CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: ON PREDICTING SATISFACTORY CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Basow (1992, p. vii) linked gender stereotypes and relationships in the following manner:

*The effects of gender stereotypes and roles are pervasive, intense, and generally damaging to all individuals, to their relationships, and to society as a whole. To break free is a difficult yet beneficial process that requires a complete transformation of society.*

The statement is strong and implies working towards a certain solution to an assumed problem. However, the position taken is not undisputed. It could also be seen as extreme, rigid, and a sweeping generalisation (see the use of “all”). In contrast, one could also deny or merely neglect the importance of gender in life. Between these two extremes, many nuances exist and different points of departure could be used in studying the matter.

The few introductory comments made in the rest of this chapter argue why more thorough studies of the broader topic are required. In addition, in Chapters 2 to 4 it is explained why, in the present study, it is considered important to focus on researching the link between relationship satisfaction and sex-role identity.

Close or intimate relationships are widely considered to be important. This is evident from scientific literature, popular publications, the media, and many other sources of information. Individuals not only pursue physical fulfilment, but also closeness and recognition, as well as emotional sharing and companionship within close relationships. What is more, the relationship behaviour of one generation in a variety of ways serves as model for the next generation when they, in turn, establish close relationships.

Axline (1964), researcher and therapist of repute, presented a case study of a most rejected and emotionally deprived boy of six whom she had counselled in play therapy. This case study clearly illustrates the dynamics involved when two individuals, each with his/her own role concepts, enter into a close relationship. In this case, a brilliant scientist was married to a very promising surgeon. After an unplanned pregnancy, the mother abandoned her medical career to care for their unwelcome son. The parents almost completely failed to come to terms with the emotional and interpersonal demands made on them as a couple and as parents. The exactness and control reigning in their intellectual environment hardly applied to child rearing. The events all but ruined the couple’s marriage. They even had another baby soon in an attempt to deal with the impossible situation that had developed. The interactions attached to the various roles and identities of husband and wife, mother and father, professional career persons, and personal selves, eventually became too complex for the couple. It took much persistence, patience, skill and understanding from teachers and the therapist to mend the rifts and set the couple back on a path of happiness in their close relationship. This would also contribute much towards their children’s chances to enter into satisfactory close relationships themselves one day.
Avoiding dissatisfaction often seems to be the rule, rather than striving towards or achieving satisfactory relationships. In July 1994, the release of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) book *No safe haven* served as a stark reminder of this fact. The APA had commissioned a task force to assemble the psychological literature on male violence against women. In the section on domestic violence, the authors noted that:

... as many as 4 million women experience severe or life-threatening assault from a male partner in an average 12-month period in the United States, and that one in every three women will experience at least one physical assault by an intimate partner during adulthood (DeAngelis, 1994, p. 1).

These statistics suggest that satisfaction is often absent in heterosexual relationships. Unmarried partners in an intimate relationship, reportedly, were affected even more. Distress and thoughts of suicide frequently occurred.

Buss and Malamuth (1996) also chose to highlight the “conflict between the sexes” that had “become so salient in social science and public discourse” (p. 3). The prevalence of topics and events pertaining to “(s)exual harassment in the workplace, rape in the dating scene, and violence in the home”, in headlines and discussions, supported their focus.

Personal fulfilment in relationships is mostly considered an essential ingredient for a contented life. Only a few, deemed to be eccentric, are content with solitary lives devoted to causes only marginally involving other people. On the other hand, it is generally much more desirable to strive towards a sound ability to socialise and contribute to one’s community. Social relationships are driven by various motives. These range from seeking recognition for one’s contributions as a central *leitmotif*, to mutual dependence for satisfying basic needs, such as needs for protection, shelter, security, food, mobility, and services. Not least are the many higher order wants, such as those for recreational opportunities, fellowship within a religious community, and entertainment.

In addition to the more general needs just mentioned, special status is awarded to the fulfilment of needs within close or intimate relationships. Many value one-on-one dyadic relationships over numerous years as the mode *par excellence* to meet various wants. There seems to be an innate drive within every person to seek out an individual with whom to share one’s life, or at least extended periods thereof. Also at this dyadic level, the companionship spans a range of areas of fulfilment. It extends from basic needs satisfaction in the form of survival, security, and being fed and nourished, to fulfilment in experiencing wealth, wellbeing, acceptance and recognition, emotional companionship, and intellectual reciprocity, to name but a few.

1.1 *The problem of relationship satisfaction*

Given the general issues pertaining to dyadic affiliations, this study is concerned with the role played by the sex-role identity of each partner in determining the outcome of close relationships. The focus is on how the "success" of a relationship is influenced by the sex-role dynamics of both partners. Not only is the individual satisfaction and happiness of each partner at stake, but also the simultaneous satisfaction of both individuals.
A glance through some popular sources provides an indication of the salience of the issues within this field. Middle-range family magazines address close relationships in many ways. These include articles on sexual fulfilment, counselling columns, medical articles, and a range of others addressing relationship satisfaction at various levels. Typical headings for such columns or articles are: what turns your partner on; how to know whether your partner commits infidelity; the ten secrets of ... (normally some variation on happiness, relationship satisfaction or personal fulfilment within a close relationship); or how to become a better ... (suggesting improvement in some of the roles present in a relationship).

In a more sensational and overt sense, sexual fulfilment has recently gained high exposure. The soaring distribution figures of popular magazines prove that. Phenomena such as the demand for sex shops, aids and services to satisfy the needs of customers also gained prominence. Information, sex aids, techniques and services towards sexual fulfilment are traded via magazines, videos, movies, lunch-hour shows, friendship clubs, match-making columns, question-and-answer rubrics, the Internet, and formal counselling services or therapy.

The present study approaches the topic in a more holistic manner. It addresses more than mere sexual fulfilment. Its primary focus is the different types of dyadic configurations in terms of relationship satisfaction linked to sex-role identity. In the process, individual inputs, experiences and outcomes are acknowledged.

In essence, the research covers the relationship between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. Various circumstances and contributing factors (or perhaps “nuisance” variables) could influence this relationship, as indicated in a new model developed by Prinsloo (1992b), reflecting some of the core dynamics. The satisfaction of couples in non-marital relationships, and the part played by sex-role identity (in)congruence, were also introduced in the model. It is suggested that the robustness and effectiveness of this model in better explaining close personal relations as a function of the sex-role identities of the individual partners, be tested.

Prinsloo (1990) also attempted to document the functioning of sex-role stereotypes in South Africa against the backdrop of a variety of factors, paying specific attention to comparing stereotypes across 25 cultures. The importance of working from integrated, multivariate models was evident and acknowledged throughout. A further aim was to collect data that could lead to the improvement of sex-role identity measuring techniques. It was acknowledged that many constructs were interrelated, which probably are determined by, and influence, certain elements of sex-role identity. Directions were indicated for future research. An important one was that new paradigms, which take into account rapid role changes, increasing role conflict and the resulting demand for therapeutic and counselling services, should be adopted. As such, a new baseline was provided by that study.

1.2 Rationale or need for research in this field
A review of research findings and related literature published up to 2000/2001 is reported in Chapters 3 and 4. The rationale for the current study is largely based on that. Although the rationale, need and scope of the study are argued in detail in these chapters, a concise statement of the importance of studying the link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction is warranted at this point, because a study’s underlying assumptions are of critical importance. It has to be noted in advance that simple models or superficial theory are not likely to support research on the complex link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction.

The main lessons learnt from previous research (see Chapters 3 and 4 for details) are summarised next in order to justify the current study.

- Some studies have neither been more than extended literature surveys without being grounded in theory, nor have they empirically tested theory.
- A variety of sub-aspects in the field have been investigated in isolation from a comprehensive framework of constructs.
- Researchers have regularly involved student samples from undergraduate (often psychology) classes.
- Simulations have been undertaken under laboratory conditions, thus not reflecting reality sufficiently and limiting the generalisation of findings.
- Only male-female relationships have been studied, and almost always within formal marriage.
- Using easily available data, collected for other purposes, has dated some findings straightaway.
- Contradictory findings have been produced regarding the link between androgyny and congruent sex-role orientations, on the one hand, and relationship satisfaction, on the other hand.

The listed shortcomings should be addressed by subsequent research. As a result, this study takes place within the outlines provided next. Personal and intimate relationships exist within the realm of sexual and gender constructs, including sexual and gender attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, it is conceivable that the relative effect of the sex-role identity of each partner, as well as the interaction between characteristics within the resulting dyad, will determine the outcome and nature of such relationships. Moreover, such outcomes can be studied in terms of the relationships and the subjective experiences of each partner. In addition, various other circumstances (or variables) may also modify the outcomes, hence it is important to analyse and to explore the phenomena concerned in terms of well-reasoned models, paradigms and/or theory. It is envisaged that a better understanding in this regard could be used to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of couples.

1.3 Potential value of the study

It is hoped that this research will extend existing models/theory or lead to the development of a new model or theory of intimate relationships. In addition, it is foreseen that the applicability and meaningfulness of elements of existing theory could be identified concerning relationships within different contexts. Moreover, the study should generate more knowledge and understanding of an
important aspect of the functioning of society as a whole, that is, intimate relationships. All this could have many practical implications for marital therapy, personal counselling, life-skills courses, psycho-education, relationships in general, and for marriage and sexuality. Not only are preventive (health psychology) and therapeutic (clinical psychology) implications anticipated for psychology as an academic discipline and profession, but also for related disciplines, such as social work.

1.4 General theoretical underpinnings and conceptual frameworks

A special note has to be made at this point about the general theoretical assumptions underlying studies concerning gender issues. Many factors caused gender studies to take the shape of almost a political or ideological crusade. Others have approached the field of study more conservatively. Current emphases range from subscribing to radical feminism, to only alerting academics to the basic elements of the psychology of women. Coming from the more radical school of thought, recent contributions, for example those by Harding (1991, 1992), Minas (1993), and Wilkinson (1986a, 1986b), have highlighted the need for a new feminist perspective. As part of it, they have put specific emphasis on the inability of men to study issues concerning women based on outdated male psychology and its theoretical assumptions.

In agreement with Minas (1993, viii), the present author claims that “gender issues ... (are) issues in human life where gender is a factor”. Of the conviction that gender research can best be undertaken when extreme points of departure are avoided, such as both radical feminist and conservative chauvinist perspectives, the current author (as a male researcher) endeavours to investigate the experiences of both women and men. In doing so, the points of departure of an explicitly feminist theoretical foundation are not necessarily completely adhered to. On the other hand, they are also not negated. However, all reasonable precautions have been taken to avoid adopting biased, chauvinist perceptions based on the limitations of a former psychology of man. Two such safeguards have deliberately been built in. The first is to have two female academics supervising the study. The second was to liaise, especially during the conceptualisation stages, with a female doctoral graduate in the same field. The latter person, in the course of the present study, graduated in the USA on the topic of sex-role stereotyping and prejudice.

The specific theoretical parameters of the present study are dealt with under Section 2.2 (Chapter 2).

1.5 Outline of chapters

The task outlined very broadly in the preceding paragraphs is reported in the chapters to follow. They are structured as indicated below.

Chapter 2 is used for conceptualising the variables and providing a thorough discussion of the theoretical framework within which the study takes place. The following four sections are included to this end:
• 2.1, which defines the central terms, including sex, gender, sex role, sex-role identity, role, relationship satisfaction, and others;
• 2.2, which provides the theoretical assumptions of the study, with specific reference to feminist theory;
• 2.3, which indicates how an interpersonal, dyadic, no longer exclusively heterosexual focus has been developed from a previous study by the present author, and how the resulting current study is a follow-up on the conclusions arrived at in the previous study; and
• 2.4, which indicates the nature and extent of the research problem in a preliminary way.

In the two chapters after that, lessons learnt from previous work in the field are documented. A literature review is undertaken, specifically by discussing methodology issues and findings with regard to the topic addressed. As such, they provide the motivation for the way in which the present study is approached. Because of the volume of the material, it was decided to present the literature on methodological and empirical issues in two separate chapters. Chapter 3 is used to point out some methodological ineptitudes underlying and contributions gained from previous research. The various sections and issues dealt with, are:

• 3.1, on the inclusion of only conventional dyads/marital relationships in most studies;
• 3.2, on the frequent involvement of only one partner of the dyad;
• 3.3, on drawing samples from localised areas;
• 3.4, on regularly involving student populations in research;
• 3.5, on basing findings on simulations instead of empirically researching dyadic relationships;
• 3.6, on the inconsistent use of concepts, constructs and variables;
• 3.7, on inconsistencies regarding the theoretical assumptions of previous research; and
• 3.8, on the datedness of some research.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on assessing the contribution of previous studies reported in the literature in terms of the content of its empirical research findings. To this end, the following sections were deemed useful:

• 4.1, to highlight inconsistencies, gaps and contributions in previous research by presenting a summary of the main findings on sex-role identity, relationship satisfaction, and the link between them;
• 4.2, to underscore the fact that intra-personal factors have generally been overemphasised at the cost of an interpersonal, dyadic focus; and
• 4.3, to underline the fact that extra-personal factors have often been overemphasised at the cost of an interpersonal, dyadic focus.

The research problem is stated and elaborated on in Chapter 5. The sections devoted to this are:

• 5.1, which introduces knowledge gaps in the area of theory;
• 5.2, which outlines the methodological pitfalls indicated by much of the previous research; and
• 5.3, which displays how inconsistencies and contradictions in terms of findings leave researchers with many gaps in their knowledge about sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction.

This pivotal chapter summarises the material presented in Chapters 2 to 4, before reporting, in Chapters 6 to 8, how the present research have gone about the formulation of specific research objectives and hypotheses, the operationalisation of variables, and the research design and procedures.

In **Chapter 6** the **aim and objectives** of the study are set out, and the research **hypotheses** are detailed. The relevant sections are:

- 6.1, which discusses the primary aim of testing a new theoretical framework;
- 6.2, which states the specific research objectives; and
- 6.3, which sets formal hypotheses.

The specific research objectives mainly centre around establishing the role played by (dis)similar sex-role identities between partners in determining relationship satisfaction. Both individual scores and dyadic patterns have to be analysed in terms of both the independent and dependent variables. The variance arising from other variables such as sex and the type of relationship experienced, also has to be examined. The formal hypotheses in essence postulate that similar sex-role identities among partners will contribute to the highest levels of relationship satisfaction, and dissimilar sex-role identities to the lowest. The more "mixed" configurations and dyads, where only masculinity is shared, are expected to be more satisfactory than those where only femininity is shared, and those where complete dissimilarity exists.

**Chapter 7** covers the **operationalisation of the variables**. The following sections are used to explain how the constructs are quantified in the measurement procedures:

- 7.1, which presents the general conceptualisation of the dependent (7.1.1), independent (7.1.2), and nuisance variables (7.1.3); and
- 7.2, which deals with the instruments or measures *per se*.

The dependent and independent variables are respectively: relationship satisfaction, with its sub-elements of dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion and affectional expression (see Section 7.1.1); and sex-role identity (see 7.1.2). The most important contributing/nuisance variables are discussed in Section 7.1.3.

The instruments considered for use in the current research include measures of relationship satisfaction (7.2.1), such as Spanier’s *Dyadic Adjustment Scale*, Olivier's *Sexual Adaptation and Functioning Test*, direct questions, and some other instruments (*ENRICH*, *PAIR*, and *PCI* - cf. 7.2.1.4); sex-role identity (7.2.2), such as the *Bem Sex Role Inventory*, and an adapted Adjective Checklist procedure; and direct items on the contributing / nuisance variables (7.2.3).

The research **design and procedures** are outlined in **Chapter 8**. The sections used are:

- 8.1, which covers the research design;
• 8.2, which describes the sample/sampling; and
• 8.3, which outlines the research procedures.

The research findings are reported in Chapter 9, the structure of which essentially follows that of Chapter 6. The sections are:

• 9.1, which details the descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent and extraneous variables;
• 9.2, which covers relationship satisfaction’s association with sex-role identity from a dyadic perspective;
• 9.3, which covers the same association from a partly-dyadic perspective;
• 9.4, which covers the same association from a non-dyadic or direct perspective; and
• 9.5, which evaluates the role of extra- and intra-personal (extraneous) factors.

The last chapter, Chapter 10, is an integration of the first nine chapters. It includes the following sections:

• 10.1, which discusses the outcomes from the hypothesis testing in terms of the theoretical foundations;
• 10.2, which evaluates the practical contribution and implications of the findings;
• 10.3, which provides a critical evaluation of the methodology, instruments, sample and analyses; and
• 10.4, which makes recommendations for follow-up research, dissemination and implementation.

After listing the references consulted, annexures are provided containing any other relevant information not included in the body of the thesis, such as bulky tables or figures, and information on measuring instruments.