perspective. For example, quiet and unsociable person can fall in love with a social person (Fisher, Hart, & Kiianmaa, 2003). The following example shows how completion was described in the data:

We disagree on certain things but are able to see each other's points of view and discuss, and look at the issue from many perspectives. I can tell him things that I cannot talk with my other colleagues or fellow students. He also understands me better than colleagues do. He knows me and our occupation, and he really knows what I think about teaching. He knows my strengths and weaknesses, and encourages me accordingly. He has, for example, told me that I am too responsible for certain issues and take things too personally. (Woman, No. 7)

Completion can also be based on reward-cost dynamics when the focus is on how much the partners invest in the relationship (see e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Schoen & Weinick, 1993). Exchange theories explain this kind of partner selection. One's picture of an ideal partner defines the frames of a realistic partner: features that the real partner lacks can be complemented with one's own strengths. Partners' different features balance but also complement each other (Määttä, 1995; Määttä, 1999).

We have so much in common but also contrasts. I feel so good when living with a teacher, because trust and openness are reciprocal, and teacherhood concerns both of us. (Woman, No. 7)

The research participants told that relationship with a teacher is fruitful because then the partners' features complement each other. While some participants reported that this was the main reason for partner selection, some others also had realized that also their professional identities were complemented by each other. Many of the participants talked about completion and homogamy in partner selection: similar values, worldviews, holidays, and many other things spoke for homogamy, but couples also complemented each other as partners and teachers, compared teaching methods and helped with work-related problems. In all, teacherhood was regarded a strong binding factor.

3.6 Ideal Self and Seeing the Partner in Self

A person may also look for a partner who complements, fulfills the unfulfilled dreams, or corresponds to the person's ideal self – “trinity of desiderata” (Murstein, 1986). Therefore, this evaluation is also affected by one's self-conception (Määttä, 1995). Seeing the partner in self leads to a situation where the other is seen as self, or the self as the other. Two individuals become “we”. This can also manifest itself as possessiveness. The partner's positive features are regarded as an important of one's selfhood. It is also possible that one does not recognize these positive features in oneself at all, only in the partner. When seeing the partner in self, one's own flaws become complemented (Määttä, 1995).

Although teacher-couples were not constructed of teachers of the same field, they still share sort of interests in similar things and respect for similar values. When people like the same things and share their views of studies or work, and consider them equally important, I believe that teachers are likely to marry each other. (Woman No. 9)

The research participants told that a teacher can be a good spouse. They are secure human beings with whom they feel comfortable of starting a family. Through the ideal self, a teacher reflects his or her self-cognizance and self-esteem if they are uncertain of their own qualities. Various personalities meet in teachers' work, and the partner can be found through the ideal self. A teacher who represents the ideal teacher can be selected as a partner as the ideal partner probably shares that same ideas concerning work or life in general.

4. Discussion

This study was strongly theory-based analysis on teacher students' perceptions and experiences of partner selection in teacher-couples. The way the viewpoint was selected was a many-phased process. Workplace romances is a theme that is less studied, nor is there much theoretical information about the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the discussion from a select point of view, and add the dimension of professional development to it.

When it came to the first research question it seemed that teachers might prefer partner selection based on homogamy: they fall in love with people with similar values and points of interest either already during studies or at work. The second research question asked what factors explain partner selection among teachers. The answer could be drawn from the fact that people who apply for teacher education already share some similar characteristics, hobbies, and other interests. Moreover, according to the results, partner selection based on

completion was strongly connected with homogamy. It can be difficult to explain what makes one fall in love and why one has selected one's partner. In this study, however, the participants seemed to be able to find the answer from the features of the "the one and only".

Teachers' homogamy has its flip side, too. Given that teachers' seemed to share similar values, attitudes, and work tasks, it can be difficult—yet important—to find their own individual space. Especially challenging is the situation among teachers who work at the same school or at two-teacher schools that are common in small villages in Finland. The same problem concerns couples in family businesses, as they work together and spend free-time together.

5. Conclusion

Although this study brought out interesting information about partner selection among teacher colleagues, some questions remained unanswered. Further research is needed for example among teachers who have been working in the profession and have been in a love relationship with a teacher for a long time. How do they perceive their partner selection? Furthermore, the role of this kind of romantic relationship to the development of a teachers' professional identity is worth a closer look and contemplation. There are not many studies to which compare the results of this one. However, for example, Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, and Grauer (2007) found out that in artist-teacher training, close in-residence periods with teachers and artists developed meaningful and mutually supportive partnerships and their working partnership and collaboration emerged in very natural and comfortable ways. Also respect toward each other was perceived increasing (see also Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007).

In this study, the importance of similar interests and worldviews were considered salient among the participants. When the partner shares the same values and experiential world, they can enhance each other's professional growth in teacherhood. The favorable professional growth begins already in teacher training, and the partners can help each other become aware of their possibilities and restrictions, and adoption of professional ethics and acceptance (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013b), and how they perceive their roles in the work community (Andrews & Lewis, 2002). The school community can include many cultures and their values, norms, and roles determine how the community acts (see Randles, 2011). An important part of a teacher's professional identity development is to socialize in the profession and the work community. While finding a partner from the workplace can help learning about the rules and norms at work, dating a colleague may not always be considered acceptable (Lickey, Berry, & Whelan-Berry, 2009).

Finally, we want to return to our concern over the fact that teacher couples were not willing to talk about their relationships. While their wish to keep their private lives private, teachers are also supposed to be ready to be open and discuss, for example, emotions with their students. Emotional education and the significance of love for human well-being (Bercheid & Reis, 1998) are issues that today's teachers cannot emphasize too much. But why did Finnish teachers choose to be silent? Perhaps, they did not think about their participation from the point of view of education but as intervention of their private lives.

On the other hand, teachers especially in Finland are considered model citizens. Indeed, they set an example of creation and maintenance of relationships, too. These questions are important and sensitive to young people and if they are not discussed at school, students look for the information from elsewhere, and sometimes from media that do not provide truthful or educative examples or information. This is the educational implication of this study. Luckily, student teachers who participated in this study appeared to be ready to analyze their emotional worlds too: they are prospective teachers who can open doors to a more unreserved and genuine interaction and discussion of emotions, relationships, and the importance of love.

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