Workplace romances in cold and hot organizational climates: The experience of Israel and Taiwan

Rita Mano and Yiannis Gabriel

ABSTRACT   Workplace romances and their consequences have been frequently seen as undesirable for organizational performance. The goal of this study was to examine how organizations themselves influence the emergence, development and discourses of workplace romances. Using qualitative fieldwork from three organizations in Israel and four in Taiwan, we examine if and how organizational climate – cold, temperate and hot – influences the ways workplace romances are reported and narrated. We argue that these climates reflect the predominance of different types of work arrangements, notably aestheticization, performance and policy. The findings lead to the conclusion that workplace romances are more likely to become embedded in organizational discourses in hot climates where a hedonistic approach to work enhances the aestheticization of the work environment, providing work arrangements that enhance physical contact mostly outside the premises and a policy that does not punish participants. By contrast, in cold climates, romances are more likely to emerge in opposition and occasionally as a challenge to organizational impersonality and formality.

KEYWORDS   cross-cultural analysis ▪ Guanxi ▪ Israel ▪ organizational climate ▪ sexuality ▪ storytelling

Love affairs and workplace romances are often discussed in the literature as 'problems' – problems for productivity and performance, potential causes of embarrassment for organizations, frequent sources of leaks, and, easily lapsing into sexual harassment and bullying. The discourse of 'love in the workplace' is one which predominantly addresses it as a troublesome force to be contained, managed and defused. What is less frequently discussed is non-exploitative, consensual, adult sexual or romantic relationships in work organizations and the ways in which such relationships unfold and their ramifications for the individuals and the organizations concerned. In the light of increased interest in the emotional dimensions of organizational life and the increased appreciation of aesthetic, sexual and discursive phenomena, this article seeks to explore whether different types of organizations and different types of national cultures engender distinct configurations and expressions of sexual and romantic attachments. By using a qualitative methodology based on storytelling, the article further examines the natures of narratives spawned by such attachments and their relationship to wider organizational and cultural discourses.

The discussion of workplace romances can be seen as part of the wider discourses of sexuality and gender in organizations (e.g. Mead, 1980; Burrell, 1984; Hearn et al., 1989). Yet romances attracted the attention of scholars before the discourses on organizational sexuality became established. In 1977, Robert E. Quinn, author of the first widely cited research article on workplace romances, defined organizational romance as a relationship between two members of the same organization 'perceived by a third party' as characterized by sexual attraction (Quinn, 1977). More recently and conventionally other scholars have defined workplace romances as relationships involving physical attraction and desire between two employees of the same organization in which some element of sexuality or physical intimacy exists (e.g. Mainiero, 1986, 1989; Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Pierce et al., 1996). The individuals in question may be single or married and of any sexual orientation. They may be organizational peers, equals or form part of a supervisor–subordinate relationship (Powell & Foley, 1998). Workplace romances sometimes extend to individuals outside the organization, such as clients and suppliers (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Adib & Guerrier, 2003).

There is considerable evidence that the incidence of workplace romances is sizeable and on the increase. Already in 1988, Dillard and Miller reported that 71 percent of respondents in the combined samples of prior studies had observed at least one romantic relationship at work, and 31 percent of persons surveyed had themselves been involved in a romantic relationship with someone at work (Dillard & Miller, 1988). In 1994, studies reported that 80 percent of American employees have experienced some type

of romantic relationship at work (Copley News Service, 2000, cited in Schaefer & Tudor, 2001). Some 93 percent of respondents said they knew co-workers who were romantically involved, and at least 60 percent said they were involved with a fellow worker (SHRM, 1998, 2002; CareerBuilder.com, Aug. 2001). High-profile cases, such as Microsoft CEO, Bill Gates meeting his future wife at the workplace, have received wide publicity.

In spite of their increased incidence, workplace romances are not generally seen in positive terms by most western managers and personnel professionals; love and sex are viewed as troublesome forces, interfering with work and performance, raising the prospect of favouritism and acrimony and opening the prospect of blackmailing, bullying and sexual harassment (Leonard, 2001). In a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 1998, 2002), 81 percent of HR professionals and 76 percent of corporate executives consider workplace romances as dangerous and as something they would personally avoid. As a result, much effort has been devoted to controlling the manifestations of sexuality and intimacy at the workplace through company policies and regulations.

The distinction between consensual and exploitative workplace relations is a problematic one. As numerous authors (e.g. Mainiero, 1989; Pierce et al., 1996; Yelvington, 1996; Williams et al., 1999; Powell, 2001) have convincingly argued, consensual sexual behaviour, such as flirting or dating, cannot be divorced from organizational power relations and may be supporting or reinforcing exploitative power inequalities. Yet, in contrast to extensive scholarship on unambiguously exploitative harassment and unwelcome expressions of sexuality in the workplace (Stockdale, 1996, cited in Powell & Foley, 1998; Pierce et al., 2000, 2004), scholarship on more contradictory forms where 'consent' is not clear-cut or unambiguous, including workplace romances, has been more limited (Powell & Foley, 1998) and tends to overlook the factors that encourage their emergence and development. Much of it is based on anecdotal evidence from opportunistic or convenience samples, such as MBA students or people waiting in airport lounges (Williams et al., 1999). Furthermore, much of this research approaches romances from a psychological angle, focusing, for example, on the motives of the protagonists (Dillard et al., 1994), managerial perceptions (Brown & Allgeier, 1995) or the perceived benefits or difficulties for the participants (Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989). Organizational factors that shape the incidence and presentation of workplace romances have been less well researched. These may include longer hours spent at the workplace interacting with colleagues and less time spent with family members, the increasing aestheticization of many workplaces, the increasing prevalence of emotional and aesthetic labour within systems of customer-focused

management which emphasize appearance, style and sensuousness, company policy on romantic relations and so forth. Less is also known about the precise linguistic forms that workplace romances assume, the types of stories they spawn and the way these stories are received.

In this study we propose to investigate the influences of organizational factors on workplace romances through the concept of 'climate', a concept that has been used elsewhere in organizational theory (Tagliuri & Litwin, 1968; Rentsch, 1990; Denison, 1996; Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Fey & Beamish, 2001; Stringer, 2001) but not in connection with the occurrence of romances. The concept of climate offers a promise of addressing both organizational factors (such as organizational policy, structure and culture) and wider social and cultural ones, such as values on sexuality, loyalty and love. Using two contrasting national set-ups and a number of organizations of differing sizes, products and cultures, we have sought to investigate the organizational framework that hinders or enhances workplace romance and the way romance enters organizational discourses. In planning this research, we envisaged three ideal types of organizational climate and corresponding 'scenarios', that is, storylines describing how romance enters into organizational discourses.

Scenario 1. Love in a cold climate. Impersonal and formal organizational structures have long sought to exclude human feeling and emotion from mainstream organizational activities, focusing instead on instrumental, task-related relationships (Weber, 1946, 1978; Albrow, 1992; Du Gay, 2000). Such structures can be seen as 'cold climates' discouraging emotional and possibly sexual attachments, often through explicit rules and regulations (Mainiero, 1989; Pierce et al., 1996; Pierce & Aguinis, 1997; Powell & Foley, 1998). And yet, this discouragement may precisely fuel such attachments, both as a mechanism for coping with the emotional distance and, possibly, as an unconventional, rebellious venture into the forbidden territory. In such a scenario, against official deterrence, love is re-introduced into the realms of organization in an attempt to defy impersonal and intrusive organizational controls. This is essentially a 'compensation' scenario. This scenario finds numerous literary expressions where lovers defy restrictive laws and social conventions to establish and maintain illicit relations.

Scenario 2. Love in a hot climate. Many commentators have noted how some of today's organizations involve an 'aestheticization' of labour (Tyler & Taylor, 1998; Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Taylor et al., 2002). Some have argued that aesthetic labour is emerging as a distinct type of labour akin to emotional labour, with employees being on display for their looks, style and demeanour (Warhurst et al., 2000; Witz et al., 2003). Others have noted a 'sexual simmer' as the trademark of many industries, including touring,

advertising, mass media, and even catering and retail (Di Tomaso, 1989; Tancred-Sheriff, 1989; Hall, 1993; Adkins, 1995; Yelvington, 1996; Williams et al., 1999; Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Adib & Guerrier, 2003). In such environments (climates), romantic attachments would emerge as an extension of the sexualization of these workplaces. This is a not uncommon theme of TV series, like *Ally McBeal* or *The Office*.

   Scenario 3. Love in a temperate or mixed climate. In between these two extremes it would be logical to assume that in some organizations, romantic contacts unfold without either active encouragement or against positive discouragement. Such attachments might emerge as an extension of working at close personal contact during late hours, in conferences or work-related accommodation. In this way, the *margins* of organizational life (conferences, hotels, dinner and other parties, late-night working, etc.) all become spaces where workplace romances can develop, neither directly opposing the organizational climate, nor as a direct consequence of it.

Methodology

In order to assess these scenarios, we undertook a study in two stages. In the first one, three organizations in Israel were selected, each of which promised to represent one of the above organizational climates. Within these organizations, a number of stories were collected from a single participant in each. This part of the research may be viewed as a pilot study. Stories collected from these three participants were analysed and used to develop a rough framework in the analysis of contextual influences on the emergence and development of workplace romances.

   The framework was then developed, refined and expanded in the second and more comprehensive stage of the fieldwork, in which 22 employees of four organizations in Taiwan were interviewed. The interviewers collected data on attitudes towards workplace romantic and sexual attachments and their effects as well as numerous stories on such attachments. In line with the qualitative nature of this research, no psychometric test was used to this end, such as the one developed by Powell (1986). To have done so would have placed interviewees in the position of experimental subjects rather than storytellers and run counter to the qualitative character of the research. In the second stage of the research, the influence of national cultures became quite evident, allowing us to draw certain generalizations about its impact on discourses of love, sexuality and the nature of relations between genders. The interviews were conducted in the local languages by two postgraduate students who were native speakers and were

subsequently translated into English. (The questions asked at the second interview stage which were refined following the first stage are presented in Appendix 1.)

Some clarifications regarding our methodology are necessary. First, the choice of the two national set-ups as well as of the organizations, were dictated largely by pragmatic considerations. Obtaining delicate and sincere accounts of workplace romances is not easy, as Williams et al. (1999) have recognized. Partly through family and business connections on the part of our two interviewers, the opportunity arose to obtain access and co-operation by the seven organizations in the two countries and we relied on their excellent multilingual skills and willingness to spend a considerable amount of time with their respondents. The opportunity to obtain data in these two countries was especially welcome given that such data are sorely lacking. Furthermore, Israel and Taiwan offered interesting comparisons given that they share certain cultural features (e.g. a clash between 'traditional' and 'modern' values) while diverging in other respects. Clearly, this type of research design is not consistent with the requirements of positivistic methodology where considerable rigour may be involved in the selection of countries, organizations and samples. In qualitative research, the quality of the material collected depends less on rigour in selecting appropriate subjects and more on the quality of the narrative material, the nuance of emotional expression and the rapport between interviewer and interviewee. This is especially so where stories are used as part of the research process, where the interviewer must become a fellow-traveller on a narrative or story (Gabriel, 1998) rather than an interrogator.

Second, the use of storytelling in organizational research is currently becoming more popular and has been applied successfully to examine a wide range of organizational phenomena (Mitroff & Kilman, 1976; Boje, 1991, 1995; Gabriel, 1991a, 1991b; Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993). It should be appreciated that the basic unit of analysis in this type of research is neither the individual nor the organization but the story itself. Each story adds a certain insight to the discursive patterns surrounding an organizational phenomenon, such as romantic attachments at the workplace, and its analysis enables the researcher to test and refine the theoretical framework being developed.

In conducting research using stories, researchers are not so interested in the factual accuracy of the narratives they collect as in what they reveal about sense-making processes as well as deeper emotional and organizational realities (Gabriel, 2000). In many cases, it may be impossible to establish what happened between X and Y in a hotel room – and, ultimately, this may not matter as much as the fact that what is supposed to have happened was

talked about and maybe became part of an organization's folklore. Interpreting such stories can then be more fruitful than treating them as factual data. The interpretations that we offer below are the product of extensive discussions between the authors and the interviewers. Such interpretations are always provisional – until better or more insightful ones can emerge. Many stories are indeed polysemic (Boje, 1995), permitting different valid interpretations. In the analysis that follows, we have sought to examine the meanings of different stories as told by the narrators and as understood by the interviewers.

The use of a storytelling approach in research on romantic attachments seems especially promising because of two additional factors. First, such attachments often engender contradictory and unconscious emotions, such as envy and affection, threat and promise, hope and disapprobation, which cannot be adequately explored through straightforward questions. Stories allow respondents to express such conflicting emotions, whereas direct questions usually encourage rationalizations or the ironing out of inconsistencies and contradictions. Second, there is evidence that such attachments form a core theme of a particular type of story, the romantic story (Gabriel, 2000) in which love is presented as all-conquering and celebrated for its ability to bring happiness and joy. This does not, of course, preclude a different and opposed presentation of love affairs within stories as well (e.g. love turns the lovers into fools or love brings disaster for the families and spouses of the lovers). It is therefore interesting to contrast how a particular affair may feed alternative storylines, each expressing different emotions and meanings. All in all, research using stories and narratives has proven quite helpful at opening windows into an organization's culture and politics, since it allows the researcher to go beyond 'facts-as-information' to 'facts-as-experience' (for an extensive discussion, see Gabriel, 2000). Romance, love and passion may be very important as 'facts', especially to those concerned with regulating and controlling sexual behaviours, but, equally importantly, they are parts of people's emotional experience in and out of the workplace, and this is where the main interest of our research lay.

Israel – The three scenarios acted out

a) Cold climate

The first setting, standing for cold climate, was a hi-tech firm of 150 employees, mostly engineers, part of a multinational company with 150,000 employees worldwide. The company's policy specified that employees involved in personal relationships should not work either in the same teams

or in supervisory relationships. The interviewee was a male middle-manager of engineering background in his 40s. He described his organization as impersonal and bureaucratic and claimed that there had been no workplace romances in the organization to his knowledge:

> In this company, any allusion of sexual harassment is fatal. Nobody dare do something that might be understood as molestation. Employees in the US were fired because they had sexual pictures in their office or in their computers, or even for making a joke with a sexual connotation.

He contrasted this experience with his wife's, who worked as a teacher and reported much more 'romance business' in the school environment. All the same, there was one romantic story that he reported:

> They are now a married couple. He had been relocated to the US five years ago where he met the woman who had been also working there for the firm. Both reported to the Israeli branch when they met. When they both returned, they continued working for the company. We always assigned them to different team projects, but they still got married and have lived together since.
>
> (Story 1)

The story appears to epitomize the organization's 'cold climate' – it is presented as an exceptional event, taking place whilst the employees are away from their home base, while the company seeks to protect itself by keeping them apart. As importantly, the narration is cold and unemotional, sticking to the facts with no attempt to embellish. The only judgement implicit in the narrative ('We always assigned them . . .') is that the relationship was something potentially damaging to the company. Generally, the narrative can be seen as a report rather than a story (Gabriel, 2000).

b) Temperate climate

The second setting was another hi-tech firm of 1000 employees, mostly engineers, and part of a multinational company with hundreds of thousands of employees worldwide. The company had no policy seeking to regulate romantic relationships. The interviewee was female, in her 30s and occupied a middle management position. She reported several romantic liaisons at work and had personally been involved in two. She was hoping to get married to her current partner.

> There are always people that know [about romantic relations] and people that tell. Many of these romantic attachments lead to serious long-term relations which become public knowledge, and sooner or later everybody knows. Even secret relations become public at some point – there is always somebody that knows.

She reported that the company had no formal policy on workplace romances and they were not viewed as undermining motivation or performance, in spite of the time spent gossiping. She reported one particular case of:

> . . . a man and a woman married to their spouses. Once they went together out on a recruitment fair in Moscow to hire specialist professionals. The company's HR manager was in the same fair. The man and the woman spent a lot of time together interviewing in the same hotel room. Because there was no conference room available, nobody noticed that they were always in the same interviewing team. It [their liaison] was discovered much later, in an event that the company organized. They came in happily holding hands. They both divorced their spouses and married each other. They are now happily married with a little daughter. His wife did not forgive the HR manager for not preventing it.
>
> (Story 2)

As in the case of Story 1, the liaison in this case developed while the couple was away from home and it led to marriage. All the same there are marked differences. In this case, the liaison led to two broken marriages. The fact that the HR manager was held responsible by one of the former spouses suggests that the company was seen as not doing enough to discourage such affairs, in spite of presenting itself as a 'family culture' to its employees. What is more interesting in this story is the storyteller's own positive attitude towards the affair suggested by the use twice of the word 'happily', not mitigated by the damaging consequences of the affair to third parties. It is almost as if she is celebrating the couple's happiness and identifying with the successful outcome of the relationship. This contrasts with the dry, report-like narration of Story 1. In this account, the 'romantization' of the liaison which started in the hotel rooms and 'nobody noticed' is evident in the storytelling style. There is a clear sense that the hotel rooms, besides being places to interview job applicants, functioned as warm enclaves at the margins of an organization with a temperate climate.

c) Hot climate

The third setting, standing for hot climate, was a spa resort and hotel provid-
ing massage, sauna and a wide range of beauty, health and fitness services.
The interviewee was a 30-year-old desk manager, married and pregnant at
the time of the interview. She expressed unconditional positive views for
workplace romances:

> It is nice, very nice. I think it is positive. Really positive. When people
> meet each other in the workplace become friends and then get married,
> it is very nice.

At this organization, romantic attachments were commonplace:

> I know of several couples that got married after working in the organiz-
> ation, and I know of quite a few that became [intimate] friends. In
> some cases, one of them was working here, and brought his spouse to
> work in the organization. There are all kinds. It is very common. Work
> in the hotel is around the clock, 24 hours, weekends, many shifts and
> many employees. The employees are the same age mostly, in their
> twenties . . . There is always gossip [about romantic relationships], and
> I also know about them first hand. There are all kinds. Some people
> cheat their partners, and all kinds of things.

This employee recounted several romantic stories including the following two:

> There is a very nice story to tell you about an assistant chef who came
> from England and a girl that was a shift manager in the restaurant. They
> were together all the time because of their work interdependence. She
> was in the kitchen all the time and then they fell in love. Now they got
> married. He even converted to Judaism for her. They moved together
> to work in a hotel in Eilat [southern Israel], I think they have twins now.
> This was a very lovely story. He was not a Jew. A foreigner comes here
> and falls in love with an Israeli and they worked together and he even
> had a circumcision at the age of 30 to marry her. [In Israel, people
> cannot have a religious wedding unless both partners are Jewish.
> Registry office weddings exist, but are generally not approved of.]
>
> <div align="right">(Story 3)</div>

> There was a departmental manager [man] who had a relationship with
> one of his subordinates [woman]. His wife was pregnant at the time,
> and when the child was born it had a problem, but all the same he left

her and the child for the employee. The employee's family did not like him, because she was much younger, and they also disapproved the whole story of his wife and the baby. They had physically threatened him, and eventually sent her overseas, away from him, but they kept in touch. He left his house but his wife went to court and obtained an injunction stopping him from leaving the country. He got really desperate and has even become religious.

(Story 4)

These are not just stories about passion, but also told with passion. Story 3 suggests the depth of the couple's love for each other in the man's conversion to Judaism, Story 4 in the suffering and despair they endured because of their love. The narrator in both cases is telling romantic stories of the joys and sufferings of love, sharing in these joys and sufferings and identifying profoundly with the protagonists. Yet, the protagonists' passion for each other and the narrator's passion for the stories should not obscure the organizational context in which this romantic discourse unfolded. This is an organization which both encourages close working contact over long hours and also provides a highly 'aestheticized' environment. As the interviewee explained:

> Yes, [the organization contributes to the large number of romances] because of the dynamics of the place, because of the work environment. The work here is very dynamic, around the clock. It is a complete world. There are many employees, most of them are young, and in a very natural way romantic relations are formed, and really because of the nature of the organization. It is very common, very common. Everybody is dressed nicely and smells good, because the organization is very specific about it. The uniform is very spruce, and usually flattering to both men and women. Therefore the service looks nice and aesthetic. I think it helps in forming romantic relations.

In summary, the stories drawn from the three Israeli settings indicate the importance of certain contextual factors which are consistent with an organization's climate; this, in turn, is reflected in how love and sexuality are discussed and constructed at the workplace.

1. Aestheticization of work environment

Cold climates tend to be utilitarian and functional – neither the physical environment of the organization nor the appearance of staff are particularly important. These organizations are more likely to be bureaucratic and

perform on the basis of authoritarian hierarchic relationships. By contrast, hot climates are characterized by an emphasis on image – both organizational and individual. Much emphasis is paid to appearance, which is enhanced through decoration, jewellery and other aesthetic features, which highlight that the organization's image depends crucially on its employees, its buildings and its publicity looking smart, fit and stylish. Such organizations may be related to tourism, catering as well as retail, advertising, communication and marketing services. Much of the media and entertainment industries may represent such aestheticized environments (Tyler & Taylor, 1998; Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Warhurst et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Witz et al., 2003).

2. Work arrangements

As existing literature suggests (Pierce et al., 1996; Powell & Foley, 1998), long working hours and physical proximity over extended periods of time, probably during night shifts, especially out of eye-shot of others, encourages intimacy and romantic relations. Thus, business trips, which involve high levels of both physical and functional proximity away from the constraining influence of others, may be particularly conducive to the formation of romantic relationships (Mainiero, 1989). Such work arrangements may feature equally in hot, temperate or cold climates, and shape the way romances are presented in stories, whether neutrally, approvingly or disapprovingly.

3. Performance measures and hedonistic ethic

The research suggests that in the cold and temperate climates, performance measures tend to be objective and impersonal. By contrast, the hot climate involves a hedonistic ethic in which the satisfaction of the customer is paramount and cannot be reduced to coarse quantitative measures. But in an environment aimed at giving pleasure to the customer, the pleasure principle spills out into the realm of the employees and begins to colour their relations. As numerous authors have remarked an underlying sexual simmer, involving flirtation, sexualized language and innuendo, emphasis on appearance and image may gradually affect every aspect of the organization encouraging fantasy and experimentation (Adkins, 1995; Hall, 1993).

4. Organizational policy

A company's policy of regulating and controlling sexual behaviours is both an important feature of its climate and a determinant on the forms assumed

by romantic relations. Companies which seek to control sexuality through lengthy codes of practice and regulations inevitably represent cold climates; companies which take a neutral stance, neither formally approving or disapproving, represent temperate climates, whereas companies which indirectly or even directly encourage the formation of liaisons among their members are hot climates. In such organizations, workers are encouraged to socialize at company-sponsored events, and to workout at the company gymnasium. Ben & Jerry's hosts winter solstice parties for its employees where it subsidizes hotel rooms to discourage drinking and driving. A personnel manager at the company is quoted as saying, 'We expect that our employees will date, fall in love, and become partners.'

5. Organizational culture

Organizational culture is now one of the key concepts in organizational analysis. It can be defined as a system of shared meanings, norms and values within an organization which influences how employees act (Denison, 1996). Our preliminary analysis support's Mainiero's (1989) distinction between conservative cultures, characterized by an emphasis on traditional values and ways of doing things, and liberal cultures, characterized more by creativity and innovation. She noted that conservative cultures have more restricted views on women's roles and appropriate sexual behaviours making workplace romances less likely. Our findings suggest that romances may occur in both types of culture, but their presentation differs. Whereas in conservative cultures they assume the form of scandal with the lovers constructed as rebels in need of discipline, in liberal cultures romances are more likely to be celebrated and enjoyed by others. In an interesting twist, we should note that in the Israeli research, the hi-tech companies which encouraged creative experimentation and change had conservative cultures, whereas the more traditional hotel had, in fact, a liberal culture.

Taiwan – The three scenarios tested

In the second stage of the research, the preliminary findings above were tested in a different country, Taiwan, which introduced a cross-cultural element to the analysis. Four different organizations were surveyed, with five interviews across organizational hierarchies conducted in each. In addition, two interviews with expatriate managers from the US and Britain were conducted. Access to these companies was facilitated by the interviewer's family and professional contacts. These 22 interviews were more far-reaching than those

of the first stage, encompassing questions about sexuality and its role and effects in the workplace, company policy, personal experiences of liaisons and organizational stories referring to romances.

a) Cold climate

Five employees (including a front-desk clerk, an accountant and three managers from different departments) from a branch of a major national bank were interviewed. This is a highly bureaucratic organization with formal interactions among employees. Emotional distance among employees is high and regulations are extensive. Yet, the company has no official policy on workplace liaisons, although there is an unofficial policy that partners of such liaisons should be working in different departments. Managers are advised to warn members of potentially harmful personal and organizational consequences of workplace romance, but this runs against the general respect for people's privacy and even their basic 'humanity' and the dictates of fate (see below). Three findings stand out about this cold climate organization. First, in spite of the climate there were romances; second, these were kept secret though the secret could not last for long; third, they almost invariably involved older men of higher status and power and younger female employees, something that reflected the gender demographics of the organization as a whole. In such cold climate organizations, stories of office romances were not easy to obtain. Some incidents, however, had been widely discussed. Here is an account told by a female employee:

> One of my colleagues, a very good friend, was having an affair with her manager. The bad thing is that the manager was married already, for about a year. His wife came from a wealthy family and he is relatively poor. There had been talk about him going after his wife's money rather than her. Thus when he started to approach my friend, it looked as if he was not very satisfied with his wife. I believe that my friend doesn't want such a thing to happen [the manager splitting from his wife] because it is not moral. But there was the attraction and then they became a real couple. Our colleagues tend to have great sympathy for the wife, who seemed to be a victim. And so my friend took a great deal of blame and was called a woman of easy virtue. The man was not very highly respected either. They both tried to keep a low profile but people watched them closely. She tried not to stay in his office during her breaks as she used to do. They kept away from each other for two months and then she quit her job. He is still in the company now. People talk about them less and less now, but he is marked an unfaithful husband.
>
> (Story 5)

This narrative presents the teller with a dilemma between justifying the behaviour of her friend and criticizing it along with that of her lover. Gossip is very much looked down on in Chinese culture and is justified in this instance as having been caused by the reprehensible behaviour of the couple. The account, in spite of its judgemental qualities, is very sophisticated, refusing to lapse into easy judgements about villains and victims, about gender rights and wrongs. Although in common with western cultures more blame is apportioned to the female than the male partner, he too comes up for criticism. The story lacks closure – we do not learn if the couple continued to see each other or if they drifted apart after she quit the company. This is almost seen as irrelevant compared to the disrepute the incident brought for the participants.

Another incident that had attracted much attention in the branch also involved people of unequal status, even though in this instance the female is the senior partner.

> There was a senior accountant who had been transferred to our branch from the head office. She was famous for her coldness and her strict management style . . . people tended to keep a distance from her . . . The funny thing is one of her subordinates, a gentleman who was younger, then helped her a lot; he explained in detail how the department worked and even used his own network in the office to introduce her to people and help her gain their trust. He helped her adapt into the office environment and made her a part of the family; this, in a very short time, created a special feeling of dependency in her, I think. She was not so cold as she used to be, and a romance developed during the process. Even so, there was gossip about his reasons for offering her so much help, maybe he was fawning on his new boss. But well, they got married within a year and then he quit his job.
>
> (Story 6)

The story, whose plot is strangely reminiscent of *Turandot*, the story of the cruel ice princess – the heroine of Puccini's last opera – is told in a highly precise manner, as if the narrator refuses to pass judgement or to express values. The younger male subordinate softens the strict and cold supervisor through his help (and more indirectly through his affection for her). The theme of help for a colleague turning into romantic relationship is one that surfaced in several Taiwanese stories. Finally, we should note that, as in the previous story, this was narrated in rather unemotional terms, the narrator refusing to celebrate a romance whose outcome was obviously beneficial for the entire office.

b) Mixed climate

The intention here was to study a 'temperate' climate, but the organization in question, a large franchise of an international catering chain, proved to have a mixture of sub-climates rather than a uniformly temperate climate. The franchise's office was a distinctly cold climate matching the characteristics of the bank outlined above. Staff worked in separate small cubicles with little contact with each other. Indeed, both interviewees from this part of the business reported that, with one significant exception, they were totally unaware of any romantic relationships in the office. To all intents and purposes it was presented as a love-free space. The one exception was a woman manager who had become involved with her boss in the office. She married him, but the marriage did not work out and they were eventually divorced. This reinforced her negative opinion of romantic attachments at the workplace, an opinion echoed by the second manager interviewed.

The restaurant part of the organization, on the other hand, had, by all accounts, a high incidence of romance. Interviewees indicated that the music, the soft light, the late-night work, all contributed to a sexualized atmosphere. Although employees were required to wear uniforms, there was considerable freedom in using make-up and perfumes and an emphasis on attractive appearance ostensibly for the benefit of the customers. There was continuous flirtation among staff that was viewed as part of mixing work with 'fun' and excitement, making light of the monotony of the work itself and that was often extending to customers. Yet, the climate had 'cooled off' dramatically as a result of a recent 'scandal' which was reported by all three interviewees and which had evidently left a deep scar among the participants. This was the first story that raised severely critical sentiments from the narrators. This is how the incident was described by one of the bartenders:

> I can only think of the scandal. I don't know if there was true love involved. But I don't think true love is necessary for a workplace romance. There was a girl who fancied a chef a lot, the American one. I think she really wanted to have a serious relationship with him rather than a one night stand or something, something which is very common now. She gave her heart to him but he was dating with some other girls in the restaurant as well. We didn't know about it at all at the time. She then got pregnant and announced it in the restaurant as a surprise to him and to her colleagues – because he had said to her before that he would marry her one day and take her back to the US and he always said that he would like her to be the mother of his child. She thought that he would be happy and the entire restaurant would be happy as

well. But it turned out that he was sleeping with another three girls as well. Yes, the [pregnant] girl is the other bartender. We are very close like brother and sister and I knew from the very beginning that she fancied him and was working on the relationship. He seemed to be a decent guy. But [he was] not.

(Story 7)

The supervisor described the same incident:

The American chef is a very charming man. He was sent by head-quarters in America. He visited Taiwan from time to time to teach others new recipes and in every trip he stayed for a month or so. And you know the young girls nowadays worship foreigners very much . . . they all dream about dating with this American even though he is 35 already while they are 20 something. One of the girls dated with him without us knowing about it . . . and she got pregnant and told him and us all at the same time. Then you know what, he insisted that the baby is not his and three other girls got very furious because all four of them had been dating with him at the same time, without knowing it. I don't know how he managed it. He went back to the US after-wards, I don't think that he let people there know about this incident. The other three girls all quit. I think it is more a scandal than a workplace romance.

(Story 8)

The two accounts agree on the basics, even though they have some interest-ing differences. Above all, they draw a distinction between 'true love' and casual sex; they are explicitly and strongly critical of the American chef whom they view as a charming philanderer in a plot reminiscent of *Madam Butterfly*. The story seeks to enter the motivations of the participants, and in particular whether their motives were pure. There can be no doubt about the man's motives – four lovers from the same workplace amounts to parallel rather than serial misconduct. The girl's motives, on the other hand, are more problematic. The first narrator seems to be initially unsure before coming on her side – why else would she announce to all that she was pregnant with his child? The second narrator, on the other hand, suggests that she should bear some of the blame. The story entails considerable ambiguity on a number of levels. First, it alludes to sexual attraction across racial divide, a kind of exoticism, which makes it both 'dangerous' and less than lofty. Such affairs become unpredictable and even unmanageable, leaving participants and narrators alike in doubt as to whether the romance will have a happy

end or whether it will end up in tears, as to whether it will fizzle out or lead to something more significant. This unpredictability influences disclosure strategies – the participants do not want to expose themselves as having been too easy or too gullible. Disclosing the affair is a risky strategy; it may be a way of presenting it as 'true love' but if it ends up badly it lays the parties open to criticism, reproach or ridicule.

The lasting bitterness created by this incident had undoubtedly cooled the climate in this organization. Maybe in part because of this, this was the only one of the Chinese organizations which was seriously considering implementing a policy to control and legislate sexual behaviours among its staff.

c) Hot climates

The two organizations selected to represent hot climates were an advertising agency and a consultancy firm. Both of these firms employed highly qualified professionals, who worked long hours, often in small teams. In both of these firms, the boundaries between personal and professional lives were fuzzy, as employees develop strong interpersonal relations working together. In both of these companies, employees considered workplace romances to be common; their attitudes towards them, however, displayed a distinct ambivalence. Words like 'sweet', 'cute', 'natural' and 'nice' were used but they were tainted by reservations, such as:

> I think it is sweet and bitter at the same time. I used to think it is totally positive, but after I got myself involved in one, I noticed how troublesome it could be.

A consistent finding was that while 'love' was uniformly viewed as a desirable and even magic quality at the workplace, those who had been involved in relationships were mostly disillusioned. There was agreement among respondents that both of these firms involved much discussion of love affairs, which participants did not seek to keep secret. There was also agreement that such affairs were private and that the companies had no business seeking to regulate or control them. In talking about such romances, respondents upheld a highly romanticized view of love as bringing permanent companionship and spiritual unity. In this respect, they highlighted a powerful feature of Chinese attitudes towards love, that views it as the product of fate or divine providence with which people and companies should not interfere. Here are some representative views whose cumulative force was undeniable:

It's about destiny. It's not psychology.

I don't think the development of workplace romances is a psychology stuff . . . it's all about chance . . . the god sends your Mr Right or Miss Right in front of you in your team or in your office . . .

You don't fall in love when you WANT to. And you fall in love without ever knowing/planning it in advance.

I think love is something you can't force yourself into . . . so you have to go with the flow. When it comes, it comes! One can want a romantic relationship a lot but may not meet the right person.

I think it's about the feeling of affinity and coincidence. It's destiny. A person in a right place at the right time . . . he/she finds his/her partner!

Managers in these two firms also expressed strongly positive views towards the formation of office romances among their employees. One of the partners in the consultancy firm actually said:

In fact, I would personally encourage people to find their partner here. We are very strict when we recruit people. I believe I get the best people I can have. If they can find [romantic] partners with whom they can work hard together for the company, I think that they will appreciate the company better and work even harder.

While there is general agreement that the company should not interfere with the love lives of its employees, as this would be interfering with fate, there was a strong approval and admiration for matchmakers, whose efforts were seen as facilitating the work of fate and smoothing the development of affairs, the blossoming of love and its 'proper' and respectful presentation to third parties. Furthermore, these stories from Taiwan highlight the assumption that employees 'properly' in love will be happier and, therefore, more productive while, on the contrary, those merely having 'affairs' may suffer along with organizational performance.

Thus, it was interesting to note that in most of the stories related by employees, love came with a sting in the tail. One particular incident that left an unpleasant legacy in the consultancy firm was narrated by two people without prompting. The first account was by an observer of the incident while the second is by one of the participants in the romance.

> There is a consultant who is quite a playboy here in the office. He was originally dating with a team member and then he introduced a new girl to the office. He then turned his attention to the new girl and dumped his original girlfriend . . . I think he hurt her a lot. I think that if it weren't for him, she would not have left the company. In fact, she must have struggled before she quit. This is a very famous company and is difficult to get into. To tell the truth, I know that she went into the partners' office and told them that she wouldn't let this event affect her professional performance. I think she used this way to deal with the rumours. After all, it's quite embarrassing that her boyfriend in the company dumped her and then turned to another colleague.
>
> (Story 9)

This critical commentary contrasts with the following given by the 'playboy' of the above story:

> I had known a lady through common relatives for a long time. We had just known each other, but not too well. I had been in this company for several years already. One of my relatives asked me to get a place for this girl in the company and I did recommend her to my boss based on her good degree and language skills. She joined the company and she was not assigned to be in the same team with me. At the time, I had another affair with a colleague, one of my team members in fact. But because I felt a kind of responsibility towards this new girl, I did help her to get familiar with other colleagues and asked others to support her. But then, I don't know why, I felt like protecting her . . . And . . . well . . . I broke up with the team member [his original girlfriend] and she quit. I got married with this girl afterwards, after six months in fact.
>
> (Story 10)

The emotional and censuring tone of the first narrative makes a sharp contrast to the report-like account of the second, which suggests a defensive attitude on the part of the narrator. The first narrative casts the manager in the role of the villain who dumped his first girlfriend in pursuit of the newcomer; it is told from the perspective of the wronged girlfriend, whose pain and attempts to deal with her public humiliation are centre-stage. In this account, the role of the 'new girl' is peripheral as indeed are the forces that made the manager 'turn his attention' to her. Referring to him as a 'playboy' explains it – this is how playboys behave. Such stories clearly point how romance can be disruptive not only on the individual-level performance but also to the team resulting in gossip about a 'multiple partner' affair.

The second narrative presents the event in a very different light. The plight of the original girlfriend is de-emphasized and the mysterious power of love which leads to eventual marriage is offered as evidence that fate had decreed that he and the new employee should end up together. It is also telling (and this is a feature of several other romantic stories we obtained in Taiwan, including Story 6 above) that love grew out of one partner's attempt to offer help and guidance to the other – thus the driving force in the manager's story is the unstoppable force of 'true love', while in that of the observer it is the manager's playboy-like fancies.

In summary then, love in hot climates in Taiwan assumes certain well-defined characteristics. First of all, romantic liaisons among participants are widely discussed and debated; they are generally viewed as a good thing, provided they are motivated by an idealized concept of love as a pure but unstoppable force of destiny. This matches fairly well the first of the five motives for engaging in a workplace romance, identified by Dillard and colleagues (Dillard, 1987; Dillard & Broetzmann, 1989; Dillard et al., 1994), namely 'sincere love', possibly enhanced by a desire to learn from the partner. The nobility of the motive allows participants to disclose their attachments (in contrast to the cold climate organizations), which sometimes entail the mediation of matchmakers; disclosing the relationship offers them some degree of ownership, in spite of the risk of losing face if the romance does not last. Precisely because the motives of those involved in romances are lofty, there is a general belief that it is not the company's business to regulate love at the workplace and that to do so would be to interfere with the forces of fate, a view shared by managers and owners. Even so, participants in romances never display physical affection for each other in public. At the same time, there is acknowledgement of other types of love, including short-term, sexual relations and exploitative superior–subordinate relations, which feed hostile gossip. These match the more utilitarian, exploitative or purely sensuous motives identified by Dillard and colleagues and earn rebuke and criticism.

Discussion

The research in Taiwan provides some support that the core contextual factors have broadly similar effects with Israel. The aestheticization of the work environment, work arrangements involving lengthy periods spent in close proximity, flexible performance measures and a hedonistic ethic, a permissive organizational policy and a liberal organizational culture, all contribute to a hot climate in which romantic relations prosper, get widely

discussed and feed a number of different narratives. These include romantic narratives, in which all ends well with love triumphant and the couple marrying and living happily ever after; tragic narratives, in which a weaker partner is exploited by a more powerful or less honest person; and tragic-romantic hybrids, in which the eventual triumph of love is not untainted by suffering to third parties, such as former partners (see Gabriel, 2000). Such stories are far more rare in cold climate organizations where the love discourse is much more marginal and romantic liaisons more likely to be kept secret. All the same, some romantic stories did surface in such environments, indicating that they were not love-free spaces.

In spite of these extensive similarities between the Israeli and the Chinese studies, their juxtaposition reveals something of the importance of national culture in constructing love discourses. National culture cannot, generally, be reduced to a coherent and harmonious ensemble of values and beliefs. This is especially so in the case of Israel, a country that involves many diverse traditions and ideologies with many tensions and contradictions. Using Hofstede's (1980) well-known cultural dimensions, Israel combines low individualism, low power distance, a relatively low distance between the sexes and a clash between traditional family values and a more liberal and sexually permissive ethic.

Israel is characterized by both traditional and modern values. Because of the 'collectivist' origins of the early state, social relationships are defined by group-oriented values. This is further strengthened by obligatory enlistment in the army at the very young age of 18, for both boys and girls, for three years. The army further shapes values of compliance to the institutionalized system and the group, raising the importance of belongingness, but also bringing the two sexes together in vital roles and activities. This relatively low individualism among Israelis supports a stronger conformity to group norms than in other cultural settings. Second, low individualism in Israel entails a very high regard for equality. The small size of the geographically dispersed communities along with the focal role of the Kibbutz (collective communities) and the shared experience of security threats at the early (and later) stages have strengthened feelings of 'we all are in the same pot'. As a result, power distance in Israel (unlike Taiwan) is small, something evident in many aspects of Israeli life, including the absence of a courtesy plural from the vocabulary. Authority figures cannot be distinguished on the basis of visible external symbols, such as cars, clothes, titles, etc. Third, family values are connected to an ethos of procreation and the Jewish religion. As religion is highly institutionalized (defining almost unquestionably who is a legitimate Jew), a traditional perspective of family shapes the Israeli culture. This is reflected in the centrality of family-centred activities with elder members, such as regular Sabbath family dinners and the frequent

gathering of extended families for festivities. Not surprisingly tradition is often challenged by more 'modern' and liberal ones.

The clash between traditional and new values also characterizes Taiwan, a culture that has seen unprecedented economic and political developments within living memories of many people. In spite of rapid industrialization and rampant consumerism, people in Taiwan still espouse deeply held traditional values which are dissimilar from the Israeli ones (see Hofstede & Bond, 1988, but also Fang, 2003). Power distances and distance between the sexes is generally large and the norms of politeness extremely detailed and pervasive. Like Israelis, the Chinese also attach importance to their family. But family relations exist within a wider network of relations, the *Guanxi*, whose maintenance and support is a key priority. Keeping good *Guanxi* with someone is very important in the family and society. *Guanxi* is maintained by several types of display of friendship and loyalty as well as a series of favourable exchanges and gifts, which may include advice and emotional support. Advice about how to handle workplace romances no less than how to handle difficult supervisors or technical problems, all fall into the same type of activity in maintenance of a good *Guanxi*. In this way, in Taiwan, the family and the workplace networks overlap. Maintaining a good *Guanxi* is closely connected to the need to help people keep face, something that pre-occupies Chinese people greatly. In talking about affairs of the heart, Chinese people view it as very important to ensure that the protagonists' 'face' is respected. Making someone lose face results in bitter feelings for revenge and reversal of judgements as to who is right and who is wrong. Therefore, in engaging in a relationship of intimacy, employees are keenly aware of the need to avoid the possibility of losing 'face' or of putting others in a position of undermining *Guanxi*.

One consequence of these cultural differences is the greater emphasis on fate in the Chinese stories and the demand that companies should stay out of individuals' love lives. While acknowledging a wide diversity of motives and relations, the Chinese stories measure them against an ideal of 'true love' which justifies all and explains all. This is in distinct contrast with the Israeli stories in which individuals remain in the last resort masters of their destiny, irrespective of the strong desires they may experience.

Conclusions

This article has explored three scenarios of romantic love at the workplace. It was argued that some organizations provide a cold climate, discouraging directly and indirectly the formation of romantic attachments and their subsequent incorporation in organizational discourses. Hot climates, on the other hand, offer a much more hospitable environment for the blossoming

of romance among their members and entail wide-ranging and continuous romantic discourses made up of stories and gossip. Between these two types of climates, we proposed a temperate climate or mixed climate, which allows for pockets or margins in which romantic attachments may prosper. These three scenarios were explored with data from seven organizations in two countries, Israel and Taiwan, which suggests that hot climates are associated with an aestheticization of some workplaces, with work arrangements that favour long hours and close contact often out of eye-shot of third parties, loose performance indicators and a hedonistic ethic, lax or non-existent organizational policies towards the regulation of sexuality and liberal organizational cultures.

A key feature of the research was the use of stories and narratives as a means of identifying the way that love is constructed at the workplace. Generally, it was found that hot climate organizations generate many more stories about romances and these are told with greater passion and emotion than those of cold climates. It was also the case that in hot climates, participants expressed more positive views about love at the workplace, although there was a general awareness of how it may lead to trouble for the individuals concerned and the organization. Extensive similarities were observed across organizations of similar climates in Israel and Taiwan – key types of such stories are romantic stories in which the marriage of the protagonists provides evidence of the power of love, tragic stories in which love creates victims notably among previous partners and third parties, and hybrid stories which combine elements from both of the above. Cold climates were themselves far from love-free, though discussions of love and sexuality at the workplace were rare and participants sought to keep liaisons secret.

In spite of these similarities, some important differences emerged regarding the symbolic construction of love in the two different national cultures. Israeli stories were more likely to acknowledge directly sexual desire they were more likely to view participants as responsible for their actions and, at times, were narrated in a more directly passionate and emotional way than the Taiwanese stories. The Taiwanese stories, for their part, drew a rather absolute distinction between 'true love' against which other forms were measured – true love was seen as the product of fate which ought never to be interfered with but rather enhanced and promoted. In spite of their at times very judgemental qualities, Taiwanese stories indicated a far greater sensitivity than Israeli ones to the effect of disclosure and gossip on workplace arrangements and the reputation of the participants as well as of the company. They were consequently expressed with greater delicacy and less direct emotional involvement by the narrators.

This study has provided insights into the construction of romantic love in today's organizations. Some important sexual phenomena in organizations

have not been addressed – for example, we have not sought to examine different expressions of sexuality at work (notably homosexuality), the inter-penetration between gender, sexual and power relations, or the importance of workplace love for identity construction or organizational performance. What we have argued is that organizations provide different climates within which romances unfold; we have proposed three types of climate, each associated with different discourses of romantic attachments and different forms of love stories. These discourses bear strong cultural influences which suggest that organizations function as micro-climates within broader cultural domains. But whether hot, cold or temperate, these micro-climates engender their distinct types of romances and their distinct discussions of love at work.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1
Questions used at the interviews

Set 1

1.   What is your opinion about romantic relations in the workplace?
2.   Are you familiar with any romantic relations in your present workplace at the moment or in the past?

3.   What kind of romantic relations were there (casual affairs, led to marriage, etc.)?
4.   How widely are romantic relations discussed at the workplace? How hard do couples try to keep relations secret?
5.   Can you think of a typical incident?

Set 2

1.   Is your organization hostile, indifferent or does it encourage the formation of romantic relations?
2.   Is there an organizational clear-cut, formal policy regarding romantic relations?
3.   Did your organization make formal use of this policy at any time?
4.   Do managers tend to informally consult or make suggestions to employees involved in romantic relations?

Set 3

1.   Do you sense that romantic relations are taking place more often in your, rather than other types of, organization? Why?
2.   What conditions enhance the likelihood of people having romantic relations? Why? ['Conditions' – clarify that they can be organizational, psychological, etc.]
3.   How much care do people take over their physical appearance in this organization (clothes, hair, use of perfume)? Does this have any bearing on the formation of romantic relations?
4.   Even if people here do not form romantic attachments with their co-workers, do you think they have fantasies of doing so?
5.   Why do you think that people become romantically involved with colleagues from work? [Or, in the case of 'love-free' organizations: why don't people become romantically involved . . .]

Set 4

1.   Are romantic relations affecting the actors' job performance? How? [Or in the case of 'romance-free' organizations: Would romantic relations affect job performance? Why?]
2.   Are romantic relations affecting the actors' job motivation? How?
3.   Are romantic relations affecting the co-workers' job performance? How?

4.   Are romantic relations leading to the co-workers' resentment of the actors? How?

Concluding question

Would you like to share with me a story about a romantic relation at the workplace?

Rita Mano is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Human Services at Haifa University, Israel. She received her DSc from the Technion ITT Industrial Management and Engineering School in 1995. She teaches organizational theories, organizational behaviour and management as well as sociology and social/psychological approaches to work including turnover, managerial gender equality and work policy. She teaches at both undergraduate and MBA programmes. She has served as a member of the Israel Nonprofit Society and currently engages in the study of nonprofit organizations and prepares a research book in the areas of organizational performance including the subject areas of accountability, networking, change and crisis management in nonprofit organizations. She is currently on a sabbatical leave visiting 'Gnosis' Management School, Liverpool, UK. [E-mail: ritamano@research.haifa.ac.il]

Yiannis Gabriel is Professor of Organizational Theory at the Royal Holloway College, University of London. Yiannis is well known for his work in organizational storytelling and narratives, management learning and the culture and politics of contemporary consumption. He has used stories as a way of studying numerous social and organizational phenomena including leader–follower relations, group dynamics and fantasies, nostalgia, insults and apologies. More recently he has explored the education of managers and leaders in institutions of higher education and the ways in which MBAs influence professional practice. His most recent publications include the edited collection *Myths, stories and organizations* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and the articles 'Glass cages and glass palaces: Images of organization in image-conscious times' (*Organization*, 2005) and 'MBA and the education of leaders: The new playing fields of Eton?' (*Leadership*, 2005). His enduring fascination as a researcher lies in what he views as the unmanageable qualities of life in and out of organizations. [E-mail: y.gabriel@rhul.ac.uk]