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Secrecy in the organizational romance

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SECRECY IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL ROMANCE

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SECRECY IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL ROMANCE

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University of Nebraska, 2000

Advisor: Dr. Marshall Prisbell

This thesis examined why and how organizational romance participants keep their

relationships secret. Disclosure to others in the organization was also examined. The

literature review focused on definitions and antecedent conditions of organizational

romance, the decision to enter into the relationship, internal dynamics of the relationship,

external impacts of the relationship, coworker reaction, and management's perspective.

The first research question asked why do organizational romance participants keep their

relationship a secret from others? The second research question asked how do

organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

The third research question asked what behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an

organizational romance secret? The fourth research question asked how do participants

decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization? Ninety-

nine graduate students were asked to complete a questionnaire containing a hypothetical

case scenario. In response to the first research question, intra-office gossip was the

primary reason, cited by respondents, for keeping a relationship secret. Respondents were

also concerned over others' perceptions of favoritism. In response to the second research

question, respondents indicated it was important to maintain a professional demeanor at

work, avoiding any public displays of affection. With regard to the third research question, respondents recommended avoiding one's partner at work, as well as cutting off social ties with office friends and coworkers. Finally, in response to the fourth research question, the majority of respondents felt disclosure was inevitable, simply due to the serious nature of the relationship. Although, some respondents adhered to the notion that a personal relationship is a private matter and should not ever be disclosed. Discussion, interpretation of results, and direction for future research are explored.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

It is becoming more and more common to meet a member of the opposite sex in the

workplace, hence the popularity of an organizational romance. Since sexual feelings are

a natural phenomenon, meaning they can be present at any given time on any given day,

walking through the office door each morning does not extinguish them (Quinn, 1984).

Once at work, emotions do not necessarily shut down. Many times emotions and feelings

carry over from the workplace to home life and vice versa.

A December 1994 survey of 485 managers by the American Management Association

(AMA) found that nearly 80 percent of respondents had been aware of or involved in an

organizational romance, while one-quarter had actually participated in an organizational

romance, and three-quarters believed it was okay to date a coworker (Powers, 1999).

Today, the office may well be the most common way to meet a companion. According to

a survey by The Bureau of National Affairs, about one-third of romantic relationships

begin in the workplace (Bordwin, 1994). Not only is this percentage high but it appears

to be growing, at the expense of other common meeting places such as school, one's

neighborhood, mutual friendships, a local bar, or church.

Many contend that it is not people who have changed, but rather, the workplace has

changed. Employees are working longer hours than they have in the past. Many

employers now encourage their employees to spend more time together to promote

cohesiveness and camaraderie. As a result, individuals find themselves with less

leisure time for outside activities, where traditionally they would have met new people

(Solomon, 1998). There is also a sense that because companies select employees who are a strong fit with their corporate culture, they have, in effect, prescreened large groups of qualified romantic candidates (Loftus, 1995). Employees seem to be taking the bait, given that many of today's employees have assumed this "now that I'm here, let's look around" attitude with ease.

With the exception of supervisor-subordinate involvement, which most deem as manipulative and tending to create a hostile work environment, more organizational romances today involving peers or same-level participants are meeting with approval. Not only are more people willing to partake, but fewer people seem to be so critical and apprehensive over the notion and day-to-day reality of co-workers dating. "Often, those involved in the relationship are anxious to avoid the appearance of impropriety and tend to overcompensate in their performance on the job; likewise, there often is an increase in morale as couples feel an additional bond to their job" (Losey, 1993, p. 28). Plus, the organizational romance has what Quinn (1977) terms as the legitimizing affect in that it gives observers the courage to experiment with similar behaviors.

Organizational romances "are most likely to form in small organizations, particularly those that have between twenty and fifty members" (Dillard, 1985, p. 113). As the size of the organization fluctuates, either higher or lower, the chances of an organizational romance decrease. Dillard (1985) points to a number of different reasons for this, namely job autonomy and the hierarchical nature of the organization.

In the realm of organizational romance, legalities, in the form of whether it is right or wrong, whether it is good versus harmful, will inevitably surface. However, the old

cliché may well hold true, you can't legislate love. The literature points toward the fine

line that employers walk when it comes to potential invasion of privacy lawsuits.

According to a *Human Resource Management* survey that was conducted in 1991,

98 percent of all companies permit co-workers to date; however, 28 percent discourage

it (as cited in Powers, 1999). In conjunction with these statistics, an American

Management Association (AMA) study concluded that only 6 percent of companies

had a formal written policy on organizational romance, most opting not to get involved in

matters of the heart (Powers, 1999). Moreover, many top executives are from the "old

guard." They remain aloof, more likely than not embarrassed by having to confront and

meddle in the personal lives of their employees, and even worse, deciding upon when and

how to intervene.

The focus of this thesis is on those organizational romance participants who try and

keep their relationship a secret. For one reason or another, while engaging in an

organizational romance, some couples meticulously attempt to keep their relationship a

secret from co-workers and management, essentially isolating their relationship from

others in the organization. Although some couples may have a handful of confidants

at a company or a best friend also employed by the company, this thesis explores the

following research questions: 1) Why do organizational romance participants keep

their relationship a secret from others? 2) How do organizational members keep an

organizational romance secret from fellow associates? 3) What behavioral changes

occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret? and, 4) How do

participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the

organization? For example, it may be against corporate policy to date a co-worker, or while dating a co-worker, for appearance purposes, it is necessary to avoid lengthy chats at a partner's work area. Sometimes, participants go through painstaking efforts to maintain this level of secrecy, such as parting ways one block before arriving at the building's entrance each morning or taking different paths to the car when going to lunch or leaving for the evening. Some couples are successful in their attempts, although the vast majority fail. Typically, outward cues such as public displays of affection or being seen together eating lunch reveal a couple's romantic link. Thus, a case scenario will be administered to all survey participants.

The scenario will clearly depict and describe: (a) the demographics of the couple; (b) the circumstances leading up to the couple's willingness to pursue an organizational romance; and, (c) the couple's decision to keep the romance a secret from others. All participants will be asked to carefully read and review the details of the scenario, and free-form a reaction or response as if personally involved to each of the following questions, which coincide with the study's four research questions:

(1) Why did you decide to keep your relationship a secret from others?

(2) How would you go about keeping your relationship a secret from others?

(3) What behaviors (or changes in behavior) do you find yourself exhibiting/expressing in order to maintain this level/degree of secrecy?

(4) Would you reveal the relationship to others in the organization (such as co-workers and management)?

Essentially, respondents will be asked to put themselves in the situation, narratively describing their personal recommendation or course of action.

Review of the Literature

Definitions of Organizational Romance

Many definitions of organizational romance exist; however, most of the variations are slight. Mainiero (1986) defined organizational romance in behavioral terms to include those relationships that occur between men and women working together that are: (a) characterized by mutual sexual attraction; and, (b) made known to others through the participants' actions. Dillard and Broetzmann (1989) described an organizational romance as an intimate relationship with some degree of mutual sexual attraction. Brown and Allgeier (1993) explained organizational romance as relationships that occur between two individuals who work for the same organization and experience enduring erotic or romantic interest in one another that is known to observers. And, according to Dillard, Hale and Segrin (1994), organizational romances are mutually desired romantic relationships between two members of the same organization.

For this thesis, organizational romance is defined as an interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman which started in the work-setting but, as time passed, flourished beyond the work environment. While both participants may continue to hold gainful employment at the company where they initially met, it is not uncommon for one of the participants to seek outside job opportunities, ultimately exiting the (original) company. Typically, this will happen when the relationship becomes serious, such as a pending marriage date. Depending on circumstance, the organizational romance may either be monogamous or extra-curricular, for example an extra-marital affair. And,

although present and worthy of research, this definition does not explore same-sex organizational romances.

<u>Antecedent Conditions For Organizational Romance</u>

There are some distinct characteristics and situations under which an organizational romance is present. Propinquity, or spatial proximity, provides an opportunity to interact with a member of the opposite sex, and without this opportunity, there would be no chance for attraction (Pierce, 1996). As Powell (1998) notes:

> Proximity may be divided into physical and functional
> proximity. Physical (or geographical) proximity refers
> to closeness that results from the location of employees'
> areas of work; varying levels of physical proximity may
> lead to levels of employee contact ranging from occasional
> to extensive. Functional proximity refers to closeness that
> results from the actual conduct of the work. Employees
> who interact with each other more frequently or more
> intensely because of on-going work relationships are
> higher in functional proximity (p. 429).

Similarly, Quinn (1977) reported on three types of proximity: (a) on-going geographical proximity, (b) proximity as the result of on-going work requirements, and (c) occasional proximity. Quinn's first category, on-going geographical proximity, is a comparable match to Powell's description of physical proximity. Quinn's second category, proximity as the result of on-going work requirements, is also known as functional proximity, as defined by Powell (above). Yet Quinn's final category, occasional proximity, is more of a catch-all. For example, it may mean that within a company potential participants do not work on the same floor, leading to minimal or chance contact, perhaps in the cafeteria or elevator lobby. It could also mean that potential participants do not share in and perform the same

type of project work, thus there would be few exchanges about work content, with the exception of general comments such as "I am busy," "I am in the process of hiring additional staff," or "I am exploring a new system with greater capacity." Finally, according to Quinn (1984), working in close proximity while sharing tasks may stimulate familiarity and will sometimes lead to empathy, understanding, and concern.

Repeated exposure is another characteristic that is typically present in the workplace among prospective dating partners. Zajonc (1968) found that repeated exposure to a stimulus can lead to a more positive evaluation of the stimulus. An example of this is passing by the same individual in the company's parking structure each and every morning as arrival times coincide. Over time, one may gain a favorable impression of the person simply because the context of the interaction is repetitive, leading the participants to grow accustomed to seeing one another. Inevitably, some individuals may grow to acknowledge one another, such as a simple head nod, or even become acquaintances, often greeting one another with a simple "hello."

Byrne (1961) found that similar interests, attitudes, and backgrounds can lead to mutual attraction. Often people find themselves working with like-minded individuals, probably with similar ideas, upbringings, levels of education, values, and morals. "Having the same type of job may foster greater contact with others who have similar jobs and may also aid the development of the relationship once contact is made because of similarity of skills, attitudes, behaviors, values, knowledge, and interests that are associated with the jobs" (Dillard, 1985, p. 113).

According to Quinn (1977), Horn and Horn (1982), Jamison (1983), and Clawson and Kram (1984), intensity, in the form of arousal and excitement, is another reason for entering into an organizational romance (Mainiero, 1986). Certain industries are shown to induce higher levels of workplace "turn-ons," such as emergency rooms, law offices, police departments, newspaper offices, and fire stations (Loftus, 1995). These occupations deal with dangerous life and death situations on a daily basis. Simply stated, employees become accustomed to outwardly expressing their true emotions on a "no holds barred" basis. In addition, deadline pressures often cause employees to exert an abundance of physical energy, and in doing so, strongly promote an environment conducive to romance.

Research has also shown that there is a fair degree of safety, certainty, and predictability in finding a mate at the office (Hoffman, 1997). In a time of sexually transmitted diseases, video dating, domestic abuse, 900 lines, and chat rooms, finding a partner at the office is appealing. Over time, by working with someone, chances are that one has adequately gotten to know the person's tastes and interests, determined his/her character, and whether he/she can be trusted. In essence, one has determined whether the candidate meets one's criteria and standards, and is worthy of a chance.

Today's society and workplace have undergone many dramatic changes. The ratio of working men to working women has changed considerably. The proportion of women in the American workforce, which was 42 percent in 1980 and 45 percent in 1990, is expected to be 47 percent by the year 2000 (Powell, 1993). In addition, the proportion

of female managers in American organizations increased from 26 percent in 1980 to 44

percent in 1997 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1997), while the proportion of women in

non-traditional professions such as engineering, accounting, and law has also increased

(Powell, 1998). More and more women are entering what were once frequently

labeled male-dominated professions (Lobel, 1994). Women no longer hold only

secretarial, clerical, and administrative positions. They now hold positions of rank, status,

and authority. Many men now report to women. Essentially, the dynamics of the

workplace have drastically changed.

Research suggests that one's age may play a role in one's decision to enter into an

organizational romance. According to Dillard (1985), the results vary by gender. In

Dillard and Witteman's 1985 study, almost half (46%) of the romance participants were

25 years of age or less. Dillard was quick to point out that this pattern was accounted

for exclusively by females, suggesting that younger women were more likely to engage in

organizational romances. In short, results showed that men of all ages were about equally

likely to engage in organizational romances, whereas such involvements tended to occur

primarily at younger ages for women (Dillard, 1985).

Many organizations today wholeheartedly support the concept of "fraternization." To

employers, this term means that socializing among employees, both in and outside of the

work setting, is acceptable and under many circumstances strongly encouraged. It is felt

that employees will be a lot happier in a fun, pleasant environment where play, in addition

to work, is routinely allowed. As organizations continue to promote such management

strategies as team building, networking, and coalition building, the intensity of co-worker

interactions and the need for employees to gain co-worker support will increase, which will make male-female relationships stronger than ever (Lobel, 1994).

Deciding Whether to Proceed Ahead

Quinn (1977) documented three motives for entering into an organizational romance. "Love motives" were characterized by true love and a sincere desire and commitment to find a long-term companion or spouse. "Ego motives" were characterized by a fling and were sought to satisfy one's ego through personal gratification, such as adventure, excitement, or a sexual experience. And, "job motives," also known as utilitarian relationships, focus on job-related outcomes and benefits that one or both of the participants may be pursuing, such as job security, advancement, increased power, financial rewards, increased flexibility, paid time off, or a lighter workload (Dillard, 1987). Researchers classify "love motives" as "pure motives," whereas "ego motives" and "job motives" have "impure motives." Some researchers have added a fourth motive to Quinn's typology. The "power motive," by definition, is also utilitarian. It may involve on-the-job as well as off-the-job payoffs. According to Mainiero (1986), it is defined as a romance whereby one participant enters into the relationship to gain increased power and/or visibility.

There are several features inherent to the work setting that make meeting someone at work much different from meeting someone in a mere social setting, such as a gathering or special occasion. First, people at work are there to do a job, receiving benefits and compensation for the work they do. They are there to support themselves and their

families. Hence, their first and foremost goal is usually to receive money in exchange for their services, not to meet someone of the opposite sex for a potential meaningful relationship. Second, some people intend to work at the same place for a considerable length of time; a person making an overture or proposition knows that he or she will probably have to continue to work with the target person, regardless of the outcome of the overture (Gutek, 1983). Finally, status hierarchies and company politics may greatly restrict the ease with which certain relationships flourish (Gutek, 1983). Some may not even get off the ground. In fact, two prospective participants may be at such varying levels of the organization (for example, a data-entry operator and a vice president) that their paths, distinguished by their degree of hierarchical separation, may never cross.

According to Dillard and Witteman (1985), it is important to select a partner of comparable status. Overwhelmingly, these types of organizational romances show the greatest promise for long-term success. The likelihood of a romance forming is highest for persons at the same rank or for those who differ by only one level (Dillard, 1985). For males however, according to Korda (1973) and Harragan (1977), an organizational romance may be considered a status badge. Quinn (1977) described relationships wherein the male is seen as seeking such things as excitement, ego satisfaction, and sexual adventure, and the female is viewed as in search of organizational rewards. As a result, co-workers express disapproval, cynicism and hostility--all of which are mostly directed toward the female member (Anderson, 1991).

As with most things, prospective participants will typically weigh the potential risks

involved against the potential benefits reaped when deciding whether to begin an

organizational romance. These include risks to career (such as respect), risks to self-

image and esteem (such as work-related rewards after the formation of a romance with a

higher-lever participant), risks to home and family (such as marital strife and divorce), and

risks due to violations of workplace norms (Powell, 1998).

Internal Dynamics of the Relationship

Perhaps the biggest decision that a couple at work must face is when to disclose to

others that they are indeed a couple. Many concede that when people are in love, it is

impossible to camouflage; they naturally give themselves away. There may not be an

appropriate time or ideal way to openly reveal this information to others. Then again,

a relationship may be revealed by accident. And in some instances, there may not be a

desire, by either one or both participants, to keep the relationship quiet.

In the case where relationship participants choose to try and conceal their relationship,

there are a number of outward signals or cues that openly relay and display to others

a sense that something more serious is developing, such as an organizational romance.

Visibility (of the relationship) is defined as the degree to which the participants behave so

that members of the work group are aware of the existence of the romance (Quinn, 1977).

Co-workers are astute and perceptive when it comes to minor changes in behavior and

routines (Quinn, 1977). Ever so subtle swings in mood, appearance, gestures, and voice

may arouse suspicion. According to Quinn (1977), among the most common activities

that alert co-workers to a possible relationship are the following:

1. Seen together away from work
2. Initially tried to keep it a secret
3. Spent unusual amount of work time chatting
4. Took long lunches together
5. Even after others knew, still thought the relationship was secret
6. Had long discussions behind closed doors
7. Sometimes physically displayed their affections at work
8. Went on business trips together

Veblen's (1934) conspicuous consumption phenomenon best explains those situations where one of the participants has an equally strong desire to reveal the relationship. If an individual's motive in establishing a romantic relationship partially stems from the need to demonstrate his or her social worth, the person also needs to let others know of the accomplishment or latest conquest (Quinn, 1977).

There is also a "lever of secrecy" to consider in an organizational romance (Wareham, 1997). The extent to which the power structure changes is proportionate to the degree of secrecy sought by the parties (Wareham, 1997). Typically, the person with the most to lose, should the relationship go public, has the greatest need to maintain secrecy. Here again, the recommendation or golden rule is to select a partner of comparable rank and worth, given he/she will likely stand to lose in equal proportion, should the relationship become public knowledge.

Interestingly, many couples expend a lot of time and energy on trying to keep their relationship secret. In many instances, it creates additional pressure or stress on the couple. Some couples may be waiting until their relationship is on solid ground or in cruise-control prior to disclosure. However, others may intend to keep their relationship "underground" permanently, for example, it may be against corporate policy to date a

superior or subordinate, a teacher or student, etc. Also, co-worker scrutiny and gossip may be just too much to fathom. For when co-workers detect some change in behavior, details culminate very quickly through informal communication networks, also known as the grapevine. Subsequently, the more blatant or exciting the behavior, the more quickly it is transmitted (Quinn, 1977).

It is also important to briefly examine secrecy in the "normal" relationship. By definition, this includes two unattached adults and their decision to keep their relationship a secret from friends and family members. The couple does not work for the same company, nor are either of the participants married or involved with someone else. Research suggests that such secrecy may actually enhance attraction (Glanzrock, 1994). In 1994 lab studies, Wegner found that couples who interacted in secret became more attracted to each other than those who were open. Wegner concluded "that thought is involved in the path from secrecy to attraction, as people think more frequently and in a more troubled way about their secret partners than they do about other partners" (Wegner, 1994, p. 298).

Finally, there is a fair amount of literature on ways to create safe communication channels, namely, creating "your own code" (Powers, 1999). Couples commonly do this to keep others from prying. Coding messages or developing unique names and references for things that only you and your partner can decipher may eliminate having to deal with inquisitive and/or exceptionally nosy co-workers. An example is to dial your partner's extension, as quitting time approaches, asking "What time does your store close tonight?" meaning "I'm ready to go home, are you?".

External Impacts of the Relationship

The reason third-party observers become so absorbed by the organizational romance

is often because it invokes issues of love, sex, family, power, justice, ethics, and norms

regarding acceptable behavior in the workplace (Powell, 1998). In many instances, the

focus of talk and gossip are on whether the relationship appears to be carried out in an

appropriate or inappropriate manner and on whether it appears to be benefiting or

hindering the individuals involved and the organization as a whole (Powell, 1998).

Frequently, for no apparent reason, a person's mind and imagination will run rampant.

For example, in the instance of two close colleagues of the opposite sex, outsiders will

immediately make an interpretation about the nature of the relationship. Usually, those

interpreting will automatically suspect that the relationship is sexual, whether or not that is

truly the case (Crary, 1987). Aside from whether gossip is of a positive or negative tone,

Quinn (1977) reported that the most prevalent outcome of an organizational romance is

the substantial amount of constant gossip that it generates.

Upon confirmation that an organizational romance exists, co-workers may engage

in an information gathering process to make a general evaluation of the relationship, with

particular emphasis on the features of the relationship that may affect their work lives

(Brown, 1996). As Brown and Allgeier (1996) contend, co-workers generally gather

information in three ways: personal characteristics of the participants, perceived motives

(of the participants) for entry into the relationship, and specific job behaviors of the

participants (Brown, 1996). Personal characteristics would include such things as marital

status or organizational status. Motives for entering into a relationship may be broad,

ranging from infatuation to compassion to a way of earning more money while working far fewer hours. Finally, job behaviors would include such things as performance, satisfaction, motivation, and involvement, as well as the level of one's professional conduct.

Reaction of Co-workers

Surprisingly, upon learning that a co-worker is involved in an organizational romance, and despite a possible favorable reaction, an observer will typically abstain from commenting (or soliciting an opinion) to one or both of the participants. While the relationship may be a topic of interest, it seems that organizational members are content to talk among themselves about it rather than convey their opinions to the relational participants (Dillard, 1987).

Most co-workers seem to respond to an organizational romance on a case-by-case basis. Many factors play into the equation, for example, whether the participants are on the same team, whether there is a reporting relationship, whether the areas compete for resources, or whether the areas act as suppliers to one another. Some co-workers may even find a small age difference (between participants) offensive. According to Mainiero (1995):

> Even in the simplest case, where both parties are unattached, the relationship is open and above board, and neither party has conflicting responsibilities to the workplace, there are many other stakeholders who are affected by office romance. Superiors, subordinates, coworkers--all are likely to be caught up in the ebb and flow of evolving love. Depending on the duties of the lovers and the obviousness of their attraction, the relationship may be so powerful and pervasive that it affects radically the chemistry of the workplace (p. 285).

In the case of disapproval, most co-workers will simply ignore the couple, and with time, the relationship will sometimes dissolve on its own. During the initial phases of discomfort, team members will often tolerate and silently withstand the relationship. As circumstances worsen or deteriorate, people generally begin to offer the participants bits of "friendly advice." Shortly after, though, reactions become more pronounced and severe. Controversy sets in, and people feel compelled to take sides. People complain to their superiors, try to undermine the work efforts of participants, quit their own jobs, ostracize one of the participants, or employ various forms of threat and blackmail (Quinn, 1984).

In addition, Collins and Blodgett (1981) found that supervisors are held to higher standards of behavior than are coworkers or subordinates. "Behavior that might be viewed as 'friendly' from a co-worker carries implicit overtones of force or threat when it is exhibited by a supervisor" (Gutek, 1983, p. 45). For the most widely talked about relationships, and in some camps despised, are those of a manager involved with his/her direct report, also known as dating up the chain of command. Almost always, this type of relationship implies a sense of favoritism and bias. Low morale is usually the result, combined with the perception that information of a confidential nature is being leaked. Essentially, through "pillow talk" there is the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. Also, when the lower stature employee is the boss's secretary, he/she may either intentionally or unintentionally take on a gatekeeper role, for example, crucial meetings may be bumped and availability may be blocked. The higher ranking participant may also start delegating visible tasks that may be of a sensitive nature. Ultimately, credibility and

self-esteem may be lost.

In 1987, Crary found that women feel vulnerable and become fearful of the outsider's perception when they get close to a male colleague or client. Outsiders tend to quickly label the woman, applying classic accusations such as "sleeping with the boss" or "sleeping her way to the top." An outsider is less likely to equate a woman's sudden rise, within an organization, to her competency. As a result, women today tend to be more careful and discreet in managing their close relationships (Crary, 1987).

Lastly, colleagues can be confused about whether to deal with the couple as individuals or a team (Mainiero, 1995). In many arenas, being viewed as a unit is good; however, in the workplace it can be detrimental. The literature points to instances where couples are treated as one, and when confronted by unfavorable circumstances, they are brought down together. This reinforces the need to be cognizant of whom one aligns oneself with, and the potential consequences that can stem from such a decision.

Taking the opposing viewpoint for a moment, some researchers have found that companies perceive an organizational romance to be a selling point, essentially a "twofer" (Fisher, 1994). Some note that relocating two is easier and less expensive than one. Also, sometimes it is true that "two heads are better than one" when it comes to problem solving and negotiating techniques.

Management's Perspective

Corporate climate reflects a company's culture and philosophy. Climate is the compilation of a company's attitudes, values, and approach towards its workers. Those

in power enforce their definition of the company's culture (Powers, 1999). Today,

companies are nurturing social relationships more and more because of the satisfaction

they bring to both employees and their work (Powers, 1999). Pro-active companies

encourage positive interaction and promote mutually supportive environments. Yet,

pro-interactive companies heavily endorse socialization amongst and between employees.

Aside from recent trends in corporate culture, when evaluating employee performance,

management's obligation is to determine whether assignments are handled in an effective,

efficient, and timely manner. "Whether male or female, one's proper role as a manager is

to judge people on the basis of competence, nothing else" (Baridon, 1994, p. 36).

Unfortunately, as many corporate Americans can attest, this is not always the case.

The impact and outcome of an organizational romance, either with a co-worker or

superior/subordinate, can significantly affect one's success and ultimate fate within an

organization.

Legally, one's right to privacy is the primary constitutional shield that prevents an

employer from implementing restrictions or mandates as they pertain to organizational

romance (Schaner, 1994). Since so few employers have formal written policies,

enforcement is seldom a serious consideration. One of the greatest challenges, though,

comes when a relationship sours. In some settings in which participants worked together,

alternate routes to the rest-room, elevator, stairs, fax machine, photocopier, and vending

machine were established, all for the purpose of avoiding the other participant. In some

instances, concerted, vindictive efforts, even borderline sabotage, were used in getting

back at the former partner. When a break-up is one-sided, obviously, those hurt the most,

causing the most upset, distraction, and backlash. Some former participants are even

forced out of their jobs, whereas others may just leave on their own. The literature

emphasizes the seriousness and importance of, if at all possible, determining "exit routes"

in advance. For example, should one of the following events transpire: a partner is

promoted, a partner is reprimanded and put on disciplinary action, a partner is laid-off or

fired, or a highly visible, vocal break-up occurs, how will relationship participants cope

(Mainiero, 1995)?

Superior/subordinate relationships create a unique dilemma for employers. "By failing

to formulate and implement a policy concerning organizational romance, the employer is

vulnerable to sexual harassment actions if the relationship turns sour and to 'reverse'

harassment actions when the romance adversely affects an employee's chances for

advancement" (Schaner, 1994, p. 63). Romance is about attraction, about wanted

advances, whereas sexual harassment involves unwanted advances, and is about power

and control (Stanton, 1998). Out of revenge, a subordinate might accuse his or her

supervisor of sexual harassment if the supervisor terminates the romance, especially if

the subordinate entered the romance because of a job-related motive such as seeking

lighter workloads, a promotion or pay raise, an increase in power, or more vacation time

(Dillard, 1994). However, if a subordinate terminates the romance against the supervisor's

wishes, the supervisor may be bitter and make attempts toward rekindling the romance. If

the supervisors attempts at reuniting the dyad are coercive or undesired, they may be seen

as sexually harassing. A supervisor may also "try to manage the romantic dissolution by

relocating or terminating the subordinate in order to avoid negative feelings from the

disengagement" (Pierce, 1997, p. 199).

Purpose of Thesis

Research Questions

To date, much of the scholarly research has focused on (a) the factors leading up to an organizational romance, (b) the behaviors displayed by participants, co-workers, and the company once a liaison is underway, and (c) possible consequences that may stem from such encounters. One area that has received minimal attention is secrecy, specifically the attempt by participants to keep the organizational romance a secret.

RQ1: Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

RQ2: How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

RQ3: What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

RQ4: How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in gathering the data for this study. The following sections discuss the participants, procedure and measurement, and data analysis used in this thesis.

Participants

All participation was voluntary. Students at a medium-sized midwestern university, enrolled in the Masters of Business Administration (M.B.A.) program, were asked to participate in this research project. Business students, especially graduate students, may indeed have a more in-depth understanding or greater degree of familiarity with the concept simply due to the type of employment opportunities they seek and positions they eventually hold. For example, students from any of the business disciplines, either accounting, finance, marketing, or management, will likely seek employment at a corporation where their formal skill-set can best be utilized. Hence, depending on the employer, business students may be exposed to a higher number of organizational romances than the average student. In conjunction with this, M.B.A. students enrolled in evening classes were targeted for completion of this survey as opposed to students attending daytime classes. Evening students, whether full-time or part-time, typically attend evening classes to accommodate their daytime work schedules. These are the students who have a greater understanding of the workplace environment and its unique

dynamics.

A quota (or sample size) of ninety-nine was drawn. For inclusion in the study, participants had to (a) fill in a response to all four open-ended questions, (b) reply to each of the four demographic questions, and (c) write in a manner that was legible to the researcher. All students, from four classes, participated in the study. However, one survey was incomplete, where the demographic section was either intentionally or unintentionally omitted, and was immediately discarded from the study.

In addition, all survey responses were kept confidential, and would remain anonymous. Finally, upon completion of the survey, all participants were informed of the study's purpose.

Procedure and Measurement

The survey was developed by the researcher. The survey's instructions, word choice, flow, and readability were pre-evaluated in a workplace setting by friends and colleagues of the researcher. Eight individuals read and reviewed the survey, making verbal comments and suggestions to the researcher. As a result, minor wording and language changes were made. Subsequently, to further fine-tune the survey, the researcher engaged the assistance of another eight individuals to complete the survey from start to finish. Again, these volunteers provided comments and suggestions to the researcher. The researcher was able to add clarity to the survey by asking questions like: "How do you interpret this question?", "What does the question mean to you?", "Does this make

sense?", "Confirm what I am asking," or, "Can you think of another way to re-state the question?". In addition, the researcher timed each of the sample respondents, determining average completion time. Upon incorporating suggestions from both pre-evaluation environments, and feeling comfortable with the preliminary results, the researcher proceeded to the actual data collection phase.

At the start of the survey, each participant was provided with a detailed definition of organizational romance. Next, the researcher built the following hypothetical case scenario for the participant to read, review, and react to:

> Elizabeth and Robert both hold professional positions as Business
> Analysts at a large, local corporation. Their company employs
> approximately five-hundred people. Both Elizabeth and Robert
> are single, well-educated, and in their early thirties. Initially, they
> were friends, working as counterparts on separate project teams.
> However, after getting to know one another over the course of the
> last year, they found that their backgrounds were similar and they
> held many of the same interests. They have since decided to date
> exclusively, both interested in pursuing a meaningful, romantic
> relationship. They have also decided to keep their relationship
> a secret from co-workers, acquaintances, and their (respective)
> managers.

The scenario describes the dynamics of a fictitious couple's organizational romance including the company for which they work, personal traits of the couple, how the couple met, why the couple felt comfortable engaging in an organizational romance, and the importance (as perceived by the couple) for maintaining secrecy. Four open-ended questions followed, each of which coincided with the study's four research questions. Participants were asked to narratively respond in writing as if personally involved in the

situation. (See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.)

It was necessary to build a hypothetical scenario for three reasons. First, beyond gathering mere demographic information, a regular survey, given its directness, would likely elicit a low response rate. For example, as an initial screening mechanism, when asked if one has personally been involved in an organizational romance, undoubtedly the most common answer is no. From the start, a survey of this nature automatically excludes a good majority of potential respondents. So, in an effort to include everyone, from those who have engaged in an organizational romance, to those that are aware of others that have engaged in an organizational romance, to those that know absolutely nothing about organizational romance, the hypothetical scenario is considered a useful and productive tool. Essentially, all respondents are on an equal playing field, possessing the same amount of case-specific knowledge. Second, regardless of assurances regarding anonymity, individual motives for maintaining secrecy may be far too personal of a subject matter for some participants to disclose and openly share with strangers. Some participants may be reluctant to tell the truth, in comparison to the alternative (a generic, impersonal case scenario). So, through the use of an objective, impartial, less invasive scenario, one's willingness to temporarily put oneself in someone else's shoes may increase. And third, replication of another researcher's instrument or survey was not possible. Basically, there was nothing available to replicate. Secrecy (in an organizational romance) is narrow in scope and well-defined, yet a standardized, widely-accepted

questionnaire, which measures the phenomenon, does not currently exist.

At the close of the survey, the following basic demographic information was gathered from the participant: personal (first-hand) experience with an organizational romance, gender, age, and years in the workforce.

Data Analysis

In response to each of the four research questions, a content analysis of the scenario responses was performed. The purpose of the content analysis was to identify commonalties among scenario responses, thematically grouping (or clustering) the similarities into appropriate categories, interpreting and assigning meanings, and effectively explaining them to the reader (Weber, 1990).

The eight pre-evaluated survey responses aided the researcher in formulating an initial set of preliminary coding categories. The researcher then went through the ninety-eight responses, continuing to review and refine the specific categories contained within each of the four major category sets:

(1) Why did you decide to keep your relationship a secret from others?

(2) How would you go about keeping your relationship a secret from others?

(3) What behaviors (or changes in behavior) do you find yourself exhibiting/expressing in order to maintain this level/degree of secrecy?

(4) Would you reveal the relationship to others in the organization (such as co-workers and management)?

In conjunction with Kerlinger's (1964) category requirements and recommendations, the researcher's categories reflected the purposes of the research, were exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and equivalent.

To insure inter-rater reliability, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a coder. This was done to satisfy individual reliability, or the extent of agreement between coders with regard to placement of responses into specific categories (Holsti, 1969). It is important that the coder hold a similar academic background to the researcher (Stempel, 1981). For example, if the researcher is a graduate student, it is vital to have another graduate student, in the same degree program act as a coder. It is also helpful to have the coder be of a similar socioeconomic and linguistic background (Krippendorff, 1980).

A fellow graduate student then went through a sub-set of 25 survey responses, coding each response, and assigning it to one of the researcher's pre-defined categories. A comparison was drawn between how the researcher categorized survey responses and how the coder categorized survey responses. This was done to insure that the researcher's assumptions and assessments were indeed accurate, meaning objective and yielding similar results. During the first iteration, the researcher and coder yielded lower than a 70% coefficient of reliability. Essentially, the coder was unable to substantiate the researcher's categorization process. The researcher and coder collaboratively reviewed and refined the researcher's definitions, preparing for a second iteration. Upon pulling a second sub-set of 10 survey responses, the researcher and coder again yielded lower than a 70% coefficient

of reliability. The researcher's definitions were again collectively reviewed and refined.

Upon drawing a third sub-set of 10 survey responses, the researcher and coder achieved

agreement on 87% of their coding classifications. Comfortable with the process they had

gone through, the researcher and coder were now satisfied with the categories they had

established, as well as their level of reliability.

To formally draw the comparison (of the two interpretations) between the researcher's

analysis and the coder's placement of responses, the researcher used Scott's (1955) index

of reliability (*pi*) formula, which follows:

$$pi = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

This formula is important because it takes into account chance, and the extent of inter-

rater agreement that is present due to chance occurrence (Holsti, 1969). In this equation,

% expected agreement is calculated by finding the proportion of items falling into each

category of a category set, and summing the square of those proportions (Holsti, 1969).

It is also important to mention the formula used in arriving at the coefficient of reliability

(C.R.) or % observed agreement:

$$\text{C.R.} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

In this equation, M is the number of coding decisions on which the two judges (or coders)

are in agreement, and N_1 and N_2 refer to the number of coding decisions made by judges 1

and 2, respectively (Holsti, 1969). It is important to note that an acceptable reliability level is .70. The higher the reliability level, the better.

With the reliability requirement now satisfied, the researcher independently coded the remaining survey responses. Pertaining to the "other" category and its appropriate use, the researcher confirmed that fewer than 10% of all responses were coded as "other" (Wimmer & Dominick, 1990). The researcher then tabulated frequency counts by recording how often each different type of statement (response) had occurred. These counts were then collapsed, by category, to a percentage figure. Finally, for additional description, the researcher developed cluster categories within each major category (title).

Chapter 3

Results

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the following four research questions: 1) why organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others; 2) how participants go about keeping their romance secret; 3) behavioral changes that result from such endeavors; and, 4) if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization. To investigate these questions, 98 participants were administered a questionnaire, asking them to react to a hypothetical case scenario describing the dynamics of a fictitious couple's organizational romance. Other demographic questions were also asked.

Participant Characteristics

Of the 98 M.B.A students sampled, 47 (48%) were male and 51 (52%) were female. The mean age of the participants was 28.7, with a range of 29 years. The youngest participant was 21 and the oldest participant was 50. On average, participants had been in the workforce for 10.1 years. Forty-one (42%) had personally engaged in an organizational romance, while 57 (58%) had not. Of those who had, the average participant had engaged in 1.72 organizational romances, 56% had kept their romance (s) a secret, and 81% indicated their responses to the hypothetical case scenario were reflective of first-hand knowledge, behaviors and personal experiences.

Research Question Results

Research Question #1

The first research question asked, "Why do organizational romance participants keep

their relationship a secret from others?". In response to this question, the researcher and

coder developed five categories for responses (below). Upon placing participant

responses in the following categories, the researcher tabulated an overall percentage, for

each category:

1. Affect On Relationship Participant (s) -- 26.14%
2. It Is A Personal/Private Matter -- 10.80%
3. It May Be Against Company Policy -- 4.55%
4. Reaction By Organizational Member (s) -- 54.53%
5. Other -- 3.98%

By frequency, under Category 1: Affect On Relationship Participant (s), the top response

statements were:

Frequency	Response Statement
7	"So neither would lose their job, be fired/terminated."
5	"Avoid appearance of improper favoritism or business decisions."

By frequency, under Category 2: It Is A Personal/Private Matter, the top response

statements were:

Frequency	Response Statement
5	"It is a personal matter, and personal matters do not concern work."
5	"It is no one else's business."

By frequency, under Category 3: It May Be Against Company Policy, the top response

statement was:

Frequency	Response Statement
5	"Due to the intracompany relationship policy."

By frequency, under Category 4: Reaction By Organizational Member (s), the top

response statements were:

Frequency	Response Statement
20	"To avoid gossip/stares at work, become part of the office gossip, coworkers typically tend to talk extensively (gossip) about events such as this, talk about me behind closed doors. If I tell somebody soon we will be the talk of the office. This would start the grapevine going in the office."
9	"To avoid coworkers thinking that any actions at work may be influenced by their relationship, avoid perception that a personal relationship could taint judgment in situations where we are both involved. Other may perceive favoritism if the proper situation arises (supervisor/subordinate)."
8	"So fellow coworkers would not treat us differently."

Under Category 5: Other, seven separate response statements were provided; each

occurred only once. (Tables 1a-e provide a comprehensive list of all category response

statements, to include cluster categories for each major category title.)

Research Question #2

The second research question asked, "How do organizational members keep an

organizational romance secret from fellow associates?". In response to this question, the

researcher and coder developed three categories for responses (below). Upon placing

participant responses in the following categories, the researcher tabulated an overall

percentage, for each category:

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s) -- 69.54%
2. Self-Related Behavior (s) -- 29.89%
3. Other -- .57%

By frequency, under Category 1: Partner-Related Behavior (s), the top response

statements were:

Frequency	Response Statement
19	"Ensure I/we maintain a professional demeanor. Maintain a professional relationship at work."
15	"Do not display any signs of affection/love while on the premises, around coworkers, or in public (affection beyond normal handshakes, smiles)."
13	"Treat the other person like any other coworker/everyone else."

By frequency, under Category 2: Self-Related Behavior (s), the top response statements

were:

Frequency	Response Statement
17	"Do not discuss Robert/Elizabeth with anyone, even a close friend."
7	"Not confiding in office friends about the relationship and not talking about 'dating' activities at the office."

Under Category 3: Other, only one response statement was provided. (Tables 2a-c

provide a comprehensive list of all category response statements, to include cluster

categories for each major category title.)

Research Question #3

The third research question asked, "What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep

an organizational romance secret?". In response to this question, the researcher and coder

developed three categories for responses (below). Upon placing participant responses in

the following categories, the researcher tabulated an overall percentage, for each category:

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s) -- 54.76%
2. Self-Related Behavior (s) -- 44.64%
3. Other -- .60%

By frequency, under Category 1: Partner-Related Behavior (s), the top response

statements were:

Frequency	Response Statement
15	"Avoid each other at work. ...for fear that my words and/or actions (around him/her) would give me away."
8	"Conscious effort not to interact other than on a professional level. Remain professional to one another. Act professional."

By frequency, under Category 2: Self-Related Behavior (s), the top response statement

was:

Frequency	Response Statement
13	"Cutting off social ties with other workers. Not socializing at all with others in the company. Closing off personal life from work."

Under Category 3: Other, only one response statement was provided. (Tables 3a-c

provide a comprehensive list of all category response statements, to include cluster

categories for each major category title.)

Research Question #4

The fourth research question asked, "How do participants decide if and at what point

to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?".

For "yes" responses, which equated to 69% of all responses, the researcher and coder

developed five categories for responses (below). Upon placing participant responses in

the following categories, the researcher tabulated an overall percentage, for each category:

1. Inherent Nature Of The Relationship -- 46.66%
2. Reaction By Organizational Member (s) -- 8.57%
3. Self-Related Behavior (s) -- 27.62%
4. Time (Dimension) -- 14.29%
5. Other -- 2.86%

By frequency, under Category 1: Inherent Nature Of The Relationship, the top response

statement was:

Frequency	Response Statement
33	"When it becomes more serious, e.g. getting engaged, moving in together, getting married. Disclosure is inevitable."

By frequency, under Category 2: Reaction By Organizational Member (s), the top

response statement was:

Frequency	Response Statement
2	"The point I felt others became aware. Obvious others suspect."

By frequency, under Category 3: Self-Related Behavior (s), the top response statements

were:

Frequency	Response Statement
3	"I want to reveal the secret to only one or two people."
3	"When we were both comfortable doing so."

By frequency, under Category 4: Time (Dimension), the top response statement was:

<div style="margin-left: 2em;">

Frequency Response Statement
2   "After several months of dating."

</div>

Under Category 5: Other, three separate response statements were provided; each

occurred only once. (Tables 4a-e provide a comprehensive list of all category response

statements, to include cluster categories for each major category title.)

For "no" responses, which equated to 31% of all responses, the researcher and coder

developed five categories for responses (below). Upon placing participant responses in

the following categories, the researcher tabulated an overall percentage, for each category:

1. Inherent Nature Of The Relationship -- 10.53%
2. It Is A Personal Matter -- 23.69%
3. Potentially Damaging -- 23.68%
4. Self-Related Behavior (s) -- 39.47%
5. Other -- 2.63%

By frequency, under Category 1: Inherent Nature Of The Relationship, four separate

response statements were provided; each occurred only once:

<div style="margin-left: 2em;">

Frequency Response Statement

1   "I would not reveal my relationship until I know for sure that it is one to last."

1   "I would not reveal the relationship to others until I had wedding plans in place."

1   "I would not reveal the relationship until when and if we have a firm date for a wedding or we are formally engaged."

1   "The relationship would stay secret until both parties agree about the seriousness and want to move to another level."

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By frequency, under Category 2: It Is A Personal Matter, the top response statement was:

Frequency	Response Statement
4	"It is none of their business. Personal feelings/actions that occur outside of work are private and do not need to be shared with coworkers."

By frequency, under Category 3: Potentially Damaging, nine separate response statements were provided; each occurred only once:

Frequency	Response Statement
1	"I would not want to jeopardize mine or Elizabeth's jobs so I would keep the relationship totally secret."
1	"It can only harm me."
1	"Negative repercussions are not worth the risk."
1	"Office gossip can end a career quickly."
1	"Organizations frown upon coworker romance and would probably ask one individual to leave."
1	"People would see a relationship like this as a problem. I have seen other people reveal their relationships and suffer."
1	"They would open themselves to rumors, misinterpretations, and gossip."
1	"Word would spread quickly, even if I told only one person."
1	"You do not want the other person's professional life to be affected since you haven't reached the stage of permanent/long-term relationship."

By frequency, under Category 4: Self-Related Behavior (s), fifteen separate response statements were provided; each occurred only once:

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Response Statement</u>
1	"I would fear that they would tell others in the organization."
1	"I would make it public knowledge when one of us was planning to leave."
1	"I would not want to risk my personal career objectives."
1	"If someone asked, I would tell them the truth. Otherwise, I just would not say anything."
1	"If the relationship ends, it is very inconvenient in the workplace."
1	"It would be best to keep it a secret until one of the parties finds a different job."
1	"Only if I had close friends as coworkers, would I share the info and only if they would keep it to themselves."
1	"People view others differently when they hear about office romance. You would hope they would act professional about it, but that often is not the case."
1	"Play conservatively."
1	"The situation would be much more difficult with only a few knowing and not the entire group. It is hard to know who to trust."
1	"Unless there is a need to know (asking someone to be in the wedding) or the coworker has an especially close friend there is no need to tell until after the wedding."
1	"Until I was ready to announce formally, I would take the coward's route and not tell."
1	"Word spreads very quickly in the workplace. I do not want to take any chances."

1   "You can not count on people to keep secrets. By telling others about the relationship, you lose control over who may/can find out about it and it eventually gets back to respective managers."

1   "You can not guarantee that it would not spread. The only way to ensure that is say nothing."

Under Category 5: Other, only one response statement was provided. (Tables 5a-e provide a comprehensive list of all category response statements, to include cluster categories for each major category title.)

Chapter 4

Discussion

In the preceding chapter, results were reported pertaining to each of the following

research questions:

1) Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

2) How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

3) What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

4) How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

In this chapter, the research questions are examined in regard to the results. Strengths and

limitations of the research, as well as suggestions for future research are discussed.

Interpretation of Results

The results of the study raise a lot of interesting issues, from work ethic to company

policy to invasion of personal privacy. With regard to why it is necessary to keep a

relationship secret from others (RQ1), overwhelmingly, most respondents were concerned

over others' reactions. Intra-office gossip appears to be a strong force within most work

environments. Although this particular response was frequent, a lot of other response

statements appeared just once, to include:

"Attention would be placed on the couple instead of the individuals."

"It may influence how others regard any work done on a common team."

"Managers may believe that you were no longer serious about your employment."

"So coworkers would not blame any type of problems on the fact that we are dating."

With regard to how one goes about keeping a relationship secret from others (RQ2), overwhelmingly, participants wish to maintain a professional demeanor while at work, avoiding personal signs/displays of affection. Here again, many response statements were unique, appearing just one time:

"Act blasé around the other partner."

"Arrive/leave separately."

"No pictures of the other on your desk."

"Staying in at home often."

Interestingly, many of the behaviors that respondents exhibited/expressed in maintaining secrecy (RQ3) were very comparable to the replies provided to research question 2 (above). For example, avoiding each other during office hours was a common response to both questions b and c, as was acting professionally, lunching separately, and limiting social interactions with others/friends in the organization. Hence, the same categories were set up for questions b and c:

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)
2. Self-Related Behavior (s)
3. Other

With regard to revealing the relationship to others in the organization (RQ4), the majority of "yes" respondents felt is was inevitable, due to the seriousness of the relationship. However, for those respondents stating "no," there was a fairly even split between the following three categories:

1. It Is A Personal Matter
2. Potentially Damaging
3. Self-Related Behavior (s)

Here again, the majority of responses within each of these three categories occurred just once, examples include:

"If it is not affecting work, then it is none of their damn business."

"It can only harm me."

"The situation would be much more difficult with only a few knowing and not the entire group. It is hard to know who to trust."

In examining the conclusions of prior researchers, a few points should be made regarding this thesis. This study supports the earlier observation that people in love give themselves away (Quinn, 1977). Most respondents felt disclosure was inevitable, given their current level of commitment, be it exclusive dating or a pending marriage date. It was considered difficult, if not impossible, to successfully keep a secret of such enormous magnitude.

Some respondents expressed anxiety over "being caught" or "found out." Others were reluctant and hesitant to go out (on dates) in public places for fear of bumping into someone from work. Some preferred to stay in, at home, leading secluded relationships.

These statements substantiate Quinn's (1977) claim that once relationship participants are "seen together away from work," coworkers are on alert as to the existence of a possible relationship (p. 37).

With regard to disclosure, some participants preferred an open, honest policy with management and coworkers. They felt it was important to alert others in advance, before rumors culminated. They were reluctant to postpone disclosure for fear of having to abruptly either confirm or deny the relationship, and answering to widespread accusations and allegations. Some felt the pressure of having to defend themselves, after the fact, was far too costly to the well-being and preservation of the relationship.

In addition, respondents in this study seem savvy in their secrecy tactics. By comparison, Quinn (1977) found that the most common activities that alert co-workers to a possible relationship are:

1. Seen together away from work
2. Initially tried to keep it a secret
3. Spent unusual amount of work time chatting
4. Took long lunches together
5. Even after others knew, still thought the relationship was secret
6. Had long discussions behind closed doors
7. Sometimes physically displayed their affections at work
8. Went on business trips together

By today's standards, many of these activities are outdated. They are surefire ways of immediately making a relationship known to others. Based on survey responses, today's organizational romance participants appear to have a better understanding of intra-company relationship dynamics, as well as a much improved grasp of how one might

attempt to keep his/her relationship a secret.

Strengths of the Study

This section explores the strengths associated with this thesis. One strength of this study is the participant sample (N = 98, males = 48%, females = 52%, mean age = 28.7, and mean years in the workforce = 10.1). Data were gathered from a fairly equal number of men and women. The participants were older, with a good amount of workplace experience. Also, the participants were advanced degree students enrolled in a medium-sized midwestern university's M.B.A. program. For the most part, these students were familiar with many of the concepts presented throughout this thesis. Plus, many of them, through their employment experiences, held valuable opinions and attitudes toward secrecy in the organizational romance.

An additional strength of this study is the level of inter-rater reliability achieved during the development of coding categories and the actual coding process itself. Using Scott's (1955) index of reliability (*pi*) formula, the reliability coefficient obtained in coding participant responses into categories was .87. A reliability level greater than or equal to .70 is considered acceptable. However, the closer to 1.00, the better.

A final strength of this thesis is that the researcher gathered actual statements that can be used in developing an instrument for examining secrecy in the organizational romance. Since no other instrument exists, future researchers will have a starting point to draw upon. Not only is it important to have a baseline available, but future researchers can

improve upon this instrument, adding additional value to the larger body of literature.

Limitations of the Study

This section examines the limitations of this thesis. One limitation of the study is that a hypothetical scenario was used. While hypothetical scenarios allow for a broader number of participants, they limit the experiences of the participants to the confines of the actual scenario. For example, the researcher labeled the relationship participants as equals, from age to job title to backgrounds. Survey respondents may have reacted very differently to the scenario had the researcher labeled the relationship participants as married, divorced, of wide age ranges, from different levels within the company, such as management and hourly, or of a direct report nature, such as a superior/subordinate relationship.

Future Research

This section addresses areas for future research. Most companies will probably differ, some slightly and some dramatically, on their opinions and attitudes toward employees and organizational romance. A company's tone, from acceptance to rejection and varying degrees in between, is an important consideration for organizational romance participants. Taking these fluctuations into account, it would be worthwhile to survey groups of employees within particular companies, drawing comparisons/contrasts between different employer groups and their attitudes. It may be that attitudes vary by type of industry, by blue-collar and white-collar occupations, or by union and non-union groups. It may also

be that attitudes vary by company size, or by a company's current product cycle stage, for example, whether in the growth, maturity, or decline phase.

Along these same lines, it may be worthwhile to survey different population groups, for example, a branch of the military. The dynamics here might be different, relative to other population groups, such as prison inmates. It could be that there is a difference between enlisted and officer rank men/women of the military. And, there could be differences between branches, from Marines to Air Force employees.

In addition, cross-culturally, are organizational romances an issue? Do individuals in the Ukraine or India worry about the same types of issues as Americans? It may be that organizational romance concerns are limited to the confines of the United States.

It may also be of value to implement a more direct approach, gathering data from only those participants who have actually engaged in at least one organizational romance. In this particular study, 42% of participants had engaged in an average of 1.72 organizational romances. This percentage far exceeds the national average of 33%. Thus, depending upon a future researcher's sampling technique, asking participants directly, and perhaps evaluating the data quantitatively, may be of significant value.

Demographic differences is yet another area to focus on. Do males engage in more organizational romances than females? What is the predominate age for organizational romance participants? Do years in the workforce, compiled with first-hand experience/knowledge, promote or deter one's willingness to engage in an organizational

romance? Which gender has the higher percentage of organizational romances that ultimately result in marriage? And, of those romances that result in marriage, what percentage of couples are still together say 10 or 20 years later?

Application

The information learned about secrecy in the organizational romance can benefit human resource administrators when developing company guidelines, policies and procedures. Since few companies have formal written policies intact, it is imperative that companies take a stance on this issue and present it to their employees, either through formal releases (documentation) or educational training. Otherwise, companies may open the door to lawsuits, specifically claims of sexual harassment and invasion of privacy.

It is also essential that companies filter personnel issues of this nature to management. Clearly, managers are involved in the professional lives of their employees, but also, to some extent, the personal lives of their employees. Finally, it is imperative that employees, in general, know the risks involved when contemplating whether to enter into an organizational romance. In certain circumstances, a company may look upon an organizational romance very favorably. However, a similar yet different company may see the very same romance in a much different light.

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APPENDIX A

Case-Scenario Questionnaire

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research project.

Organizational romance is the focus of this study. When responding to the below scenario, please keep in mind the following definition:

> *Organizational romance is defined as an interpersonal relationship,*
> *between a man and a woman, which started in the work-setting, but*
> *as time passed, flourished beyond the work-environment. While both*
> *participants may continue to hold gainful employment at the company*
> *where they initially met, over time, though, it is not uncommon for one*
> *of the participants to seek outside job opportunities, ultimately, exiting*
> *the (original) company. Typically, this will happen when the relationship*
> *becomes serious, such as a pending marriage date.*

Please read the following scenario carefully. Put yourself in either Elizabeth or Robert's place and respond to each question accordingly. Reminder, please write (or print) legibly.

Elizabeth and Robert both hold professional positions as Business Analysts at a large, local corporation. Their company employs approximately five hundred people. Both Elizabeth and Robert are single, well educated, and in their early thirties. Initially, they were friends, working as counterparts on separate project teams. However, after getting to know one another over the course of the last year, they found that their backgrounds were similar and they held many of the same interests. They have since decided to date exclusively, both interested in pursuing a meaningful, romantic relationship. They have also decided to keep their relationship a secret from co-workers, acquaintances, and their (respective) managers.

a) If you were Elizabeth or Robert, *why* did you decide to keep your relationship a secret from others?

_____

_____

_____

b) If you were Elizabeth or Robert, *how* would you go about keeping your relationship a secret from others?

_____

_____

_____

c) What *behaviors* (or changes in behavior) do you find yourself exhibiting/expressing in order to maintain this level/degree of secrecy?

_____

_____

d) Would you reveal the relationship to others in the organization (such as co-workers and management)? ____ Yes ____ No

If Yes, at what point (or when) in the relationship would you make it public knowledge, revealing it to others?

_____

_____

_____

If No, please explain your response.

_____

_____

_____

Demographic Information (please complete the following section)

(4)   Have you, personally, ever engaged in an organizational romance?   ____ Yes   ____ No

If Yes, please respond to the following three questions ...

(a) How many organizational romances have you been involved in?   ____

(b) Did you keep it a secret?   ____ Yes   ____ No

(c) Please describe whether your above responses, reflected your (own) behaviors and experiences.

_____

_____

_____

(5)   Gender: Male ____   Female ____

(6)   Current Age: ____

(7-8)   Years in the Workforce (to include full-time and part-time employment):   ____

APPENDIX B

IRB Proposal & Acceptance

November 22, 1999

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Eppley Science Hall 3018
986810 Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-6810

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this material as my application to conduct research for the completion of the Master of Arts Degree in the Communication Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

I would like to apply for exempt status on the research for my thesis. Survey procedures will be used involving voluntary participation from subjects (see attached).

Please let me know if you have questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Debra R. Kelly
17030 Holmes Circle
Omaha, NE 68135

home number: 896-3782
work number: 351-8184

Institutional Review Board
Section II
Page 1

1. Purpose of the Study.
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the following research questions:
(1) Why do organizational members feel it is necessary to keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?
(2) How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?
(3) What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?
(4) How does one assess his/her ability at keeping an organizational romance secret?

2. Background and Rationale.
It is becoming more and more common to meet a member of the opposite sex in the workplace, hence the popularity of an organizational romance. By some estimates, one-third of all relationships begin in the workplace. With this in mind, the focus of this thesis is on those organizational romance participants that try and keep their relationship a secret. For one reason or another, while engaging in an organizational romance, some couples meticulously attempt to keep their relationship a secret from co-workers and management, essentially, isolating their relationship from others in an organization.

3. Number of Subjects.
The anticipated number of subjects is 100.

4. Gender of the Subjects.
Both male and female subjects will be used in the study. There are no gender based enrollment restrictions.

5. Age Range of the Subjects.
The age range of the subjects will be 18 to 65.

6. Racial and Ethnic Origin.
There are no subject enrollment restrictions, based upon either race or ethnic origin.

7. Inclusion Criteria.
Upper-level undergraduate students, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, will be asked to participate in this research project. Junior and Senior level students, taking coursework in either the communication department or college of business administration, will be asked to participate in this study.

Institutional Review Board
Section II
Page 2

8. Method of Subject Identification and Recruitment.
Participants will be asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

9. Study Site.
The study will be conducted in classrooms on the campus of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

10. Description of Procedures.
During class, each participant will be provided with a copy of the (attached) questionnaire. Participants will be asked to review, complete, and return the questionnaire in class.

11. Confidentiality.
Subjects will be asked to provide their gender, age, years in the workforce, and college major (or course of study). Otherwise, no other personal (or unique identification) information will be requested. This will insure the anonymity of the subjects during data analysis. The researcher, coder (for inter-rater reliability), and thesis advisor will be the only individuals reading and analyzing the questionnaire responses. The findings of this study will be published for purposes of completion of the Master of Arts Degree in the Communication Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

12. Informed Consent.
Due to the voluntary participation of all subjects, this study does not require informed consent. Any potential subject may elect not to participate. A brief explanation of the thesis topic will be given prior to distributing the questionnaire. Participants may opt at any time not to take part in the study. Participants will be debriefed (about the study) upon completion of the questionnaire. Also, the anonymity factor of subject participation eliminates the possibility of disclosing participants' responses in a manner that will place them at any type of risk.

13. Exemption Category.
This research study qualifies for exemption under category 2. The method of research involves survey procedures, with all participation being voluntary. Participants' responses will be recorded in such a manner that (individual) identification will not be possible. Disclosure of the participants' responses will not put them in any type of civil or criminal risk (to either their financial standing, reputation, or employability).

14. References (optional).
None listed.

Institutional Review Board (IRE
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December 12, 1999

Debra Kelly
17030 Holmes Circle
Omaha, NE 68135

IRB#: 471-99-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Secrecy in the Organizational Romance

Dear Ms. Kelly:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of five years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the five year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, PhD
Co-Chair, IRB

lw

TABLE 1a

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

1. Affect On Relationship Participant (s)	Frequency

Individual Comfort Level

Because I work as counterparts with Robert, I would not want our relationship to damage my ability to work with him.	2
I would not want anything to change in my work environment.	1
If the relationship ends, it is very inconvenient in the workplace.	1
It may cause strain on the relationship.	1
To avoid being uncomfortable.	1
To avoid dealing with conflict, difficult situations.	2
To avoid potential conflicts-of-interest.	3

One's Role In The Company

A university study concluded that women lose 50% of their authority when people find out who they are sleeping with.	1
Being moved, to a different area/department.	1
Fear that this may negatively affect their careers (promotion potential).	2
I do not want to jeopardize my business relationships/positions within the company.	3
If promotions arose, you may not be allowed to work in his area.	1

TABLE 1a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

---

1. Affect On Relationship Participant (s)	Frequency
It may affect our job status.	1
It may affect project assignments.	1
Opportunities may be withheld to work on similar projects or in the same company.	1
So my credibility is not compromised.	2
So neither would lose their job, be fired/terminated.	7
The relationship may hurt their advancement opportunities with the company.	2
The romance is not serious enough to jeopardize our jobs.	1
Their emotional state could negatively influence their image in the workplace.	1
To further personal careers.	1
You do not want the other person's professional life to be affected since you have not reached the stage of permanent/long-term relationship.	1

Others' Perceptions Of Me/Us

Avoid appearance of improper favoritism or business decisions.	5

TABLE 1a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

1. Affect On Relationship Participant (s)	Frequency
I would be concerned that others would find the relationship inappropriate.	1
I would not want to be "water cooler gossip."	1
In the event the romance did not work out, the fewer people who know would result in less of an uncomfortable environment.	1
To maintain a working relationship with Robert without people questioning motives.	1

TABLE 1b

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

2. It Is A Personal/Private Matter	Frequency

It Is A Personal/Private Matter

As long as a relationship does not affect my job performance, why tell?	2
Did not feel others had a need to know.	2
If it did not work out, we'd be the only ones asking "what happened?".	1
It is a personal matter, and personal matters do not concern work.	5
It is no one else's business.	5
Let the relationship be our own business and not common knowledge at the company.	1
My relationships are my private issues and I do not like to discuss them publicly.	1
Your personal life is your business.	2

TABLE 1c

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

3. It May Be Against Company Policy	Frequency

It May Be Against Company Policy

Due to the intracompany relationship policy.   5

Many companies, maybe this one, have codes asking you not to
date coworkers especially if one is higher than the other -- one
may be asked to leave.   1

So that I/partner could stay employed with firm, because I/we like
our jobs.   1

There is an unwritten (sometimes written) rule that says you don't
date coworkers.   1

TABLE 1d

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

4. Reaction By Organizational Member (s)	Frequency

Affect On Work Performance

It may appear that they were not as focused on their work as they should have been.	1
It may influence how others regard any work done on a common team.	1
Office relationships are perceived to cause inefficiencies in performance, influence performance in a negative way.	5
So that others would not think it would interfere with my job.	2

Management's Perspective

Avoid possible reprimands from supervisors.	1
Coaxing by management for one of the two to leave.	1
Managers may believe that you were no longer serious about your employment.	1
Might not want managers/supervisors to know, in case dating employees is frowned upon.	4

Negative Reactions

As the group becomes aware of the relationship, their opinion of me might be negative.	2
Avoid a barrage of questions from coworkers.	1

TABLE 1d
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

4. Reaction By Organizational Member (s)	Frequency
Avoid teasing from coworkers.	3
Avoid undue attention from coworkers.	1
By letting others know, it would cause distractions, people would always be asking about the relationship.	2
Coworkers/managers may not approve of the relationship due to the potential risks involved, such as fighting, personal issues affecting work performance.	2
Fear of repercussion from the company/peers.	5
If it was disclosed, every conversation would be scrutinized.	1
So coworkers would not blame any type of problems on the fact that we are dating.	1
So fellow coworkers would not treat us differently.	8
So that others in the organization would not give either person flack.	2
So that others would not become alarmed.	1
The relationship may be viewed/believed by others as inappropriate or unprofessional.	4
To avoid rumor and the inevitable ribbing one would receive.	3

TABLE 1d
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

---

4. Reaction By Organizational Member (s)	Frequency

Office Gossip

If the relationship goes bad, then coworkers won't have other things to gossip about. — 1

To avoid gossip/stares at work, become part of the office gossip, coworkers typically tend to talk extensively (gossip) about events such as this, talk about me behind closed doors. If I tell somebody soon we will be the talk of the office. This would start the grapevine going in the office. — 20

Showing Favoritism

Coworkers may think that we may place more value and more trust on each other's decisions. — 5

Do not want to be asked to get her to do something. — 1

Fear of perception of others, such as using the romance to gain a promotion. — 1

If promotions arose, you may be looked at differently. — 1

This may cause the coworkers/managers to be bias towards Elizabeth or Robert. — 3

To avoid coworkers thinking that any actions at work may be influenced by their relationship, avoid perception that a personal relationship could taint judgment in situations where we are both involved. Others may perceive favoritism if the proper situation arises (supervisor/subordinate). — 9

TABLE 1d
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

4. Reaction By Organizational Member (s)	Frequency

Other (Reaction By Organizational Members)

Attention would be placed on the couple instead of the individuals.   1

I did not want my coworkers to make observations about our
behavior.   1

Specifically being viewed as the office flirt, making it difficult to
maintain a professional atmosphere with other male co-workers.   1

TABLE 1e

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #1:
Why do organizational romance participants keep their relationship a secret from others?

5. Other	Frequency
Other	
Did not think it would affect work relationships.	1
Hostile work environment.	1
It is awkward with coworkers.	1
It may create an uncomfortable atmosphere around coworkers.	1
The conflict it would cause at work with my coworkers and manager.	1
To keep the workplace professional.	1
To prevent it from interfering with work relationships.	1

TABLE 2a

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Avoidance Behavior (s)

Avoid contact during work hours. I would avoid Robert at the office, so as not to let anything slip.	6
Do not display any signs of affection/love while on the premises, around coworkers, or in public (affection beyond normal handshakes, smiles).	15
Keeping a cool distance (safe distance away from the other person) at work.	2
Limited contact, very few phone calls, I would e-mail Robert if I were thinking about him instead of visiting his office.	3

Control Behavior (s)

Act blasé around the other partner.	1
Act normal, not too apathetic and not too affectionate.	1
Act normally around each other.	2
In exchanges between us, I would keep them casual.	1
Maintain the same visual/physical "apparent" relationship as before the relationship began, while at work and in public.	1
No pictures of the other on your desk.	1

TABLE 2a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Not changing daily routines, keeping phone calls and visiting to after hours.	1
Stay casual at work.	1

Dating Behavior (s)

Arrive/leave separately.	1
By not meeting/going to either eating or drinking establishments that my coworkers would likely go also.	3
Do not associate/socialize by having lunch/coffee together at work.	6
Do not attend company business/social functions together.	4
Do not eat out in public.	1
Do not go out on dates at public places.	1
Have a secluded relationship outside of work.	1
Only meet far away from the office on a personal basis.	2
Staying in at home often.	1

TABLE 2a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Other-Related Behavior (s)

Behave as though we were friends, appear to be good friends in front of others.	3
Do not spend a lot of time talking together in front of others.	1
I would try not to be seen around Robert all the time.	1
In the presence of other coworkers, I will speak about work or neutral things (such as the weather).	1
Okay to talk openly in groups.	1
Treat the other person like any other coworker/everyone else.	13

Work-Related Behavior (s)

Be sure not to be bias in any decisions.	1
Ensure I/we maintain a professional demeanor. Maintain a professional relationship at work.	19
Keep phone calls professional.	1
Keep the romantic relationship out of the workplace (keep work focused on work and the outside relationship outside the work place). Keep all correspondence work-related.	12

TABLE 2a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Keep work conversations to a minimum, unless the nature of their work required extensive communication.	10
Keeping work very discreet.	1
May not seek joint projects together.	2

TABLE 2b

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Control Behavior (s)

Avoid mentioning the coworker in conversations which do not involve them.	5
Denying any inquiries about the relationship.	1
Downplay any personal feelings/opinions about Elizabeth.	1
I would not advertise that we are dating.	1
Keep the relationship a secret.	2
Maintain discipline while on company time.	1

Social Behavior (s) With Others

Do not discuss Robert/Elizabeth with anyone, even a close friend.	17
Do not give coworkers a reason to believe there is a romantic relationship going on.	1
Do not go to places frequented by my coworkers.	1
I would avoid telling any of my coworkers I was dating someone, because it would eventually come out who I was dating.	1
Not confiding in office friends about the relationship and not talking about "dating" activities at the office.	7
Not discussing anything out of the ordinary with fellow coworkers.	1

TABLE 2b
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Not discussing plans for evenings and weekends in order to avoid revealing who the plans were with.	2
Not discussing things done with the person at work.	1
Not tell anyone who is associated with an employee of my company.	1
Still have other friends to spend lunches with.	1

Work-Related Behavior (s)

Act professionally.	3
I would try to get a job in a different organization.	1
Keep to the task at work.	1
Try not to discuss personal issues at work.	1
Try not to let emotions affect my work.	1

Other (Self-Related Behaviors)

I would not go to a great deal of effort. I would go out without any reservations and risk (of being found out), always planning around the situation.	1

TABLE 2c

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #2:
How do organizational members keep an organizational romance secret from fellow associates?

3. Other	Frequency

Other
Sooner or later, rumors will spread if someone sees something.　　1

TABLE 3a

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Avoidance Behavior (s)

Avoid bumping into him.	1
Avoid each other at work. ...For fear that my words and/or actions (around him) would give me away.	15
Avoid verbal conversation at work.	1
Limited contact, very few phone calls. Not conversing with Robert too much or sharing "inside jokes" with one another at work.	5
No public affection, kissing, and touching.	3
Present an avoidance behavior ... in terms of remaining out of contact with Elizabeth.	1
To distance yourself from the other person.	1

Compensating Behavior (s)

Exaggerate the business relationship in order to disguise the romantic one.	1
Going too far to cover up the relationship.	1
I would be un-naturally professional around Elizabeth/Robert at work.	1
I would tend to ignore him or be more critical of his ideas/work so no one would know. Being more critical to prove there is no relationship.	3

TABLE 3a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Trying to overcompensate and keeping our discussions truly only business related.	1
Control Behavior (s)	
Curtail personal sharing.	1
Ensure interactions are not overly familiar.	1
Guarded conversations.	1
Hiding feelings in the workplace.	1
Less talking.	2
More professionalism.	1
Not displaying any cards, flowers, or momentous received in the office.	1
Repress the urge to talk to the other person.	1
Trying not to go to her department.	1
Other-Related Behavior (s)	
Attempt to be neutral/treat Elizabeth like everyone else.	4
Avoid being seen with just him in the office.	1

TABLE 3a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Not talking about our personal lives while at work.	1
Tend to avoid meeting with Elizabeth/Robert (each other) one on one, talk to each other when others are present.	1

Relationship (Dating) Behavior (s)

Arrive/leave work separately.	2
Being aloof around Elizabeth when I am at work -- not acknowledging her like I used to.	2
Direct approaches with him, tone of voice, body language.	1
I find myself acting a little more distant from Robert in the workplace, for example, I no longer put my hand on his arm when I laugh at his jokes at work.	1
I may act straight as an arrow (making it obvious I am treating Elizabeth differently).	1
I would be very clear with Elizabeth that in say 6 months that we go public with the information or at a time when it is appropriate.	1
Lunch separately. Avoid engaging in activities together.	5
May even limit your activities to things/places where you would not run into anyone.	1
Meet away from work.	1

TABLE 3a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

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1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	**Frequency**

More cold towards your partner than normal. More coldness
to the other person in work situations. | **4**

Reducing the time both see each other during breaks or during
regular office hours. | **1**

Secret phone calls and e-mails. Secret meetings. | **1**

Treating each other as somewhat less than friends. | **1**

Try to keep more physical distance between us at work than
I would with other employees. | **1**

Self-Conscious Behavior (s)

Become less communicative, more self-concerned,
the way we act, and tone of voice. | **1**

Becoming even more professional with other female coworkers
to reduce any tension between yourself and Elizabeth. | **1**

Consciously aware of every little thing when I am talking to
the other. For example, my facial expressions, and how close
I am standing to the other. | **1**

I would be conscious of my behavior around Elizabeth,
avoiding any flirtatious behavior. | **2**

TABLE 3a
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

1. Partner-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Work-Related Behavior (s)

Ask to work on separate projects. Try not to have a project or any work that both of us will need to work on together.	3
Base my opinions of his ideas in an unbiased fashion.	1
Conscious effort not to interact other than on a professional level. Remain professional to one another. Act professional.	8
I would suggest that one of us find a new job at another company.	1

TABLE 3b

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Compensating Behavior (s)

I will work much harder then before so that nobody will have any hint.	2
I would downplay the situation if someone inquired.	1
Increased stress by keeping yourself in "check." You have to keep a check on your actions.	2

Consequences/Ramifications Of The Relationship

An effort to plan out activities. Are you going to meet someone you know from the office?	1
Concerned about stories matching, who I told what.	1
Fear. Fear of what others might be thinking.	2
Guilt.	2
Increased stress.	1
Nervousness and possibly defensiveness on my part.	2
Not behaving normally.	1
Paranoia. Paranoia would set in because some people might notice that our behaviors would be different before the romance.	3
Patience.	1

TABLE 3b
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Quieter.	3
Secret is exciting at first, then grows tiresome.	1
The secret requires a lot of effort.	1
Trouble focusing.	1
Wondering if others suspect anything.	1
Would have to change the open way I normally discuss my life.	1

Maintaining Self-Control

Becoming much more self aware of my actions and other coworkers' reactions to things. As a result, I am more cautious and hesitate.	2
Being evasive and secretive.	3
Caution.	1
Control.	1
Control your emotions.	1
More closed behaviors.	1
Repress some emotions while at work.	1

TABLE 3b
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Spend the same amount of time conversing with Robert as I would with other colleagues.	1
Talking in general terms about personal items.	1

Social Behavior (s) With Others

Avoid contact with other employees outside of the office. Not going out with other friends from work. Remain more distant with coworkers and colleagues.	4
Avoiding usual "hang-outs."	1
Being secretive with my coworkers about where I go in the evenings.	1
Cutting off social ties with other workers. Not socializing at all with others in the company. Closing off personal life from work.	13
Difficulty dealing with day to day conversation, such as weekends and boyfriends.	1
Dishonest behaviors, hiding the truth, telling "little white lies." Lie about who I am dating. I would be dishonest with others, which would make me very passive around them.	3
Do not refer to other in conversation with coworkers.	1
Having to give the guys reasons why I can not go out with them.	1

TABLE 3b
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

2. Self-Related Behavior (s)	**Frequency**
Isolating myself from coworkers, not participating in the usual "how was your weekend" conversations.	2
It is hard to keep a secret from my best friends at work since this relationship makes me happy.	1
Keeping a distance from others and not asking personal questions for fear I would be asked the same.	1
Less chatty about what I did over the weekend.	1
More guarded in conversations with coworkers.	1
My willingness to confide in others has decreased.	1
Use very vague answers if asked questions about what I did over the weekend or if I am seeing anyone.	1
With everyone else - all would remain the same, unless I had close friends in the organization.	1

Other (Self-Related Behaviors)

I will not change my behaviors in any way.	1
Nothing drastic.	1

TABLE 3c

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #3:
What behavioral changes occur amid trying to keep an organizational romance secret?

3. Other	Frequency
Other	
Unsure, I have not been in this type of situation.	1

TABLE 4a

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

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1. Inherent Nature Of The Relationship	Frequency

Seriousness Of The Relationship

After it was established.	2
After you had introduced him/her to your family.	1
If the relationship was a long term one with a strong future.	3
Preparing for a higher level of commitment.	1
Spending a lot of time together.	1
When it becomes more serious, e.g. getting engaged, move-in together, get married. Disclosure is inevitable.	33
When relationship surpasses job in importance.	1
When we made the exclusivity commitment.	6

Other (Inherent Nature Of The Relationship)

It becomes disappointing enough that we do not continue the relationship.	1

TABLE 4b

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

2. Reaction By Organizational Member (s)	Frequency

An Awareness Exists

After I saw a coworker in public when I was with the person.	1
If rumors began to fly and there was no way to avoid the questioning.	1
Only after you have been caught.	1
The point I felt others became aware. Obvious others suspect.	2
When it appears others may know something.	1
When people would know, due to an engagement.	1

Management's Perspective

The action of management is known (if one person will need to leave the company because of the romance).	1
When I knew there would be no ramifications from management.	1

TABLE 4c

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the
organization?

3. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Individual Comfort Level

I would be casual about it.	1
Once we felt comfortable and secure with our own relationship.	1
Until everything becomes certain. My personality does not like vague things.	1
When I was comfortable discussing it.	1
When I was comfortable enough in the relationship to know it was more than a fling.	1
When we were both comfortable doing so.	3
When we were ready to deal with the opinions/questions/"hype."	1

Maintain Open/Honest Communication

Honesty is the best policy. I would never lie about the relationship.	2
I would not hide that there was a relationship outside of work.	1
I would tell coworkers right away and would not hide anything, therefore management would know also.	1
If someone asked, I would tell them the truth. Otherwise, I just would not say anything.	1

TABLE 4c
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

3. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency
Somewhat early, that way if it does become serious, it won't surprise anyone.	1
We were having to "lie" about our relationship to coworkers.	1
When it became deceptive, and I thought that we would have to lie about the situation.	1
When somebody would ask. I would tell people about it if they asked.	2

Need To Inform Management

After I had talked to my manager about any problems it may cause.	1
I would tell my human resource manager early in the dating just to make him/her aware.	1
I would want my boss to know from me personally rather than risk him/her finding out through the grapevine.	1

One's Role In The Company

After I would give my notice of quitting.	1
No chance of working together.	1

TABLE 4c
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

3. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Trusting Others

I want to reveal the secret to only one or two people.   3

To a select few close friends at work.   1

Other (Self-Related Behaviors)

If the relationship ends ugly or fades, then I would ask the
other partner to tell no one or else.   1

TABLE 4d

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

4. Time (Dimension)	Frequency

Dating: 2 Months Or Less

After we had been dating exclusively for awhile, one to two months.	1
From the onset.	1
Probably after the first 2 or 3 dates.	1
Several dates, perhaps a month.	1
Soon, after a couple of dates.	1

Dating: More Than 2 Months

After a fairly lengthy period (3-6 months) of exclusive dating.	1
After several months.	1
After several months of dating.	2
Dating for 6 months or more.	1
Probably after 3 months or so if things became serious.	1

Trusting Others

As far as I can trust the person, the time (point) is not important.	1
Early on in the relationship (to a good friend).	1

TABLE 4d
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

4. Time (Dimension)	Frequency
Other (Time Dimension)	
Seeing each other on a daily basis.	1
The time (point) is not important.	1

TABLE 4e

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (Yes):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

5. Other	Frequency

Other

If it is not against company policy.	1
If job would be jeopardized.	1
When I felt it would not influence work assignments.	1

TABLE 5a

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

1. Inherent Nature Of The Relationship	Frequency

Permanence Of The Relationship

I would not reveal my relationship until I know for sure that it is one to last.	1
I would not reveal the relationship to others until I had wedding plans in place.	1
I would not reveal the relationship until when and if we have a firm date for a wedding or we are formally engaged.	1
The relationship would stay secret until both parties agree about the seriousness and want to move to another level.	1

TABLE 5b

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

2. It Is A Personal Matter	Frequency

An Issue Of Privacy

It is none of their business. Personal feelings/actions that occur outside of work are private and do not need to be shared with coworkers. — 4

My relationship is a private affair, and the company must not be involved in that. — 1

Personal relationships are not a part of the business environment. Who I see, what I do after work is my business. — 1

There is no need to tell until after the wedding. — 1

Performance-Related

As long as you both do not let the relationship affect work, no one else needs to know. — 1

If it is not affecting work, then it is none of their damn business. — 1

TABLE 5c

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

3. Potentially Damaging	Frequency

Office Gossip

Office gossip can end a career quickly. — 1

They would open themselves to rumors, misinterpretations, and gossip. — 1

Word would spread quickly, even if I told only one person. — 1

One's Role In The Company

I would not want to jeopardize mine or Elizabeth's jobs so I would keep the relationship totally secret. — 1

Organizations frown upon coworker romance and would probably ask one individual to leave. — 1

You do not want the other person's professional life to be affected since you haven't reached the stage of permanent/long-term relationship. — 1

Other (Potentially Damaging)

It can only harm me. — 1

Negative repercussions are not worth the risk. — 1

People would see a relationship like this as a problem. I have seen other people reveal their relationships and suffer. — 1

TABLE 5d

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

4. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

Maintain Open/Honest Communication

If someone asked, I would tell them the truth. Otherwise, I just would not say anything. — 1

Office Gossip

Word spreads very quickly in the workplace. I do not want to take any chances. — 1

You can not guarantee that it would not spread. The only way to ensure that is say nothing. — 1

One's Role In The Company

I would make it public knowledge when one of us was planning to leave. — 1

I would not want to risk my personal career objectives. — 1

It would be best to keep it a secret until one of the parties finds a different job. — 1

Trusting Others

I would fear that they would tell others in the organization. — 1

Only if I had close friends as coworkers, would I share the info and only if they would keep it to themselves. — 1

TABLE 5d
(continued)

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

4. Self-Related Behavior (s)	Frequency

The situation would be much more difficult with only a few knowing and not the entire group. It is hard to know who to trust. 1

Unless there is a need to know (asking someone to be in the wedding) or the coworker has an especially close friend there is no need to tell until after the wedding. 1

You can not count on people to keep secrets. By telling others about the relationship, you lose control over who may/can find out about it and it eventually gets back to respective managers. 1

Other (Self-Related Behaviors)
If the relationship ends, it is very inconvenient in the workplace. 1

People view others differently when they hear about office romance. You would hope they would act professional about it, but that often is not the case. 1

Play conservatively. 1

Until I was ready to announce formally, I would take the coward's route and not tell. 1

TABLE 5e

Response Statements By Major Category Titles and Cluster Categories

Research Question #4 (No):
How do participants decide if and at what point to reveal the relationship to others in the organization?

5. Other	Frequency
Other	
Notify immediate manager, to ensure compliance with any company policy.	1