

Office romance? Not a problem most of time: study

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Co-workers take a laissez-faire approach to office romances as long as there aren't any negative vibes, says a new study by Ryerson University Professor Nina Cole.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Pam and Jim on The Office. Meredith and McDreamy on Grey's Anatomy. Television shows depict many workplace romances, but in the real world how do co-workers view love on the job?

According to one Ryerson University professor, most colleagues aren't bothered by office romances as long as they don't negatively affect the workplace.

"Most people believe [romantic relationships](#) are OK as long as they don't affect productivity, de-motivate other colleagues or have an impact on

the overall work environment," says Nina Cole, an associate professor in the Ted Rogers School of Business Management.

Cole's study investigated co-worker's perceptions of fairness regarding workplace romance management practices. In the modern workplace, romances are very common, says Cole. A 2005 study by the Society for Human Resource Management and the Wall Street Journal found that 40 per cent of employees said that they had engaged in a workplace romance at some point in their careers.

There are several reasons for the phenomenon of on-the-job dating. In addition to higher divorce rates, more people are staying single longer or are not marrying at all. Combined with long work hours, it creates a recipe for workplace romance. In the past, such relationships were considered inappropriate and often provoked disciplinary action. Today, however, managers take a more laissez-faire approach toward office romances.

Cole's study involved 100 employees who were pursuing either full- or part-time studies at Ryerson University, and who had, at one point, observed a romance in the workplace. The majority of those romances involved two single employees (75 per cent) in a peer-working relationship (76 per cent) in the same department (65 per cent). The average length of these office romances was 20 months.

The study found that participants believe certain conditions warranted managerial action with office romances such as: when the performance of co-workers was negatively affected; where the work environment was negatively impacted; and when negative emotion from a breakup affected a [work environment](#) previously unaffected by a workplace romance.

Employees also believe action should be taken when there is an office

romance between a manager and an employee in the same department.

"Clearly, there are specific situations when co-workers perceive that managerial action should be taken," Cole says. "But they don't believe action should be taken all of the time."

Cole believes it is important to implement policies about office romances even though it's an acceptable practice most of the time. "Even a general policy is good," Cole says. "It acknowledges that office romances are a fact of organizational life, but it also sends the message that you shouldn't let romantic relationships affect the workplace."

"A Workplace Romance: A Justice Analysis" was published in December 2009 in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Provided by Ryerson University

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