

Ari Haukkala - a supportive supervisor and mentor

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Hanna:

My scientific collaboration with Ari started in autumn 2004 when he hired me as his research assistant. Ari has had an enormous impact on my academic career and life paths as a supervisor, mentor, collaborator and friend. He is my scientific father. Already when working as a research assistant, I appreciated his way of involving me with such a perfect combination of challenging tasks and apt support and guidance. Ari acted first as my Master's thesis supervisor and then PhD supervisor, and I am indebted to him how much I have learned from his huge stock of health and social psychological knowledge in the areas of chronic diseases, eating behaviour and other health behaviours, and genetics. My doctoral dissertation was part of the multidisciplinary DILGOM project (conducted in collaboration with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare) where Ari led the sub-study on psychosocial factors in obesity and metabolic syndrome. Our close collaboration in this research area eventually resulted in me receiving the EHPS Early Career Award in 2016 – a recognition that I was very honoured to receive.

I have always felt that Ari genuinely appreciated my views and scientific interests and supported me to find my own research paths in academia. However, it did not mean that he would have let me off easily. Instead, I could always count on him to go critically through my manuscripts, grant applications and presentations, as well as to gently push me to go beyond my comfort zones.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance can be hard academia, but as a loving and caring father of four children, Ari was a true expert also in this area, and actively encouraged his employees and supervisees to pursue all personally meaningful aspects of life. Attending scientific conferences with Ari, who had exceptionally wide networks, was a joy – I have numerous fun and irreplaceable memories from several EHPS and other conference dinners around the globe.

Within these almost two decades, Ari and I developed a mutual understanding on the multiple research projects and academic duties in which we worked together. There are no words to describe how painful it is to realise that I cannot have those insightful and invaluable discussions with him anymore. However, I believe that his scientific legacy continues not only in me, but also in numerous other early career researchers that he guided. Currently, I supervise six gifted and enthusiastic PhD students and I see it as my role to pass on all the priceless advice and encouragement that Ari gave me. 'What would Ari do in this situation?' often serves as my guiding principle.

In 2014, Ari received a four-year research grant from the Academy of Finland to investigate public understanding of genetics and genetic risk communication in the era of whole genome sequencing. This project extended our collaboration to acting as PhD supervisors together. Marleena was hired out of around 20 applicants and, as it subsequently turned out, she was an excellent recruitment for this position.

Marleena:

I first met Ari during my undergraduate years a decade ago. While I was working on my Master's thesis, I heard about Ari's new research project on public understanding of genomics, where Ari was going to hire a PhD student. To me the topic was novel and it caught my interest, and although I did not know Ari very well at that point, I had the feeling that he would be nice to work with, but I was not fully prepared he would be so nice to have fun with, too.

Ari was a people person and this clearly showed in how he worked. Ari connected people and their ideas over different countries and disciplines. He was able to see strengths in different personalities, and he supported his colleagues' individual ways of working. I felt that Ari respected people's boundaries, and I appreciated his tactfulness around sensitive matters. I always admired Ari's genuine self-esteem and natural way of seeking contact with and support from others. I never saw Ari threatened by other people's competence or success, and he always focused on lifting others and on what he found important, instead of trying to make a good impression on others.

It was a pleasure to be around Ari, there was a certain warmth around him. During difficulties, he made me feel we were there together and we would get through it step by step. As a PhD supervisor, he gave me quite some space and independence, I felt he trusted my judgement even though our perspectives often differed somewhat. In academia, many people tend to be very busy, and so was he. Ari might have been late for meetings several times, but when he came, he really was present. He had time to listen and to think, there was no rush.

Hanna and Marleena:

During these years, we have witnessed Ari's large influence in Finland in bringing up a new

generation of social and health psychology researchers. Ari found particular joy and meaningfulness in supporting young scholars and building bridges across various disciplines, such as health psychology, genomics, and nutrition. Several former students have reminisced how their career paths and opportunities have been positively influenced by Ari's advice, connections, generous encouragement, and empathy.

We were lucky to have someone like Ari as our supervisor and mentor. It is easy to forget the many ways in which a supervisor can influence a young scholar's thinking, social relations, and self-esteem. Ari used his influence wisely, kindheartedly, and with respect.



Hanna (on the left), Marleena and Ari after Marleena's successful PhD defence in June 2019

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