CHAPTER 5
STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The nature and extent of the research problem is outlined more fully in this chapter. The various conclusions, up to now still scattered throughout Chapters 2 to 4, are now structured more systematically. Chapter 5 thus serves as a summary of the problems perceived to be most urgently in need of research attention.

The most fundamental problem is seen as our insufficient understanding of intimate relationships. Researchers have not adequately come to grips with the phenomena of sex roles and relationship satisfaction, and the link between them. A severe complication is the backdrop of change against which relationship (dis)satisfaction occurs, which is characterised by fluidity in societal dynamics, morality, preferences, life-styles, job arrangements, labour relations, human rights issues, and democratisation processes, to name only a few. Consequently, many individuals have been unable to prepare themselves for their future roles in life. Furthermore, counsellors often do not know how to guide clients towards personal fulfilment, not to mention the dilemmas faced by therapists in remedying already manifested distress. **The complexity, and inclusion or exclusion of the relevant moderators of the central constructs, are also daunting.**

We need a critical scrutiny of previous conclusions about the correlation between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. The primary thrust would be to confirm the weaknesses and strengths of existing and proposed theories to predict relationship satisfaction outcomes on the basis of sex-role identity type. In addition, the effect of secondary variables, as moderators of the primary link, should not be overlooked. The intention of the present research is to substantially reduce the prevailing use of fragmented and selective approaches.

The first broad statements about the core dilemmas of our research and knowledge base in the field have already been made in Section 1.2. Our knowledge is inconclusive and incomplete for many theoretical, methodological and empirical reasons. To address these deficiencies, future research, including the present study, should:

- find a sound theoretical basis for the study of the link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction;
- solve the more serious problems of research method and design, including sampling procedures and the selection of appropriate statistical techniques; and
- cast light on the inconsistency of existing findings, and fill some of the conspicuous gaps in our knowledge about sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction.

Various nuances have to be accommodated. These are outlined further in this chapter, which covers the shortcomings of theory (in Section 5.1), summarises the methodological deficiencies (in Section 5.2), and overviews problems regarding the content and consistency of findings (in Section 5.3).

5.1 Shortcomings of theory

The general conviction is that the present state of development of theory pertaining to the field of study cannot support research strongly enough. This tenet is argued in this section under the following rubrics:

- we are close to a theory vacuum in some (or even many) instances (5.1.1);
- where it exists, theory has suffered from a ~~male psychology bias~~, which also explains the vigour of the debate on feminism and criticism from feminist researchers (5.1.2);
- present theory and its language ~~mainly~~ accommodate research on ~~conventional~~ marital relationships, or at least those within a heterosexual context (5.1.3);
- current research mainly reflects a cross-sectional view of intimate relationships, and mostly disregard a ~~life-stage developmental perspective~~ (5.1.4); and
- confusion exists about the appropriateness and integration of constructs and concepts because of the many problems regarding the theory base (5.1.5).

5.1.1 Theory vacuum

Most studies of sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction up to now have not been grounded in an appropriate theoretical framework. Uni-dimensional (or two-dimensional, at most) theoretical frameworks have always been in vogue. Constructs have been researched in isolation. This state of affairs is not acceptable, because it testifies to an oversimplified empiricism, where one construct is unrelated to the next. As a result, knowledge creation becomes a function of replicating isolated findings with very limited application value. The main cause of this practice is the absence of a common, sufficiently comprehensive, theoretical base.

Bradbury *et al.* (1995, p. 328) confirm the notion stated above, as the following citation from their article appropriately and unambiguously shows:

> *Since Terman (1938) first examined spouses' personality traits in an effort to resolve the "chaos of opinion on the determiners of marital happiness" (p. 6), the relation between individual differences and marital functioning has been a common topic of study. Despite this interest, much remains unknown about whether personality affects the course of marriage and, if so, how this influence occurs. A premise of this article is that our current understanding of personality in marriage is hampered by incomplete development of conceptual frameworks to guide research in this area.*

Bradbury's research team proceeded to address this problem by combining longitudinal, behavioural and sex-role data in a single set of analyses, testing various models.

The present study addresses the stated problem in at least two ways. The first of these is by presenting a critical analysis of existing theory in Chapter 2. This analysis concludes (cf. Section 2.3.2 in particular) that a comprehensive theoretical framework has been lacking thus far and this situation needs to be remedied. What is more, the relationship satisfaction congruence theory and the refined or expanded ~~dyadic relationship outcomes theory~~ are proposed as provisional frameworks to fill the vacuum. The latter has been used in Chapters 3 (cf. the first few paragraphs) and 4 to introduce and structure the various relevant discussions and arguments.

The second approach to the research problem, is to base the empirical part of the present study on everything learnt so far. Therefore, in Chapters 6 to 8, the aims and objectives of the present study, and its measurement procedures and research design, are aligned as best as possible with the thinking and analyses up to this point.

5.1.2 Male bias

Justification for making the point about male bias in relationship-satisfaction research comes from the intensity and breadth of debates on gender issues in the field. Many of these issues were identified, and have already been addressed in Sections 2.1.2 to 2.1.4, where definitions of gender, sex role(s) and sex-role identity are given. What is more, the particular intensity and dynamics of the debate on feminist research (2.2.1) emphasise that research practices have been defined and dominated by males. In this process, female behaviour has more often been the focus, compared to male behaviour, violating the requirement of equity. The latter is evident from the disproportionate numbers of female respondents in samples including only one sex (3.2.2). The prevailing situation is indicative of how much one group is taken to be "dominant" and the other as "deviant", and, as a result, the topic of more frequent studies.

To avoid a recurrence of this particular (albeit subtle) flaw in science, the present study involves male and female respondents on an equal and symmetric basis. This is clear from the way in which samples are drawn, and hypotheses are set (in Chapters 6 and 8).

5.1.3 Focus restricted to conventional marital and heterosexual relationships

In a review article, Wright (1987) criticised the authors of a newly released book for not practising what they preached. The authors of the book on marriage and families argued strongly that cultural pluralism and individual differences resulted in a ~~pluralism~~ of family forms. However, having said this, they continued organising their publication around the dualism between traditional and companionship marriages. This oversimplification further enhanced stereotyped ideas and imposed a severe theoretical limitation on researching the determinants of relationship satisfaction.

The foregoing criticism can be applied to the exclusion of a fairly large - and growing - part of society finding relationship satisfaction outside conventional marriage. Similarly, a narrow dualism does not acknowledge the plurality of real life as far as homo-gender dyadic relationships go. The literature review has also shown how current relationship satisfaction research has fallen victim to this restriction (see Section 2.3.1 and Table 3.1).

To cap it all, the few studies that have been conducted, suffer from many additional limitations, such as deficient sampling, conceptualisation and theoretical frameworks. Non-empirical reviews have also been used often.

From the discussion (in Section 3.2.1) of the patterns prevalent in Column G of Table 3.1, it is clear that the vast majority of researchers restricted themselves to marital relations. This situation implies

that not much is known in our modern day and age about intimate relations outside wedlock, and outside heterosexual arrangements.

Also this research problem has been turned into a research objective through purposive sampling (8.2.3) procedures that have guaranteed that at least one-third of the research participants in the total sample of the present study have comprised respondents from non-heterosexual populations. The research hypotheses set in Chapter 7 have also been treated accordingly.

5.1.4 Neglect of a life-development perspective

It is clear from the research findings reported at various places so far (mainly Chapters 3 and 4) that there is a dearth of follow-up research. This would not be the case if we had theoretical models that stressed the importance of life-stage development.

Although almost all previous research findings have indicated areas of follow-up work, more often than not the original researchers themselves or other researchers in the field have neglected it. A possible explanation is that research programmes are too loosely structured to ensure horizontal integration or vertical continuity. As a result, many reports are based on the findings from one-off cross-sections of single samples or comparisons between two sub-groups from the same sample. Until longitudinal studies are done, such findings remain based on very rudimentary assumptions (Antill, 1983). Only very simple (singular) models can be tested in this way.

A good case in point is related to the persistence of sex-role stereotypes. Previous conclusions all reflect the widespread persistence of characteristic sex-role stereotypes in almost all societies. This persistence, in many senses, is incompatible with major developments and changes regarding contemporary relationship models. For example, the current move is towards egalitarian and comradeship relationships, away from conventional marital ones. As a result, people currently enter into less rigid arrangements, often outside sanctioned wedlock. More intricate interactions also take place owing to both partners becoming more involved in their personal and career roles. These discrepant indications have not yet received the attention they deserve.

Lye and Biblarz (1993) alerted the research community to the potential existence of systematic bias that could lead to the exclusion of individuals who have gone through divorce. This practice may lead to an overestimate of the average happiness ratings in surveys.

In response to the indications given above, some optimism is warranted with regard to the valuable family-stage research reported under 4.3.6. Generally speaking, such research is more mindful of longer-term developmental issues, and perhaps their theoretical underpinnings. The fact remains that current theorising severely neglects the life-stage developmental perspectives argued for so far.

Difficult as it may be, theories covering development over time will have to replace static ones. **Even if researchers choose to conduct one-off studies in this field, they have to mind the**

variables on which information have to be gathered to enable sensible interpretation of developmental issues. The present study, because of its academic purpose and other practical limitations, also falls into this category.

5.1.5 Lack of integration between theory and constructs

To have theoretical frameworks is one thing, but to actually base one's research on them, is another. Consistency in this regard does not only direct the work of a particular researcher, but it also calls for coherence and integration across researchers in the field. Therefore, this aspect has intra- and inter-researcher dimensions. Unfortunately, glancing again over the material recorded elsewhere, for example under Sections 2.3, 3.3.2 and 3.3.3, and even 5.2, leaves a somewhat bleak picture.

The likelihood that sex-role identity could be linked to relationship satisfaction in meaningful ways and to a significant extent, is largely undisputed. Often, the notion of using multi-dimensional approaches is being emphasised strongly to give finer nuances to the interpretation of the first statement. A good example of this is the important local contribution made by Smith (1986). She studied androgyny and relationship satisfaction by using a qualitative approach with the specific aim of generating hypotheses. Towards the end of her dissertation, she concluded and recommended: that the hypothetical question whether or not androgyny promotes marital satisfaction, should be researched; and that the question whether or not traditional sex roles and preferences lead to greater marital satisfaction compared to egalitarian attitudes, should be examined.

However, many studies, subsequent to similar acknowledgements, have still failed to integrate their main constructs and the many other factors determining the research outcomes (3.3.3), not to mention retaining the coherence between the use of the relevant research constructs and their theoretical underpinnings (declared or assumed). Towards the end of Section 2.4, specific examples illustrate the present argument in terms of the way in which biographical, intra- and extra-personal variables are treated in association with the main phenomena studied (sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction). Also the matter of congruence within the dyadic relationship is emphasised as crucial.

In this process, one also has to be very careful about one's assumptions about causality, as underscored already. Only systematic empirical study using sound research designs built on solid theoretical foundations can produce convincing findings. The findings profiled in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 seem to suggest that the outcome of close personal relationships have been studied mainly as a function of intra-personal factors or extra-personal circumstances. Due consideration has not been given to interpersonal (with special reference to dyadic) determinants. It can thus be argued that the functioning of interacting partners deserves further in-depth study, especially with a view to comparing different kinds of dyads. To achieve this, **the first task would be to create a tight fit between theory and research, as strived towards in the present study.**

In conclusion, the direction to pursue in Chapters 6 to 8 is clearly mapped-out. To best address the

theoretical aspect(s) underlying the research problem, a strong effort has to be made to achieve a consolidated, comprehensive, integrated, holistic, unbiased and dynamic approach (especially with reference to the developmental perspective underlying the variables). An essential charge is not to lose the connection between constructs and variables, and their theoretical foundation(s).

5.2 Methodological limitations

Even assuming that the theoretical foundations relevant to the present study can be dealt with appropriately, as many as possible of the various methodological limitations, that have plagued previous research, also have to be avoided. These shortcomings are listed below (with their relevant sub-section numbers) to highlight the pitfalls that have to be avoided in future research:

- insufficient attention to ~~research designs~~ (5.2.1);
- analysis of the psychological functioning of only one individual from the dyad, or even of both independently, but without retaining the ~~dyadic connotation~~ (5.2.2);
- acceptance of ~~simulations~~, instead of truly empirical data (5.2.3);
- poor choice and use of ~~statistical techniques~~ (5.2.4);
- ~~sampling~~ errors / restrictions, often favouring students, urban populations, and unique sub-cultures (5.2.5);
- poor conversion of ~~constructs~~ into research ~~variables~~ (5.2.6); and
- flawed operationalisation of variables in terms of measurement instruments (5.2.7).

Most of the pitfalls mentioned, are clearly evident from the literature survey (cf. especially Chapter 3). Therefore, only brief arguments will be submitted here in summary of the main methodological issues requiring improvement in future research, including the present study.

5.2.1 Insufficient attention to research designs

It has been submitted throughout that the connection between theory, method(ology), research procedures and statistical techniques is an extremely important one. The debate reflected under 2.2 is a good illustration of this point. Much clarification is still required regarding the interface between feminism and research, mainstream values *vis-à-vis* new claims for relevance, the object and subject (researcher and researched) relationship, the social construction of meaning, ideological and other agendas, and many more issues. The overriding picture is one of discord, rather than harmony, between the various scholars and other actors.

The difficulties experienced at the level of theory inevitably restrain researchers from producing sound research designs. In a way, the picture portrayed by the entries in Columns B to D of Table 3.1 in Chapter 3, reflects an inability to achieve a sound, integrated approach to the main variables at stake in the present study. Scholars' contributions in relating sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction have been hampered accordingly.

Solutions have already been offered in Chapters 2 and 3 with regard to some of these problems. The task remains for the present study to **integrate all the relevant aspects of theory, methodology**

and research design in Chapters 6 to 8 to facilitate the optimal production of research data and new knowledge.

5.2.2 Neglect of dyadic focus in favour of evaluating individual behaviour

By far the majority of researchers have analysed the relationship satisfaction of individuals as if it is totally independent from that of their partners. Similarly, the joint influence of partners' sex-role identity types, and even other contributing variables, is also very seldom taken into account. This has even occurred in cases where the data seem to have been available. A revisit of the information given in Columns B to D of Table 3.1 (Chapter 3), the accompanying discussions (especially under 3.2.2), and Figure 4.1 (Chapter 4), indicates how seldom the congruence between sex-role identity configurations and dyadic relationship outcomes has been studied.

The intricate connections between inter-partner actions and reactions, or relationship-satisfaction congruence, have largely been overlooked as well. Examined from this angle, it occurred because of a lack of methodological sophistication, even though a male-psychology bias (cf. 5.1.2) may also provide a plausible explanation. This practice has serious consequences for the validity of findings. The present study has therefore **paid specific attention to capturing, analysing and reporting its data** (cf. Chapters 6 to 9) **in such a way that these interpersonal interactions and the dyadic focus are not neglected.**

5.2.3 Simulation studies

It is argued that the high complexity of dyadic relationships precludes generalisation to them from "laboratory" simulations. The findings from such simulation studies, as reported in Column G of Table 3.1 (Chapter 3) and discussed under 3.3.1, therefore have to be treated circumspectly. The circumstances of adolescents, even children, and pre-marital participants, are too far removed from the realities of mature dyadic relationships to be confident in conclusions based on the former. The same applies to studying attitudes and expectations in contemplated situations, far-removed from behaviour in real-life situations, and then assuming that behaviour in intimate dyadic situations can be predicted.

As a result, any pseudo-empirical base is avoided in the present study, and empirical data are instead gathered about true-life conditions from people in the relevant situations.

5.2.4 Inappropriate statistical techniques and poor data analysis

It is premature to finally decide on every intended statistical technique before embarking on data gathering. Many aspects of the fieldwork and eventual dataset have to be explored and mapped first, before hypotheses are tested in a focused way. At the appropriate points (Chapters 8 and 9), and in consultation with statistics experts, **theory and the nature of the actual data have made it clear which techniques have been best.**

Generally speaking, one is astonished by the variety of techniques applied in previous studies. The information in Column L from Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 testifies to this spread. In principle, the mere lack of agreement between researchers on this is not sufficient ground for condemnation. What is, though, is well-founded criticism against the inappropriate use of certain analyses, such as that voiced in the debate between Bowen (1989a), Bowen and Orthner (1983), Caldwell and Li (1989) and Li and Caldwell (1987) under 3.3.2.

5.2.5 Restricted sampling

Poor sampling practices may greatly threaten the validity and generalisation of findings. This has been shown by the survey of research literature in the field. The information in Column J of Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 bears testimony to this. The two greatest concerns are samples limited in terms of size, or other crucial dimensions. Sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 contain most of the factual information to further illuminate this point. Some brief comments are made below on three of the most salient areas in which sampling has often gone awry.

- Students

Too often, undergraduate students are conveniently available to academics in higher education. Very often, those studies cover psychology, and as a result the students are undergraduate psychology students. It is argued that such students may display profiles that are too different from the general population. These differences can pertain to mental abilities (more clever), personality development (still young), experience in adult roles (less intimate dyadic relationships of shorter duration), residential distribution (close to universities, mostly white, heterosexual and urbanised), and value orientation (short-term, hedonistic). In addition, the studies are of necessity often simulations.

- Urban populations

Localised populations, in some sense geographically confined, from large cities are very often used. This practice further limits the methodological soundness of sample characteristics.

- Other unique features

Unique and localised sub-populations may differ much from the general population. This may apply to culture, nationality, religion, and job sphere (e.g., the military). Reporting findings based on such sub-populations, without prominently mentioning the degree of deviation from the generally expected profiles, may not be sufficiently sound. The information in Column K of Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 gives an indication of the frequency with which such samples have been drawn recently. The type of factor that may interfere with the findings may vary widely. People from the Mormon religion, for instance, may practice poligamy. Some parts of the American society (e.g., Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York) may have values and attitudes as idiosyncratic as those of some non-American societies (e.g.,

the Netherlands, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Israel, and India). The military environment and its hierarchical construction of viewpoints, authority and roles is another example.

In the present study (Section 8.2), like in many others, supposedly, sampling was influenced by the **practical limitations of budget and geography**. Students were not sampled as a group, however. Instead, **purposive** (also termed **theoretical**) sampling was used to ensure **representation** of the target population and enhanced **score ranges** on the core variables. Consequently, homosexual couples, heterosexual couples living in harmony, and heterosexual couples experiencing disharmony (e.g., undergoing family or marital therapy) were involved in the research. Homosexual couples in disharmony were not (could not be) targeted specifically, because it was assumed that their already unique, and sometimes taxing, circumstances, sufficiently enhanced variation. Also, such couples are more likely to just split up, before contemplating formal "divorce", a situation that may otherwise (among heterosexual couples) provide a strong stimulus to enter into a period of counselling first, as would the presence and concern about the future plight of children do.

Recent census figures show that 55 % of our population is **urban**. Previous work by the current author (Prinsloo, 1990) also revealed that South African sex-role stereotypes, on which sex-role identity measurements are based, do not differ significantly from global patterns. Therefore, there have been many **positive indications that studying a South African city population along the given lines will not lead to findings that are atypical of the broader South African society.**

5.2.6 Ambiguities in defining constructs and conceptualising variables

It is clear from previous research that findings on sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction are not always immediately comparable. The main reason for this is that the relevant constructs and variables have not been conceptualised consistently. Therefore, it becomes important to first understand what a concept included and excluded, before trying to establish whether it actually contradicts or supplements previous findings. These matters are clarified to a large extent in Sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.6.

The foregoing chapters are filled with references to the difficulties caused by inconsistent conceptualisation. From Chapter 3 (Table 3.1, Columns B to D), it is evident that few studies have researched the link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. Added to the methodological difficulties in properly defining constructs, it is clear that previous findings' contribution to the present study should not be overrated. From Section 3.3.2, more restrictions are evident. The review presented in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 also reveals various limitations to the contribution of moderating factors (especially with regard to their conceptualisation) to sex-role identity, relationship satisfaction, or the link between them. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 also provide helpful parameters in this regard. It has to be acknowledged that the conceptualisation of constructs and variables cannot be separated from the theoretical problems reflected in Section 5.1.5 above.

The present study attempts to address the problems mentioned through **properly defining** (cf. Chapter 7) those **variables and constructs** on which consensus is sought, for the sake of enhancing the value of the new knowledge thus generated. Proper attention is given to what is included and excluded in denoting each variable or construct. Furthermore, a deliberate attempt is made to stay within "mainstream" (generally accepted) notions pertaining to these definitions. The same applies to the approach discussed in the next section.

5.2.7 Flawed operationalisation of variables and selection of instruments

Indications from the literature review are that poorly conceptualised measuring instruments have often found their way into research in the field under study. Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 (Columns E and F) provides an idea of the sheer variety of instruments used. The following shortcomings are common among many of them: ignoring the effects of social desirability, inconsistent scoring conventions, conceptual problems in general, insufficient standardisation, poor psychometric properties, and cultural bias. It is argued that the abundance of instruments contributes to confusion, instead of having value, for instance through multi-method measurement. Thus, a minimum level of standardisation may actually be what is now required. A major problem seems to be the choice between generalist and specific approaches to relationship-satisfaction measurement (cf. Section 2.1.6).

The *Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI)* and the *Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)* stand out above the rest in terms of frequency of usage as well as concrete documentation of their psychometric properties. The *DAS* seems to satisfy the need for finer nuances in solving some of the more serious problems of measurement. The aspects mentioned above are discussed in more detail in Section 7.2 in making final decisions about the **operationalisation and measurement of the constructs** of the present study.

In conclusion, the following limitations pertaining to methodology, raised in this section (5.2) and in Section 3.4, have to be acknowledged and addressed in future research:

- theories, the conceptualisation of constructs and variables, and instruments are not substantive and integrated enough to support meaningful findings contributing to valuable knowledge in the field of study;
- sampling practices seriously limit the generalisation of findings; and
- the performance of dyads as units are largely unmapped, but instead, only individual partners have been studied, resulting in neglect of (in)congruence as dimension important to relationship satisfaction and sex-role identity.

5.3 Problems regarding the content and consistency of findings

The content of findings is next put under the spotlight. In this section, it is argued that not much is known for sure about the important link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. The specific issues and questions are mainly reported in Chapter 4. Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 are particularly helpful in mapping the frequency and content of previous empirical findings in the field. Figure 4.1 is pivotal, along with and underpinning the discussion in Section 4.1. This discussion

summarises the main findings on the two core variables of the present study, and emphasises how few of the studies reviewed have contributed to our knowledge about this relationship. The reasons for this are that most studies neglected either variable; or suffered from serious methodological or theoretical inadequacies, for example, in terms of sampling or research design. In the end, only the studies by Cardell *et al*. (1981), Kurdek and Schmitt (1986), Norton (1995), and Peters and Cantrell (1993) contributed directly, although sampling limitations were evident in some of them.

The problems experienced with previous research findings are the following (including the numbers of the sub-sections in which more detailed comments are made):

- the ~~representativeness~~ of the findings (5.3.1);
- the ~~comparability~~ of the findings (5.3.2);
- ~~contradictory~~ findings (5.3.3); and
- not filling the ~~gaps~~ in urgently needed knowledge.

5.3.1 Inconclusive / unrepresentative findings

Owing to many limitations, as already alluded to in the introduction to this section, as well as the many theoretical, conceptual and methodological problems referred to in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, the bulk of the findings cannot be **generalised to intimate dyadic relationships irrespective of the sex of partners and the cohabitation agreement entered into**. In confirmation, only one significant finding has been identified on the influence of sex-role identity among non-heterosexual couples (see Section 4.1.5), while at most four other studies dealt with related topics. A vast majority of the empirical findings reviewed, therefore, only apply to conventional heterosexual couples, and not to intimate dyadic relations regardless of sexual preference.

Firm attempts are made, as described in the remaining chapters, to ensure that the empirical findings reached by the present study will have **relevance to a wider target population**.

5.3.2 Incomparability

For various reasons mentioned up to this point in the chapter, empirical findings have been difficult to compare. Scores may appear to overlap sufficiently, in terms of the terminology used, but may still not be equivalent. The reasons for this dilemma mainly comprise the **many ways to define constructs, develop instruments, design research procedures, and select and apply data-analysis techniques** (cf. especially 5.2). These factors make it very difficult to achieve continuity in the research agenda, and to build on previous knowledge.

As described in further chapters, the only remedy for the present study is to adhere as closely as possible to the common ground that does exist with regard to constructs, variables and operational procedures,

5.3.3 Contradictory findings

Knowledge is valued most when subsequent research consistently replicates central findings. When this is not achieved, doubt is cast on one or more of the many facets of the research process. Theoretical foundations and assumptions may be wrong. Inappropriate methodologies may have been applied to test theory. Many things could have gone wrong in the attempts to convert constructs into measurable and operationalised variables. Inappropriate research designs may have been used, or samples drawn in such a manner that they have not represented populations sufficiently. Data capturing may have suffered errors, or data analysis and the selection of statistical techniques may not have been correctly executed. Any or all of the preceding elements may lead to a researcher's inability to confirm findings that previously proved to be significant. This could manifest in either different significant outcomes, or the lack of any significant finding. To cap it all, unique, recent findings may, by virtue of modern techniques and better research practices, reflect the real-life situation best, but still remain untested as yet.

In this section, a few such discrepancies in the present field of study are highlighted to argue the case that further research is needed. Because many of these discrepancies are presented more fully in Section 4.1, not all the details are provided here.

As suggested above, the significant findings of four or five, even as many as eight, researchers had corresponded initially, but could not be confirmed again by later studies. Such a situation begs the question of who was right in the first place. It also has to be acknowledged that many findings, unable to reveal a significant link between variables, never find their way into the literature. This is the case even when such findings are highly significant in their own right. Therefore, the review and comparisons presented in this and any other study may be a gross underestimation of such non-significant links.

With regard to the **main link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction**, which is discussed and explored in Section 4.1, a number of glaring **discrepancies** are evident. (Cf. Figure 4.1 and the accompanying text for an overview of the frequencies of specific patterns of findings.) The main examples are:

- A masculine ~~sex-role identity type in husbands~~ (cf. 4.1.1) sometimes correlated positively and sometimes negatively with relationship satisfaction. Androgyny, masculinity and femininity correlated with relationship satisfaction (of either spouse, and with regard to the (in)congruent experience of satisfaction between them) with various degrees of strength, in different patterns, and in different hierarchical positions.
- The effects of masculine, feminine and androgynous sex-role identity types in wives (4.1.2) on relationship satisfaction were inconsistent in the same ways according to different researchers. In addition, contradictory findings occurred with regard to the influence of traditional and modern attitudes among wives on relationship satisfaction.
- The joint effect of (~~congruence~~ between) spouses' sex-role identity types (4.1.3) was fairly consistent only for egalitarian attitudes and androgyny. However, researchers differed on the link between simultaneous femininity and masculinity in spouses and relationship satisfaction. There

was often a large difference in the magnitude of spousal relationship satisfaction, even for identical sex-role identity type configurations.

- Regarding ~~ascribed sex-role identity type~~ (4.1.4), the roles of masculinity and femininity again are not consistent.

With regard to the **influence of intra-personal factors** (4.2), the following discrepancies are evident:

- a high ~~self-esteem~~ score went with masculinity among males, but with femininity among females to correlate in varying degrees with relationship satisfaction scores; and
- variations were found between researchers in terms of the correlation between traditional and egalitarian ~~attitudes~~, sex-role ~~conflict~~, and relationship satisfaction among males and females.

Pertaining to the **influence of extra-personal factors** (4.3), the discrepant findings according to research done by different researchers are whether or not:

- there is a link between ~~sex~~ and sex-role identity;
- ~~job satisfaction~~ (for either spouse) and job success enhance relationship satisfaction;
- the influence of ~~single- and dual-career status~~ in families varied depending on ~~sex-typed~~ *vis-à-vis* non-sex-typed arrangements; and
- later ~~life stages~~ and the ~~number of children~~ are linked to relationship satisfaction in wives.

Ickes (1993) gave a typical example of the contradictory nature of the research problem. He alerted academics to the phenomenon that partners seem to be attracted through genetic and cultural factors to relationships in which both partners adhere to traditional gender roles. This happens in the face of a conflict with what present culture prescribes in terms of androgyny's higher value. Ickes showed how this led to what he called "the fundamental paradox" (p. 72): - despite fairly strong initial attraction to each other, spouses with traditional gender roles have relationships far removed from optimal. In contrast, androgyny among couples, and the femininity of one's partner, often predicted marital satisfaction better.

In evolutionary (almost Darwinistic) terms, young females value men as the external resource that will help guarantee the reproduction and survival of their offspring. Men, by the same token, perceive women and their femininity as able to provide nurturance to their offspring. Initially, this sex-typed heterosexuality is sufficient to create a satisfactory relationship. Later, however, the double bind caused by paradoxical messages from society creates all kinds of confusion, and a less-clear link between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. Thus, relationships founded on each of the two models (traditionally sex-typed, and now more androgynous) may benefit or suffer. Empirical findings seem to confirm either of these sets of options from time to time.

Each set of outcomes in the explanation related above, according to Ickes, can be explained depending on the theoretical model preferred. He considered four cultural determinist accounts, being: a ~~gender-role socialisation model~~; a ~~situation model~~; an ~~oppression model~~; and an ~~individuation~~

~~model~~ (p. 79). However, not all elements of each can be true simultaneously, implying a problem that future research has to solve still.

The present study intends to further **investigate** some of **the paradoxes** mentioned above. The soundness of its procedures will determine whether its solutions will shed more light on the topic.

5.3.4 Gaps in research coverage / knowledge

There are many areas central to the present theme of study about which no or only the most basic knowledge seems to exist. These areas include **gaps in empirically based knowledge** about:

- the connection between sex-role identity type and relationship satisfaction in close dyadic relationships between homosexual partners (including the role of other moderator variables);
- the relationship between intra-personal and extra-personal factors;
- the (in)congruence of sex-role identity type and relationship satisfaction between partners and cross-partner influences and patterns in this regard;
- ascribed sex-role identity, and the overlaps or differences between it and self-rated sex-role identity, and;
- the connections between some intra- and extra-personal factors and sex-role identity, relationship satisfaction or both, including insufficient or very little knowledge about:
  - cognitive and affective factors (4.2.1 and 4.2.2);
  - the role played by educational level;
  - career-role influences for wives (4.3.6);
  - more nuanced frameworks for the influence of age (4.3.2);
  - the part played by the presence or absence of children in same-sex couples; and
  - truly longitudinal processes pertaining to family-stage / life-stage (4.3.5).

For the present study, data were collected on as many as possible of these constructs, and the analyses (Chapter 9) reveal to what extent the gaps could be filled.

A research strategy has been designed and followed to reduce the listed gaps, inconsistencies, contradictions and other shortcomings threatening previous research findings. To this end, a new, expanded theoretical framework has been tested empirically for its ability to underpin research into close relationships, also including non-heterosexual couples. Provision has been made to include a wide range of important variables.

5.4 Conclusion

Some of the preliminary remarks made towards the end of Chapter 4 are now elaborated and amplified. At this point, the argument essentially changes from a retrospective to a forward-looking one.

The focus hence is on how best to address the many theoretical, methodological and empirical problems discussed up to here. To this end, the objectives of the study are stated systematically in Chapter 6. The choices made as to prioritising specific issues, and the ways in which they have been addressed, are also motivated. The assumptions (theoretical and methodological) on which the

imminent activities are based, are also revealed and explained, in as far as they have not been covered in Chapters 2 and 3. Next, the discussion covers the means through which the operational activities have been engaged, i.e., measurement instruments (Chapter 7), and research design, sampling, and other procedural issues (Chapter 8).

The rationale underlying the present study may be articulated at this point as the attempt to find relevant connections between old theories and a new world. This new world is characterised by a society:

- living in sexual freedom;
- striving more than ever forward to individual development, as expressed in the exercise of personal rights; and
- claiming career fulfilment for its female members, not only in scope, but also in rung, as employment equity standards are set.

The science, profession and discipline of psychology need(s) to keep up in terms of its knowledge, based on sound theoretical foundations and methodological practices.