

# Love & Relationships at the Workplace in Finland

by *Elina Haavio-Mannila*

Compared with other Western European and North American countries, the proportion of women in the labour force in Finland is very high. In 1985 almost half — 48% — of their economically active population consisted of women. In the age group 15 to 74 years, 66% of the women and 74% of the men were part of the labour force. For those 33 to 39 years, 90% of the women and 96% of the men were in paid work. Women's employment does not decrease at the child rearing phase of life as is the case in most other developed Western countries. Actually, the mothers of small children are employed more often than other women.

Most Finnish women work full-time. Only 12% have part-time jobs (less than 30 hours per week). Of the men, 5% work part-time. Another 11% perform extra work outside their regular jobs, compared to only 7% of the women. Due to the larger proportion of women than men in white-collar jobs — where working hours are shorter than in blue collar jobs — women's average weekly working hours are 36 and men's are 41.

The greatest inequality between the sexes in the Finnish labour market is in pay. In 1984, women in year-round, full-time jobs made only 70% of what the men earned. The low incomes of women are largely due to the segregation by sex of industries, occupations and jobs. Concentrated in clerical, service and care-giving occupations, women work mainly in the public sector and have lower status in the workplace hierarchies.

The extent of segregation by sex in the work force can be seen in the following data, based on the official census of 1985: 48% of women and 46% of men worked in occupations where the proportion of their own sex was 90 to 100%. At the workplace,

functional segregation of the sexes by job is also apparent. According to survey data collected by the Central Statistical Office of Finland in 1984, 43% of female wage earners and 50% of the men shared the same tasks exclusively with members of their own sex. However, there is more informal social integration of men and women at work: 84% of women and 86% of men meet members of the opposite sex each day at work.

Men's and women's joint work activities and social contacts at the workplace

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may sometimes lead to unexpected consequences for the family. This article tries to illustrate the relationship between male-female contacts in the family and in the workplace.

## Research Problem

This paper touches two topics: (1) the importance and closeness of workers' relationships with their spouses as well as with co-workers and friends of the same and the opposite sex, and (2) the effect of these relationships on the well-being of individuals.

Special emphasis is placed on the relationships of the workers to their spouses or common-law partners and on relationships between co-workers of the opposite sex. I explore whether it is possible to maintain close and important relationships simultaneously with one's spouse and with co-workers of the opposite sex. My main question here is: Are they conflicting or complementary sources of social support?

## Data and Methods

The data was originally collected for the survey on "Women in Men's and Women's Jobs" conducted by Elina Haavio-Mannila, University of Helsinki; Kaisa Kauppinen-Toropainen, the Institute of Occupational Health; and Irja Kandolin, the Academy of Finland.

The research material consists of replies given by men and women with permanent partners to a questionnaire sent to trade union members of 11 occupational groups in southern Finland in 1986. In each occupational group about 100 men and 100 women returned the questionnaire. The response rate varied between 52 and 75% for the different groups.

In Finland, 85% of the employed people belong to trade unions. Thus the data covered, for the most part, the members of the occupational groups selected for the study.

The groups were chosen on the basis of their ratio of men to women members and on the socio-economic status of the group itself. We included as female-dominated groups (in order from the highest to the lowest status group) dentists (66% women in 1980), mental health nurses (68% women), nurses for handicapped children (92% women) and waitresses (81% women). The male-dominated groups selected were architects (29% women), police officers (2% women), technicians (9% women), metal workers (8% women) and construction workers (8% women). The sexually mixed groups studied were journalists (42% women), and rubber and plastic workers (42% women).

The respondents were asked to evaluate the importance and closeness of their relationships with their spouse, co-workers and friends. First they were required to check a twelve-item list, measuring the

four stages of love defined in the *Wheel Theory of Love* by Ira L. Reiss (1960): rapport, self-revelation, dependency and satisfaction of the need for intimacy. Respondents were then asked to rate their relationships with their spouse or common-law partner, their favourite male and female co-worker and their best male and female friend on a five-point scale. There was a 'not relevant' option for persons who had no spouse, co-workers or friends.

## Results

### Which Are the Important Social Relations?

Marital or common-law partnerships are the most important and closest social relationships of the five relationships studied. More than 90% of the respondents have a close and important relationship (i.e. 4 and 5 on the 5-point scale) with their partner. As many as 80% of women rated their relationship with their spouse as very close (score 5).

Friends of the same sex also ranked as close and important, especially for women, 54% of whom rated their best female friend as close (scores 4 and 5). Only 33% of the men indicated they had close and important male friends. One out of four respondent indicated they were close to a co-worker of the same sex. Least important were friends and co-workers of the opposite sex. Only 41% of the women and 56% of the men mentioned any friends of the opposite sex.

### Who Has Close Relations?

Close relations to both the favourite co-worker of the opposite sex and to the spouse, indicating the respondent is integrated at both work and in his or her family, are more common among white than blue collar workers. The latter are very often spouse-centered, that is, they have a close relationship to their spouse only. White collar workers are more often co-worker-centered, that is, their closest ties are with their favourite co-worker of the opposite sex. Blue collar women are more often isolated or "detached", without close ties to either a spouse or a co-worker of the opposite sex, than are white collar women.

In workplaces where jobs are segregated along gender lines ("sex-segre-

gated") and men and women perform different tasks but meet each other daily at work ("complementary" — terms see Kauppinen-Toropainen *et al.*, 1984), close relations between co-workers are rare. In workplaces where the jobs are mixed between sexes ("sex-integrated"), there are many people who have close ties with both co-workers of the opposite sex and with the spouse.

### Effects of Spouse-Co-worker Orientation

The classification of people according to their closeness to both their spouse and to their closest co-worker of the opposite sex — that is their "spouse-co-worker orientation" — will next be used in explaining work satisfaction, marital happiness and well-being.

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The four types of orientation — constructed on the basis of the closeness of the relationships between a worker and his or her permanent partner and with his or her closest co-worker of the opposite sex — are: integrated (both relationships are important), spouse-centered, co-worker-centered, and detached (neither the spouse nor the closest co-worker is important).

Among men, work satisfaction does not vary according to spouse-co-worker orientation; that is, between the four types listed above. Among women, the co-worker bond does make a difference: women with at least one close male co-worker relation are more satisfied with their work than those without it, irrespective of the quality of their marital relationship. The thesis that it adds to the well-being of the individual to have several sorts of close social ties even across the gender-line (the multiple role hypothesis) is only partly supported by the data; the co-worker centered individuals with one important role are actually most satisfied with their work.

The results on marital happiness reveal some interesting connections. Among

men with a close marital relationship it does not make any difference whether or not they have a close female co-worker: the integrated man is as happy as his spouse-centered counterpart. But, if the man's relationship to his spouse is distant, a close tie with a co-worker of the opposite sex decreases marital happiness: co-worker-centered men are less happy than detached men. Among women with a close relationship with their husbands, integrated women with close relations with a male co-worker are happier than spouse-centered women. This supports the multiple role hypothesis: it is better to have two than only one close social relationship. If the marital tie is weak, there are no statistically significant differences in the marital happiness of the co-worker-centered and detached women.

Well-being is related to the spouse-co-

worker orientation too. Co-worker-centered men show significantly more stress symptoms than any other male group examined. This indicates the difficulty of being without marital support, even for men with close female co-workers. For women, it seems to be most stressful to be detached and without any close relations either in the family or at work. The integrated men have the highest number of sick days away from work per year. Among women, it is the detached women who have the highest rate of absenteeism. For men, different types of spouse-co-worker orientations increase stress and illness. Co-worker-centeredness "leads" to stress but integration in both the family and the work community to illness.

Overall happiness is strongly dependent on the quality of the marital relationship. Co-worker relationships have no influence on happiness when the quality of the marriage is kept constant. The basic social bond leading to feelings of happiness, finding life interesting and not being lonely thus is the marital relationship. When such a partnership is close, co-worker contacts do not have any independent effect on happiness.

## Conclusion

Earlier studies have shown that social support is beneficial to health and satisfaction. It helps the individual deal with stress and illness. It also, however, has an even more direct influence on health. It is here assumed that close social relationships contribute to the well-being of individuals. However, family is sometimes thought to be the only place where one's need for intimacy is fulfilled. Conflicts may arise when people develop close ties with co-workers and other friends, especially if they are of the opposite sex.

The results of the 1359 questionnaire responses reveal that it is possible to maintain close and important social relationships at the same time with a spouse and with co-workers of the opposite sex. There was no statistically significant association between feelings of closeness to the spouse and to the closest co-worker of the opposite sex.

When the effects of the closeness of the spouse and the closest co-worker of the opposite sex were studied simultaneously it was found that women's work satisfaction was associated with a close relation to a male co-worker when the quality of the marital relationship was kept constant. Men's work satisfaction was not affected by the closeness of his relation to female co-workers.

Marital happiness did not suffer from close relationships with co-workers of the opposite sex when the relationship to the spouse was also close and important. Actually, women with close relationships to both the husband and a male co-worker had the happiest marriages of all. This again supports the multiple role hypothesis, according to which it is beneficial to one's well-being not to "have all the eggs in the same basket," that is, to have a variety of social relationships. Also giving support to the multiple role hypothesis is the result according to which detached women who had distant or no relationships with neither the husband nor the closest male co-worker, recorded the most stress symptoms and sick days. Overall happiness was greatly influenced by the quality of the relationship to the spouse. But when the respondent had a good marital relationship, additional relationships with co-workers of the opposite sex increased their happiness.

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

### The Politics of Reproduction

This issue of Resources for Feminist Research is inspired by the work of Mary O'Brien, and seeks contributions which engage critically with it. Work exploring and debating O'Brien's philosophy of birth and critique of dominant Western intellectual traditions is invited. Papers are also encouraged that critique ideologies of reproduction in non-Western philosophy and theory. Writing in the following areas is also welcome: women and mothering in social and political thought; feminist epistemology and ethics; current or historical case studies on reproduction or ideologies of reproduction; and issues around the new reproductive technologies.

Some suggested general topics include:

- O'Brien's philosophy of birth and feminist epistemology
- Motherhood and sisterhood: theoretical and political questions
- Debates in feminist politics and theory: O'Brien/de Beauvoir, O'Brien/Irigaray, O'Brien/Ruddick, etc.
- The politics of reproduction and feminist organizing

Submissions should not exceed 3,000 words and must be received by February 1, 1989. Please send contributions, in either English or French, to:

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