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## SUMMARY

Effective interventions are hindered by a lack of context-specific data on how South African men and women construct and experience intimate heterosexual relationships. Most studies exploring committed heterosexual relationships have been conducted with White populations living in developed countries. As relationship satisfaction is seen as a requirement for a good quality relationship, this study examined the relationship satisfaction of committed heterosexual couples in one low-income, semi-rural Western Cape community. A cross-sectional survey approach was used to examine relationship satisfaction among heterosexual married and unmarried couples. A random sample of 100 couples was drawn from the community, 93 of which were included in the final analyses, on the criterion that both partners were interviewed. Trained fieldworkers administered a demographic and relationship questionnaire, as well as three relationship satisfaction measures namely the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Index of Marital Satisfaction and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Analyses were conducted using the statistical programme Statistica 7.0 and both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed separately for men and women. Inferential statistics included Spearman correlations, repeated measures ANOVA, and reliability analyses.

Results show that although, on average, neither men nor women were clinically dissatisfied with their relationships, women reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction than men. Significant relationships were found between relationship satisfaction and a number of demographic variables, including the male partner's educational attainment (with the female partner's relationship satisfaction); female partner's perception of her male partner's religiosity (with both her own and her male partner's relationship satisfaction); own church attendance (with own relationship satisfaction), female partner's church attendance (with her male partner's relationship satisfaction), and joint church attendance (with both female and male relationship satisfaction); sharing a bedroom at night with children, sharing a bed at night with children, and sharing a bed at night with partner. Demographic variables found to have a *non*-significant relationship with relationship satisfaction included: age; church affiliation; employment; and couple monthly income.

Although there were several trends that tended towards significance, the only relationship variables found to be significantly related to relationship satisfaction were previous marriages and, for cohabiting couples, the age at commencement of cohabitation. Relationship variables found to have a *non*-significant relationship with relationship satisfaction included: relationship status; relationship duration; age at marriage for married couples; reason for marriage (for married couples) or for marriage

in the future (for unmarried couples); number of significant relationships; and a number of children-related variables. Results are discussed and recommendations are made for future research.

## OPSOMMING

Effektiewe intervensies oor hoe Suid-Afrikaanse mans en vroue intieme heteroseksuele verhoudings konstrueer en ervaar, word deur 'n tekort aan konteks-spesifieke data verhinder. Die meeste studies wat toegewyde heteroseksuele verhoudings bestudeer, is in wit populasies in ontwikkelde lande uitgevoer. Aangesien verhoudingsatisfaksie as 'n voorvereiste vir 'n goeie kwaliteit verhouding gesien word, het hierdie studie die verhoudingsatisfaksie van toegewyde, heteroseksuele paartjies in 'n lae-inkomste, semi-plattelandse Wes-Kaapse gemeenskap ondersoek. 'n Kruis-snit opname benadering is gebruik om die verhoudingsatisfaksie onder heteroseksuele getroude en ongetroude paartjies te ondersoek. 'n Ewekansige steekproef van 100 paartjies is uit die gemeenskap getrek, waarvan 93 in die finale analise ingesluit is, op grond van die vereiste dat beide maats ondervra is. Opgeleide veldwerkers het 'n demografiese- en verhoudingsvraelys toegepas, sowel as drie verhoudingsatisfaksie maatstawe, naamlik die Dyadic Satisfaction subscale van die Dyadic Adjustment Scale, die Index of Marital Satisfaction en die Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Analises is met die statistiese program Statistica 7.0 uitgevoer en beide beskrywende en inferensiële statistieke is afsonderlik vir beide mans en vroue uitgewerk. Inferensiële statistieke het Spearman korrelasies, herhaalde-metings-ANOVA, en betroubaarheidsanalises ingesluit.

Resultate toon dat, ondanks die feit dat nie mans of vroue klinies ontevrede met hul verhoudings was nie, vroue tog beduidend laer verhoudingsatisfaksie as mans gerapporteer het. Beduidende verwantskappe tussen verhoudingsatisfaksie en verskeie demografiese veranderlikes is gevind, insluitend die manlike verhoudingsmaat se vlak van opleiding (met die vroulike verhoudingsmaat se verhoudingsatisfaksie); vroulike verhoudingsmaat se siening van haar manlike verhoudingsmaat se godsdienstigheid (met beide haar eie en haar manlike verhoudingsmaat se verhoudingsatisfaksie); eie kerkbywoning (met eie verhoudingsatisfaksie), vroulike verhoudingsmaat se kerkbywoning (met beide vroulike en manlike verhoudingsatisfaksie), en gesamentlike kerkbywoning (met beide vroulike en manlike verhoudingsatisfaksie); deel van 'n slaapkamer, snags, met kinders, deel van 'n bed, snags, met kinders, en deel van 'n bed, snags, met 'n verhoudingsmaat. Demografiese veranderlikes wat 'n onbeduidende verwantskap met verhoudingsatisfaksie toon, sluit in: ouderdom; kerkaffiliasie; aanstelling; en gesamentlike maandelikse inkomste.

Ondanks verskeie beduidende tendense, is die enigste verhoudingsveranderlikes wat beduidende verwantskappe met verhoudingsatisfaksie getoon het vorige huwelike en, vir samewonende paartjies,

die ouderdom by aanvang van saamwoning. Verhoudingsveranderlikes wat geen beduidende verwantskap met verhoudingsatisfaksie getoon het nie, sluit in: verhoudingstatus; verhoudingsduur; trou-ouderdom vir getroude paartjies; rede vir huwelik of huwelik in die toekoms; hoeveelheid beduidende verhoudings; en hoeveelheid kind-verwante veranderlikes. Resultate word bespreek en aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing word gemaak.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction and Motivation

This study investigated the relationship satisfaction of couples in one low-income, semi-rural Western Cape community and formed part of a larger on-going research project which explores how these couples construct and experience their intimate heterosexual relationships (IHR). The importance of close personal relationships (CPR) for human well-being motivated both the larger project and the present study, and will be briefly discussed below before focusing on relationship satisfaction.

Close personal relationships refer to a range of relationships, including, but not exclusive to our most intimate relationships (Perlman & Vangelisti, 2006). There are a broad range of psychosocial benefits associated with good quality CPR. Knowledgeable researchers in the field of social support have, over two decades of research, demonstrated the connection between social support and CPR (e.g., Sarason, Sarason & Gurung, 2001; Hooley & Hiller, 2001). For example, the mundane context of daily interaction in CPR can be supporting, can affect recognition of needs for and provision of social support, and can influence the interpretation of others' actions in seeking or providing support (Leatham & Duck, 1990, cited in Badr, Acitelli, Duck & Carl, 2001). Furthermore, many researchers acknowledge the role that CPR play in the connection between social support and health outcomes (e.g., Sarason et al., 2001). In one of the two papers commonly acknowledged as seminal to the field of social support, Cassel (1976) referred to the importance of "meaningful social contact" for health (quoted in Sarason et al., 2001). Good quality CPR can also play a crucial role in the prevention of major mental disorders, for example, schizophrenia and mood disorders (Hooley & Hiller, 2001). In addition, there is much evidence demonstrating the relationship between social support and particular aspects of life, including health status, illness, recovery from illness, and adjustment and psychological functioning (Sarason et al., 2001). The fact that most meaningful social contact for the majority of people is provided by those they regard as their intimates underlines the importance of CPR for health outcomes.

While CPR can provide psychosocial benefits for the individuals involved, they can also be detrimental to the wellbeing of individuals. This rings true in the South African context, especially for women, who experience a range of psychosocial problems that frequently occur within the context of or are influenced by their IHR. (According to Prager (1995), intimate relationships is a particular type or set

of CPR in which intimate interactions occur on a regular and consistent basis.) These psychosocial problems have adverse effects on their emotional, mental, physical, social and economic wellbeing. For example, Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka and Schrieber (1999) found the following in South Africa: emotional, physical and financial abuse are common features of IHR; physical violence often continues during pregnancy and represents a significant cause of reproductive morbidity; women are often injured by their partners and sizeable health sector resources are expended providing treatment for these injuries; and injuries result in costs being sustained in other sectors, particularly to the family and the women's community, as well as to employers and the national economy. Violence against women, in particular, is a serious human rights abuse and public health issue. Women are at far greater risk of physical or sexual violence and coercion by a partner than by other people (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise & Watts, 2006).

The quality of IHR also has the ability to shape *family* wellbeing. For instance, it is related to important family outcomes such as poorer parenting, problematic attachment to parents, poorer child adjustment, increased likelihood of parent-child conflict, and conflict between siblings (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Marital satisfaction specifically has an important role in family well-being as marital satisfaction has been shown to have strong intra- and intergenerational effects (Johnson & Booth, 1998). The bulk of problems for which people obtain professional help concern their spouse or partner (McAllister, 1995) and marital satisfaction is seen as the final common pathway that leads to marital breakdown (Jacobson, 1985). Marital dissatisfaction is also consistently linked with depression (e.g., Hollist, Miller, Falceto & Fernandes, 2007) and anxiety (e.g., Caughlin, Huston & Houts, 2000), several studies have shown marital dissatisfaction to be associated with morbidity and mortality (e.g., Coyne et al., 2001; Kimmel et al., 2000; Orth-Gomer et al., 2000).

Decreased social constraints, increased alternatives, and heightened pair instability, has increased the importance of partners' relationship satisfaction in the maintenance of IHR (Levinger, 1997). Consequently, relationship satisfaction has been afforded a central status in relationship research and has been the dominant construct studied (Fincham & Beach, 2006). Because the majority of research on satisfaction has been conducted with married couples, *marital satisfaction* has been the term most frequently used. However, a changing world where different relationship forms are becoming increasingly common (e.g., the cohabitation of partners in a marriage-like relationship: Cherlin, 2000) necessitates broadening the term *marital satisfaction* to the more encompassing term of *relationship satisfaction* so as to include the diversity of relationship types. Accordingly, *relationship satisfaction* is

the term used in the present study. However, where research refers to *marital satisfaction*, the author has named it as such (and, thus, uses the terms interchangeably). Similarly, *partner* is the term utilised in the present study. However, where the literature refers to specific terms (e.g., *husband*, *wife*, and *spouse*), it has been named as such.

The sheer magnitude of research and literature on relationship satisfaction attests to the importance placed on understanding relationship satisfaction, as an end in itself, and as a means to understanding its effect on numerous other processes inside and outside the family. The rationale for studying relationship satisfaction stems from its centrality in individual and family well-being (e.g., Stack & Eshleman, 1998), from the benefits that accrue to society when strong, good quality marriages are established and maintained (e.g., desistance from crime; Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998), and from the need to develop empirically defensible interventions for couples that prevent (e.g., Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl & Eckert, 1998) or alleviate (e.g., Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto & Stickle, 1998) IHR distress and instability.

Although it is evident that relationship satisfaction has an important influence on key aspects of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being, there has been limited research on this topic in South Africa. Research is specifically needed in low-income, semi/rural communities that have been historically disadvantaged. We have limited knowledge of how women and men in these communities experience their IHR (Conradie, 2006). Most relationship research has been conducted with White populations in developed countries (Fincham & Beach, 2006) and the applicability of these findings for different South African groups should thus be questioned (Lesch, 2006). This necessitates the generating of community-specific information that reflects how these particular communities construct and experience their IHR. The present study, therefore, explored the relationship satisfaction of heterosexual couples in one low-income, semi-rural Western Cape community.

## **1.2 Organisation of Dissertation**

The introduction, motivation for, and broad aim of the research has been presented in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 the theoretical departure point of the present study, social constructionism, is presented, and low-income, semi-rural Western Cape communities are contextualised. In addition, the theoretical issues around relationship satisfaction are discussed. Chapter 3 reviews findings from research on relationship satisfaction conducted both internationally and in the South African context. Literature pertaining to the relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction is also reviewed quite



extensively, followed by a brief review of recent findings on the associations between relationship satisfaction and various demographic and relationship variables. In Chapter 4 research objectives are presented and the empirical study is outlined. In Chapter 5 the results of the present study are presented and discussed. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses limitations and strengths of the present study, draws conclusions from the present findings, and provides final recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUALISATION

### 2.1 Social Constructionism as Broad Theoretical Departure Point of the Present Study

As previously mentioned, the present study formed part of a larger research project which aims to investigate how couples in one low-income, semi-rural Western Cape community construct and experience their IHR. The project focuses on generating community-specific information, taking its theoretical departure point from social constructionism. Social constructionists argue that human beings make sense of their experience through constructions of meaning (White, 2004), with social and cultural contexts informing the way a person perceives or makes sense of his or her world (Wortham, 1996). Against an inherited historical, social backdrop; action is rendered meaningful within a context, and the meanings which motivate actions are defined in terms of shared convention rather than in terms of individual representations of reality (Durrheim, 1997).

Social constructionism is not a unitary framework but encompasses numerous different, overlapping perspectives that have informed approaches to anthropology, political studies, literary criticism, sociology and cultural studies (Durrheim, 1997). Social constructionism is critical of traditional psychology in a number of important ways and, therefore, can be understood as a critique (Durrheim, 1997): First of all, it resists the institutionalised dominance of empiricism as the guiding philosophy of the human sciences, opposing the idea of a single truth and a paramount theory encompassing the ultimate truth. According to social constructionism, facts and truths are at all times perspectival interpretations which can only become known against the backdrop of socially shared understandings. Secondly, rather than focusing on psychopathologies, social constructionism encourages the pursuit of ways to facilitate people's psychological well-being. Thirdly, social constructionism is anti-individualist, rather focusing on microsocial processes in understanding human behaviour.

Although social constructionism originated and has been considerably influenced by its resistance to empiricism, it can also be described more positively as a subjective and active involvement with how people make meaning of their lives and as an orientation that appreciates and validates the numerous ways that different people make meaning of their lives in their various contexts (Lesch, 2000). Social constructionism proposes that people respond to their own definition of reality rather than an external reality (Ibáñez, 1994), and since reality is subjectively constructed, multiple realities are possible

(Becvar & Becvar, 2006). Indeed, social constructionists (e.g., Gergen, 1991) argue that there are as many realities as there are contexts, cultures, and ways of communicating.

Social constructionism is about relationships. The self is viewed as relational rather than individual; the self is recognised not as an autonomous, isolated being, but as constructed in relationships. Thus, our realities are constructed in relationships with others. Individuals are constantly negotiating the meaning of their close relationship activities, feelings and thoughts within specific social settings (Duck, West & Acitelli, 1997). Sociocultural practices and belief systems present the individual with constructs that make his or her experiences meaningful, and these constructs are developed in a person's daily interactions in specific relational contexts (Wortham, 1996). Shotter (1993) refers to *joint action* which is the cooperative development and implementation of shared functional meanings that arise when people interact. Social constructionists argue that people develop their intimate relationships through their thoughts, feelings, and interactions, and emphasise social processes more than innate, biological processes in human behaviour and development (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006).

In sum, social constructionists propose a merged view of the person and his or her social context where the boundaries of one cannot be easily separated from the boundaries of the other (e.g., Wortham, 1996). Social contexts should therefore be taken into account when conducting relationship research. The project within which this study was conducted, therefore, explores IHR in one specific community and also collects data that will inform about the specific social context of this community.

## **2.2 Contextualising Low-Income, Semi-Rural Western Cape Communities**

Cape Town is the most densely populated area of the Western Cape, but 40% of the province's population live outside the Cape Town metropolitan in small towns and rural settlements (May et al., 2000). Approximately 57% of the Western Cape population is 'Coloured' (May et al., 2000). The nature of 'Coloured' identity has always been a point of intense ideological and political contestation. The author is, therefore, mindful that the use of racial categories in South African scholarship is controversial and supports the need to move beyond them. These categories are socially constructed, however, and carry important social meanings (Swartz, Gibson & Gelman, 2002). Leading South African psychological researchers (see for instance Walker & Gilbert, 2002) have argued that the use of such categories in social research is important because it highlights the impact that Apartheid had on specific groups of people. The term 'Coloured' was used to categorise people of 'mixed' racial origins

under the Apartheid system and, as evidenced by the participants in this study self-identifying as ‘Coloured’, the term is still used by people to refer to race or ethnicity.

However, ‘Colouredness’ has functioned as a social identity from the time it emerged in the late nineteenth century through to its adaptation to post-apartheid. In his systematic investigation of ‘Coloured’ identity, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, Adhikari (2005) shows how the interplay of racial hierarchy, marginality, assimilationist aspirations, ideological conflicts, negative racial stereotyping, and class divisions have helped to mold people’s sense of ‘Coloured’ identity over the past century. Specifically, he highlights the following core characteristics rooted in the social situation and historical experience of ‘Coloured’ people that regulated the manner in which ‘Colouredness’ functioned as a social identity under white domination: (a) the assimilationism of ‘Coloured’ people, which prompted hopes of acceptance into the dominant society in the future; (b) their intermediate status in the racial hierarchy, generating fears that they could lose their position of relative privilege and be consigned to the status of ‘Africans’ (Adhikari uses this term to refer to the indigenous Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa); (c) the negative connotations with which ‘Coloured’ identity was imbued, especially the shame associated with their supposed racial hybridity; and finally (d) the marginality of ‘Coloured’ people, the source of a great deal of frustration.

Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) point to the validity of ‘Coloured’ identity formation by conceptualising ‘Coloured’ identities in the following ways: Firstly, like all identities, ‘Coloured’ identity is constructed, unstable, and heterogeneous. Identities are constructed and are meaningful in particular social contexts. It is important for one to view the content of this meaning in its socio-political, historical, cultural and spatial contexts. Conceptualising formations of identity as processes involving active agents or subjects challenges the notion that ‘Coloured’ identities are simply White-imposed by slave-owners and/or apartheid politicians and that they are passively accepted by ‘Coloured’ people. Rather, it facilitates a conceptualisation that takes into account the important role that ‘Coloured’ people played and continue to play in giving meaning to their own identities.

Second of all, from a historical approach, processes of identity formation are embedded in specific historical contexts. Accordingly, ‘Coloured’ identity is constructed and re-constructed in particular social contexts. Such an approach permits one to acknowledge that processes of ‘Coloured’ identity formation can be defined by what they ‘are’, that is, valid processes of identity formation which shift

with place, time and space. Relevant historical processes include dislocation in the context of slavery, and cultural dispossession in the context of subordination of indigenous people and genocide.

Finally, in the historical context of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, all processes of identity formation in South Africa have been molded by racialised relations of social power. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) highlight the importance of understanding racialised identities in relation to particular sets of social relations, rather than as homogeneous, abstract categories. In understanding racialised identities as based on the particularity of experiences, the common view that 'White' and 'Black' are homogeneous binary opposites is challenged. 'Coloured' identities have been shaped by very particular racist discourses. Rather than viewing 'Coloured' as a specific category of persons and/or as simply an imposed name from a racist history, it is important to conceptualise 'Coloured' identities as relational identities shaped by intricate networks of social relations. This approach is valuable in that it acknowledges the particularity of identities and challenges notions of 'Colouredness' as an essentialist and/or homogeneous ethnic identity with set cultural boundaries.

'Coloured' Afrikaans-speaking people make up the majority of farm workers in the Western Cape (London, 1999). They reside either on the farms or are drawn from nearby small rural towns. Under past apartheid policies, farm workers occupied a particularly marginalised position in an already unequal society and the legacy of these policies is still evident today in the multitude of poor social indicators for farm workers (London, 1999). For example, the wages of farm workers are extremely low (Donaldson & Roux, 1994) and inadequate water supplies and poor sanitation in semi/rural communities are frequently reported (Department of Health, 1994). The lack of housing security is a significant problem for farm workers given that access to housing is dependent on employment and on the farm worker's relationship with his or her employer (Greenberg, Hlongwane, Shabangu & Sigudla, 1997). A paucity of workplace health and safety measures has also been reported (London, 1994).

Agricultural semi/rural populations compared to urban populations in the Western Cape differ in terms of income, unemployment, and poverty. Although unemployment rates are lower among agricultural populations, poverty rates are higher (De Lange & Faysse, 2005). This could be explained by the lower rural wages of people in semi/rural agricultural areas who are generally farm workers. In addition, educational levels of farm workers are low, with research indicating an average of five schooling years (London, 1995), and estimates of illiteracy ranging from 20% to 30% (Kritizinger & Vorster, 1996). Rural health and social services are grossly under-resourced in rural farming areas (Harrison, Barron &

Edwards, 1996) and farm workers' access to health services is constrained by their dependence on employers for transport (Greenberg et al., 1997).

Economic, social and emotional distress is an adverse consequence of such structural inequalities (Swartz, 1997). Within this context, psychosocial problems are prevalent, including stress, drug and alcohol abuse and dependency, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) family fragmentation, school truancy, conflict and violence including IPV, and the use of weapons (e.g., Gibson, 2004, cited in Lesch, 2006; London, 1999; May et al., 2000). Many people in the Western Cape participate in growing grapes and producing wine, and this has influenced regional drinking patterns (May et al., 2000). For several centuries, in partial payment for labour, wine was distributed among and consumed daily by farm workers in what is referred to as the "Dop" system (London, 1999). The "Dop" system has been made illegal by at least two legislative acts, but residual patterns of regular and heavy alcohol consumption by farm workers remain prevalent in low-income, semi/rural Western Cape communities. Additionally, increased availability of inexpensive commercial wine and beer in shebeens (illegal bars) has exacerbated problems of heavy drinking, and weekend binge drinking is a major form of recreation (May et al., 2000). It is, thus, not surprising that today semi/rural Western Cape communities are characterised by alcohol abuse and fetal alcohol syndrome. Alcohol consumption among farm workers in these communities is twice that of their urban counterparts (London, Nell, Tompson & Myers, 1998). Of the traumatic injuries seen at rural clinics almost half are related to alcohol – these rates are approximately 30% higher than those for urban residents in Cape Town (National Trauma Research Programme, 1994).

May and colleagues (2000), investigating FAS in a primarily 'Coloured' Western Cape Community (approximately one-fifth rural), documented the highest FAS rate to date in an overall community sample, some 18 to 141 times greater than the rates in the United States (compared with, for example, Abel & Sokol, 1991). All of the children with FAS in the study were 'Coloured', and within the 'Coloured' group, those with the lowest socio-economic status (SES) were overrepresented in the FAS cases. FAS was more common in rural than in urban schools. This may be reflective of increasing socio-economic resources among urban residents, or urban areas might simply provide escape from a heavy-drinking social environment. Accordingly, May and colleagues argue that residence on grape-growing, wine-producing farms is an important risk factor for FAS.

In sum, many semi/rural 'Coloured' communities in the Western Cape are characterised by extreme poverty, unemployment, poor or non-existent health and welfare facilities, inadequate or crowded housing, and extremely inadequate provision of education (e.g., Pauw, 2005). These communities have unique histories that are frequently characterised by specific psychosocial problems such as IPV, alcohol abuse, and FAS.

Another important factor to consider in the context of low-income, semi-rural Western Cape farming communities is that of gender. While there are wide-ranging changes regarding gender equity at a political level, the gap between constitutional and legal change and women's lived realities has also been widely recognised (e.g., Gouws, 2005). The complex intersection between gender, 'race', class and other forms of historical and current inequality mean that the majority of South African women remain extremely poor, with limited access to political or material power. This complex intersection between gender, 'race', and class can be seen in the societal position of female farm workers in the Western Cape who are primarily 'Coloured' and have limited income. As a group they hold a particularly marginalised and powerless position in South African society (Kritzinger & Vorster, 1998).

The following demographic information regarding female farm workers is cited from a study by Kritzinger and Vorster (1995, cited in Kritzinger & Vorster, 1998) conducted between 1994 and 1995 (it must be noted, therefore, that these conditions may have changed significantly in the past few years, but more recent data could not be located): Most female farm workers in fruit farming were 'Coloured', Afrikaans-speaking, and between the ages of 20 and 40 years. While 75% of women had seven years of schooling or less, one-fifth reported illiteracy. The average age of women entering farm employment was 18 years. Almost half of female farm workers were married, 18% cohabited with a partner, and 34% were single (including 6% divorcees and widows). Most female farm workers had their first child between the ages of 16 and 20 years. The majority of female farm workers who had children reported that their first child was unplanned and that they were unmarried at the time of the child's birth. Most of the single women had children and lived with their parents.

'Coloured' female farm workers in particular have almost no independent access as workers to either employment or housing provided by the farm owner (Kritzinger & Vorster, 1995, cited in Kritzinger & Vorster, 1998). The female farm worker's employment and access to housing is dependent on her membership of a farm worker family or her relationship to a male farm worker (as a partner or child). When hiring male farm workers it is assumed or frequently explicitly stated that women are obligated

to work. In the case of the partner's or father's termination of employment, the woman is expected to leave the farm. Only rarely does the farm owner permit her to remain in employment and in such cases the female farm worker is expected to move out of the housing she shared with her partner or father and move in with another family. Housing is allocated to the male farm worker on the basis that he is the 'breadwinner' of his family.

Traditional gender roles and relations are still dominant in economically disadvantaged, historically disenfranchised Western Cape communities (Shefer et al., 2008). For example, in low-income farm worker households in the Western Cape, Knye, Ottermann and Alberts (1997) found that both men and women upheld traditional views of women's roles. Traditional notions of male dominance and female subservience are still evident, along with traditional gender roles that mandate a division of labour between the household (women's domain) and the paid workforce (men's domain). Women focus on the family and on domestic reproduction while men fulfill the traditional role of 'breadwinner'. Women are expected to be submissive to their male partners, and men are constructed as the primary decision-makers (Strebel et al., 2006). Churches are viewed as supportive of these traditional roles (Strebel et al., 2006), as is 'traditional culture', in that women are expected to obey men and to obtain permission from their male partners for their actions (Shefer et al., 2006). Family structures also reinforce the women's dependence on male partners, as women are often told to remain in abusive IHR for the sake of the family (Strebel et al., 2006).

Christian churches as social institutions are increasingly being challenged by feminism from within their own ranks (e.g., Goedhals, 1992). Saide and Van Aardt (1995) argue that Christian churches in South Africa reinforce gender stereotypes. Generally, this is done through theological views on the nature of women; and specifically by means of male-oriented leadership which characterises congregational and denominational structures. In a Reformed congregation, Swemmer, Kritzinger and Venter (1998) found that while both women and men recognised the importance of the role of husband and father, it was particularly men who appeared to hold this role in high esteem. The role of the father was conceptualised as protector of the family and as a role model for his children, in order that sons would learn how to be fathers and daughters would learn how to respect men. Women were seen to possess specific characteristics which enable them to fulfill their roles of mother and homemaker. Children and everything that affects them was the responsibility of women. Women's roles were held in less esteem than men's roles and women were expected to provide support for the man in the family. Women themselves tended to emphasise the man as the 'leader' of the household. Respondents in this



study frequently located their ideas about gender relations within the teachings of Christianity. For example, one male elder said the following (p. 169):

Ja, die man vervul eintlik nie sy rol nie, want hy is geroepe om die leier te wees. Die godsdienstige leier te wees. Dit staan so in die Bybel ook. Kyk, Adam was die eerste gebore. Die Bybel is eintlik gerig op die mans...die mans is die leiers. As jy lees Efesieërs 5 sê dat die man is die hoof van die huis.

There are several texts in the New Testament of the Bible that suggest that male dominance in marriage is ordained by God and hence is morally correct (Dowling, 1991). These texts affirm the subordination, dependence, and, in some cases, the inferiority of women. Paul's views have been especially influential in justifying what many twentieth-century Christians view as the God-given male dominance over women. For example, Paul writes: "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Corinthians 11: 8-9).

Related to the role divisions and power disparities of traditional gender roles is gender-based violence (Jewkes et al., 1999). Abrahams, Jewkes and Laubsher (1999) found that men who reported the abuse of female partners were younger, less educated, more likely to be 'Coloured', and more likely to consume alcohol and drugs. Such statistics indicate that low-income 'Coloured' communities that are characterised by heavy alcohol consumption (such as the population in the present study) are particularly at risk for IPV. Research respondents offer a number of explanations for such violence, some serving as rationalisation or justification. For instance, the discourse that women sometimes expect to be beaten, seeing it as a sign of love. This belief is especially evident in 'Coloured' communities (Shefer et al., 2008). Feminist discourses purport that traditional gender roles and male ownership of women facilitate men's sense of entitlement to beat their female partners (Strebel et al., 2006).

With the shifting power relations between men and women in present day South Africa, men are frequently viewed as being undermined by women and women are seen as responsible for men's loss of power (Shefer et al., 2008). Men report feeling disempowered and marginalised relative to women in their communities, or at least they embrace this narrative as a rationale for their resistance to the shifting power balance and resources for women. A common perception is that because men's power has been undermined by women, men would be physically violent towards their partners (Strebel et al., 2006). In other words, the rationale that is offered for IPV is one based on the combination of changing

gender roles and economic and social marginalisation of men. The belief that men have lost power and status is frequently intertwined with a ‘blaming’ discourse that it is women who have caused the disempowerment of men. Boonzaier (2005) suggests that men experience a crisis of masculinity when they perceive they are losing a gendered power advantage, which consequently elicits gender-based violence or at least they use such a discourse as an explanation for their violence. Therefore, violence is not only used to maintain dominance and control, but to counteract real or imagined threats to ‘manhood’ (Mager, 1998).

### **2.3 Relationship Satisfaction: Conceptual and Methodological Issues**

Marital satisfaction is a construct with a long but controversial history, variously labeled *marital satisfaction*, *marital quality*, *marital adjustment*, and *marital happiness* (Heyman, Sayers & Bellack, 1994). The central status afforded to marital satisfaction in relationship research became largely salient in two projects that are frequently recognised as establishing marital research as a field of empirical inquiry (Fincham & Beach, 2006): Terman and colleagues described a questionnaire study of 1,133 couples designed to identify the determinants of marital satisfaction in their 1938 book, *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness* (Terman, Bottenweiser, Ferguson, Johnson & Wilson, 1938). Similarly, in *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage*, Burgess and Cottrell (1939) reported a questionnaire study of 526 couples. In their attempt to identify correlates of marital satisfaction, both books are established as classic texts and report studies that became the prototypes for later research.

Recent progress in the field of relationship satisfaction has been characterised more by the addition of ideas in a given research area rather than by building upon, and where appropriate, discarding existing ideas. Although progress has been marked by the degree of sophistication in the questions that are asked and not solely by the systematic accumulation of empirical findings, cumulative growth in the field of relationship satisfaction is hindered by the tendency to supplement rather than supplant or even integrate hypotheses and ideas. “The apparent increase in breadth without a corresponding increase in depth may be part of the price that is paid for conducting research on a complex topic where research designs usually preclude strong inferences of causation” (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000, p. 975).

#### **2.3.1 Conceptual Issues**

A lack of adequate theory on relationship satisfaction has contributed to conceptual confusion, resulting in a large overlap of terms, such as adjustment, success, happiness, companionship, or “some synonym reflective of the quality of the relationship” being used interchangeably to refer to satisfaction

(Fincham & Beach, 2006, p. 581). Faced with conflicting views of relationship satisfaction, it is tempting to want to identify the “real” relationship satisfaction. However, such an endeavor is ultimately self-defeating. The number of options available for understanding relationship satisfaction each, when adequately described, have merit. In sum, different perspectives on relationship satisfaction should not be rivaled against each other, but rather referents and purposes for which each perspective may most be suited should be carefully specified (Fincham & Beach, 2006).

Two dominant approaches have been used to study relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 2006). The first approach views relationship quality as a characteristic of the IHR between partners rather than, or in addition to, the partners’ feelings about the IHR. Terms such as relationship/marital adjustment have been favoured by this approach. The other dominant approach focuses on how partners feel about their IHR. This approach, to which self-report appears to be better suited, has tended to prefer terms like relationship/marital satisfaction and relationship/marital happiness.

Research on relationship satisfaction has ignored a fundamental question that can be asked of several psychological constructs, namely, “Does relationship satisfaction reflect an underlying continuum or are there discontinuities in satisfaction?” (i.e., continuum or category?; Fincham & Beach, 2006). It is important to understand the underlying structure of relationship satisfaction for a number of reasons (Fincham & Beach, 2006): First of all, with regard to the plausibility of linear versus nonlinear models in the study of IHR, nonlinear models often imply discontinuities and if a continuous dimension underlies scores of relationship satisfaction, it might be taken as a strike against such theories. Secondly, if a variable that could legitimately be treated as a continuous variable is dichotomised, the resulting effect on statistical power is the same as removing more than a third of one’s sample. This is wasteful and has the potential to lead to type two errors. Third, one might question the validity of the distinction between therapy participants who have “recovered” and those who have not “recovered” following couple therapy, if indeed there is no point of discontinuity in relationship satisfaction. As such, there are both practical and theoretical reasons to address the latent structure of relationship satisfaction.

There have been important developments in the conceptualisation of relationship satisfaction in recent years. First, as is implied by the routine use of the term *nondistressed* to describe couples who are satisfied, there is a growing appreciation for the view that a satisfying IHR is not merely characterised by the absence of dissatisfaction (Bradbury et al., 2000). Factors that lead to IHR distress may not

simply be the inverse of the factors that lead to a satisfying IHR. Continuing interest in the attributes of long-term satisfying IHR (e.g., Kaslow & Robinson, 1996), discussion of the defining features of a good quality marriage (e.g., Halford, Kelly & Markman, 1997), and a growing emphasis on social behaviours such as social support in IHR (e.g., Cutrona, 1996), all point to a developing conception of IHR and relationship satisfaction in which the unique dimensions of dissatisfying and satisfying relationships are recognised.

Second, the conceptualising of relationship satisfaction as a global evaluation of the IHR has focused on a bipolar conceptualisation, with dissatisfaction reflecting an evaluation of the IHR in which negative features are salient and positive features are relatively absent, and satisfaction reflecting an evaluation in which positive features are salient and negative features are relatively absent (Bradbury et al., 2000). However, Fincham and colleagues have challenged this view on the basis that positive and negative evaluations in IHR can be conceptualised and measured as separate, but related dimensions (Fincham, Beach & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). Data used to capture this two-dimensional conception of relationship satisfaction indicate that the two dimensions have different correlates and account for unique variance in reported IHR behaviors and attributions. Such noteworthy work draws attention to the important but largely overlooked distinction between positive and negative dimensions of IHR.

A third important development in the conceptualisation of relationship satisfaction is the notion that relationship satisfaction is appropriately conceptualised as a trajectory that reflects fluctuations in relationship evaluations over time, and not simply as a judgment made by partners at one point in time (Bradbury et al., 2000). Advantages of this perspective include the encouragement of multiwave longitudinal research on IHR (where two-wave longitudinal designs have predominated; see Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and the encouragement of researchers to specify a model of IHR change (where two-wave longitudinal designs assume a simple linear model). The use of a trajectory-based view of relationship satisfaction is increasing (e.g., Cox, Paley, Burchinal & Payne, 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1997) and holds great promise for testing refined models of IHR change.

A fourth important development in the conceptualisation of relationship satisfaction is the application of a social-cognitive perspective (Bradbury et al., 2000). One example of this is the reconceptualisation of relationship satisfaction as an *attitude* toward the partner or IHR. The social-cognitive perspective has future value for offering new insights with regards to the correlates of relationship satisfaction, reactions to partner behaviour, and the impact of a variety of life contexts on relationship satisfaction.

As IHR is difficult to predict, measure, or define because of its complex and changing nature, so relationship satisfaction is an elusive construct that does not have a uniform definition (Heyman, Sayers & Bellack, 1994). Some relationship researchers have criticised the concept of relationship or marital satisfaction as being vague, ill-defined, and value-laden (e.g. Donohue & Ryder, 1982). According to Zuo (1992), marital satisfaction is the subjective feeling of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by married couples. Marital satisfaction refers to a spouse's personal experience of satisfaction or happiness with the marital relationship (Wolf, 1996). Similarly, Crawford (2002) defines marital satisfaction as an individual's subjective evaluation of the quality of the relationship. Relationship satisfaction has also been defined as "the extent to which both partners in the relationship are satisfied that it has fulfilled reasonable expectations and mutual needs" (Hunsley, Pinsent, Lefedvre, James-Tanner & Vito, 1995, cited in DeGenova, 2008, p. 175). Inherent in this definition is the recognition of individual differences in expectations and need requirements. Thus, what satisfies one couple might not satisfy another couple. In addition, it is important that *both* partners be satisfied for a relationship to be considered successful.

Researchers such as Fincham and Bradbury (1987) and Norton (1983) have defined marital satisfaction as spouses' global evaluations of their marriage. Accordingly, marital satisfaction focuses on spouses' subjective, affective experiencing of their own personal happiness and contentment with their close relationship. In accordance with this approach, the present study views relationship satisfaction as subjective, global evaluations of the relationship. The advantage of this approach is its conceptual simplicity (Fincham & Beach, 2006) and the problem of interpretation that crops up in many omnibus measures of relationship satisfaction is avoided. Its clear-cut interpretation also allows for the straightforward examination of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of relationship satisfaction. One criticism of this approach is the view that unidimensional, global scales, other than indicating that a couple is distressed or nondistressed, do not provide much information (Fowers, 1990). However, the conceptual clarity of this approach and the ease of measuring subjective, global evaluations of the IHR offer important advantages, and thus was chosen as the approach for the present study.

### **2.3.2 Methodological Issues**

An important feature of literature on relationship satisfaction is the almost exclusive focus on Western, and especially on North American, IHR (Fincham & Beach, 2006). Most studies have been conducted with middle-class White participants and a small number of these studies have used nationally

representative random samples (Bradbury, 1995). Thus, the extent to which their findings can be generalised to all IHR is open to question. In addition, most of the assessment instruments used to study relationship satisfaction have focused on only one particular IHR, that of marriage (Fincham & Beach, 2006). This emphasises the need to use assessment instruments with couples other than those whose partners are married. Furthermore, the majority of international studies includes only one partner of the IHR and generally do not assess both partners' perspectives (Bradbury, 1995).

Related to the conceptual confusion in the field is the difficulty in determining exactly what it is that most relationship satisfaction instruments actually measure. As Fincham and Beach (2006) write, "Most frequently, measures comprise a polyglot of items, and responses to them are not conceptually equivalent" (p. 581). Thus, not many measures of relationship satisfaction attend to the level at which responses are to be interpreted. Because of overlapping item content in measures of relationship satisfaction and measures of constructs examined in relation to it, knowledge of the correlates and determinants of relationship satisfaction include an unknown number of spurious findings (Fincham & Beach, 2006).

An advancement of the relationship satisfaction field in the past several years is the increasing rate at which longitudinal studies have been conducted and published (Bradbury, 1995). Up until 1995, 155 research studies had been published in which either marital quality or stability was predicted from other variables measured earlier in time (for a review of these studies see Karney & Bradbury, 1995). While longitudinal studies on relationship satisfaction offer a number of advantages over cross-sectional designs, longitudinal studies on this topic have encountered similar pitfalls of cross-sectional research as well as the following limitations (Bradbury, 1995):

First of all, regarding many of the samples studied, participants were somewhat diverse in the duration of their IHR, whether or not they were previously married, and whether or not they had children. Previous research has shown that these factors can influence IHR, and the failure to investigate their unique effects in longitudinal research may mask their importance. Secondly, although longitudinal studies examine IHR over a period of time, the bulk are limited (by design or by method of data analysis) to investigating how IHR change from one point in time to a second point in time. Although this approach offers several advantages over cross-sectional designs, estimations of change in IHR are probably quite limited to the degree that they rely on only two waves of data. Because more than two

waves of data are rarely collected or analysed simultaneously and because attrition tends to be high and nonrandom, the inferential power in longitudinal studies tends to be lower than desired.

## CHAPTER 3

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

#### 3.1 Introduction

The field of relationship satisfaction is a dynamic one, with a broad range of established and emerging topics within this field. Recent years have witnessed a vast number of papers published on a wide array of topics pertaining to relationship satisfaction. In their 2000 review, *Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review*, Bradbury and colleagues highlighted key conceptual and empirical advances in the field of marital satisfaction, with particular emphasis on:

- a. interpersonal processes operating within marriage, including affect, cognition, social support, behavioral patterning, physiology, and violence;
- b. the milieus within which marriages operate, including microcontexts (e.g., transitions, life stressors and the presence of children) and macrocontexts (e.g., perceived mate availability, economic factors); and
- c. the conceptualisation and measurement of marital satisfaction, including 2-dimensional, trajectory-based, and social-cognitive approaches (please note that has already been discussed in Chapter 2).

The impressive breadth and scope of work on relationship satisfaction demonstrates that research on this topic is not a literature unto itself but is dispersed over several overlapping, yet generally distinct, literatures. Relationship satisfaction has been addressed with vigor by scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Accordingly, the field of relationship satisfaction is a large and loosely organised field, and continues to expand rapidly in all directions. The ongoing high volume of activity in the field places a burden on relationship satisfaction scholars in that only a tenuous grasp of the depth and breadth of the field is to be had. Thus, periodic volumes that comprehensively but concisely describe current activities in the field of relationship satisfaction are urgently needed.

Recent research findings regarding the following areas of progress in understanding relationship satisfaction are presented next: (a) interpersonal processes in IHR, and (b) IHR processes in context (including microcontexts and macrocontexts). A great deal of attention has been given to evaluating the link between relationship satisfaction and interpersonal processes, while there has been comparatively less research on the contexts or milieus that may also influence relationship satisfaction.



### 3.2 Interpersonal Processes and Relationship Satisfaction

Interest in understanding the role of interpersonal processes in relationship satisfaction remains strong. Yet research has indicated that, despite some advances, these interpersonal processes are not easily studied and a comprehensive understanding of them is not yet within reach.

Pertaining to behavioural patterning, one of the best-documented findings in the relationship satisfaction field is that communication is a primary determinant of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Noller & Feeney, 2002). Studies have shown that the communication of satisfied couples is different from that of unsatisfied couples, in terms of both specific behaviours and of patterns or sequences of interaction (Whisman, 1997). Foremost among these is the demand-withdraw pattern (e.g., Caughlin & Huston, 2002). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal observational studies have demonstrated that communication, when explored systematically, is consistently and significantly related to couple's relationship satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005).

With regards to cognition, major developments in the literature on partners' attributions include evidence for the association between explanations for relationship events and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fincham, 2000), elaboration of the internal structure and organisation of attributions and other cognitive factors (e.g., Fincham, 2001), and additional longitudinal data relating attributions with relationship deterioration (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 2000). Indeed, "the evidence for an association between attribution and marital satisfaction is overwhelming, making it possibly the most robust, replicable phenomenon in the study of marriage" (Fincham, 2001, p.7).

There has been a dramatic surge in research on the role of affect in relationship satisfaction and there is now reasonably clear evidence that affect is an essential factor to consider in accounting for the variability in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Holm, Werner-Wilson, Cook & Berger, 2001; Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). However, this association requires clarification because some studies indicate, for example, that negative affect hinders relationship satisfaction, whereas other studies indicate that it promotes relationship satisfaction or is unrelated to it (see Gottman & Notarius, 2000 for a discussion). Bradbury and colleagues (2000) contend that:

Definitive statements about the role of affect in eroding or supporting marital satisfaction await refinements in the conceptual underpinnings of affect-related constructs and in the methods used to observe emotional expressions and to discern their effects on marriage over time. (p. 966)

Occurring largely in conjunction with the growing emphasis on affect in the relationship satisfaction field is the increased research on physiological concomitants of interaction (for a review see Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). Physiological changes associated with relationship functioning have long-term implications for health outcomes (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). For instance, several recent studies have shown marital dissatisfaction to be associated with morbidity and mortality (e.g., Coyne et al., 2001; Kimmel et al. 2000; Orth-Gomer et al., 2000).

Although support processes in IHR have long been a topic of interest, the topic has recently been addressed with increased vigor. Partner support has been consistently linked with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Lorenz, Hraba & Pechacova, 2004; Xu & Burlison, 2004). A noteworthy feature of recent research on partner support is the utilisation of methods such as observational and daily diary methods, allowing for more detailed exploration of potentially supportive interactions (Bradbury et al., 2000).

Important research has been conducted on relationship satisfaction and IPV (e.g., Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward & Tritt, 2004; Williams & Frieze, 2005). Low levels of relationship satisfaction have been one of the most frequently examined relational risk markers for IPV (e.g., Riggs, Caulfield & Street, 2000; Schumacher, Slep & Heyman, 2001). For example, in a meta-analytic review of marital satisfaction as a risk factor for IPV, Stith, Green, Smith and Ward (2008) found a significant negative relationship between marital satisfaction and IPV. Decreased relationship satisfaction can also be a consequence of IPV (e.g., Katz, Kuffel & Coblenz, 2002; Williams & Frieze, 2005). While it is not always possible to clarify whether low relationship satisfaction leads to IPV or whether low relationship satisfaction results from experiencing or perpetrating IPV, most research finds a relationship to exist.

### **3.3 Context and Relationship Satisfaction**

Despite the widespread view that “the stuff and substance of an interpersonal relationship is the behavioral interaction between the partners” (Berscheid, 1995, p. 531), a number of scholars purport that the meaning and implications of behavioural interaction cannot be fully understood without taking into account the broader context in which those interactions occur.

### **Microcontexts**

Children feature prominently in how IHR are experienced by couples and many studies have examined the link between relationship satisfaction and children (e.g., Cowan & Cowan, 1999). This literature is discussed in section 3.5 as it is particularly relevant to the present study.

Stressors external to the IHR frequently affect the way partners evaluate their relationship satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2004). Although an oversimplification of a large and complex literature, research on relationship environments generally tends to address either: discrete, often traumatic events; work-related and economic stressors; or the total set of events and stressors to which couples might be exposed. The traumatic events that have been examined in relation to relationship satisfaction are numerous and range, for example, from child illness or death (e.g., Reysn, 2005) to cancer (e.g., Tuinman, Fler, Sleijfer, Hoekstra & Hoekstra-Weebers, 2005) to in vitro fertilisation (e.g., Verhaak et al., 2001). There is a large body of research on the links between marital satisfaction and job characteristics (e.g., Lloyd, King & Chenoweth, 2002) and economic or work stress (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2004).

### **Macrocontexts**

It is important to consider that there are more encompassing, relatively slow-changing factors that have the potential to influence, to varying degrees, entire cohorts of couples, for instance, broader social conditions and institutions. Recent work indicates that relationship satisfaction can covary with aspects of these broader contexts. Such aspects include, amongst others, mate availability or perceived mate availability (e.g., Trent & South, 2003), acculturation (e.g., Kallampally, 2005), and neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage (e.g., Cutrona et al., 2003). For example, Negy and Snyder (1997) found that ratings of higher acculturation among Mexican American couples were related to lower levels of marital satisfaction for wives but unrelated to the relationship satisfaction of husbands.

Consistent with the family stress model (e.g., Conger & Elder, 1994), Cutrona et al. (2003) found that family financial strain predicted lower marital quality. Unexpectedly, neighbourhood-level economic disadvantage predicted higher marital quality. Two potential explanations were offered for this result: It is possible that married couples in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are better off financially than their neighbours. Downward comparison with their neighbours may engender positive emotions that favourably influence married couples' evaluations of their marriages. A second possible explanation involved the degree of exposure to racial discrimination. Two recent studies found that, among

African-Americans, exposure to discrimination is positively related to SES and education level (Kessler, Mickelson & Williams, 1999; Sigelman & Welch, 1991). Sigelman and Welch (1991) suggested that higher SES and education leads to more frequent interactions outside the African-American community, which are, in turn, linked with higher exposure to discrimination. Consequently, marital satisfaction may be negatively influenced by psychological stress due to exposure to racial discrimination (Murry, Brown, Brody, Cutrona & Simons, 2001).

Of particular interest in recent research are links between relationship satisfaction and various aspects of religiosity (e.g., Asamarai, Solberg & Solon, 2008), and also in how relationship satisfaction is related to couples' participation in religious practices and institutions (e.g., Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Literature on religiosity and church attendance is discussed in section 3.5 as these variables are also particularly relevant to the present study.

At least as important as mere exposure to these macrocontext factors, is how people understand these factors as well as the extent to which they engage the relevant institutions (Bradbury et al., 2000). For example, perceptions of mate availability versus actual mate availability and spiritual activity versus religious identity. Consequently, there are most likely noteworthy differences in how different persons and couples respond to otherwise identical milieu or the related experiences they have had (Bradbury et al., 2000).

### **3.4 Gender and Relationship Satisfaction**

#### **3.4.1 Emergence of Interest in Marital Satisfaction and Gender**

There appears to be differential meanings of contemporary marriage and other partnerships for men and women. Jessie Bernard (1972) argued that there are two marriages in every marital union, "his" and "hers", and that his is better than hers. The costs that the differences in this his-and-her marriage imposed on women's well-being were emphasised by Bernard. Glenn (1975) countered Bernard's claims with data indicating that husbands and wives had equivalent marital satisfaction scores. Bernard (1975) disputed Glenn's interpretations of that data, highlighting the overwhelming research literature on the mental health and mental illness of *married* women. Subsequent studies generally provided support for Bernard's claim (e.g., Gove, Hughes & Style, 1983). More recently, Fowers (1991) argued

that when Glenn (1975) cited national data to support his argument (of no gender difference<sup>1</sup> in marital satisfaction scores) he is dealing with average scores. Thus, his observations are valid but for the population at large.

In an attempt to reconcile the two positions, Schumm, Jurich, Bollman and Bugaighis (1985) using a sample of nearly 200 couples found that, although overall marital satisfaction scores did not vary significantly by gender, when one spouse was much less satisfied than the other, it was much more frequently the wife. At that time, Schumm et al. (1985) believed that the issue had been resolved, with Glenn found to be correct from a macrosociological perspective and Bernard found to be correct regarding the internal dynamics of a minority of marriages.

However, Fowers (1991), using a much larger sample of over 1,000 couples, replicated Schumm et al.'s (1985) study and found a significant difference in marital satisfaction related to gender. In his article entitled *His and her marriage: A multivariate study of gender and marital satisfaction* Fowers (1991) examined gender differences in marital satisfaction using the multidimensional marital inventory ENRICH (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1982). Contrary to previous research up until this point in time (e.g., Glen, 1975; Johnson, White, Edwards & Booth, 1986; Kazak, Jarmas & Snitzer, 1988; Williams, 1988), the results indicated that men were somewhat more satisfied with their marriages than women. Fowers (1991) found husbands to be more satisfied with their marriage than wives across a variety of relationship dimensions. Fowers' (1991) article reopened the debate because his data indicated that, on average, women were scoring lower on marital satisfaction (and other aspects of marital quality) than their husbands. Hence some family theorists, especially those who utilise feminist perspectives, might interpret such results as an indication that women are disadvantaged within the institution of marriage in the United States (Fowers, 1991).

### **3.4.2 Gender Differences in Relationship Satisfaction: A Review of the Research**

Empirical research on gender differences in relationship satisfaction has been underway for a number of decades. Gender has been recognised as an important, but poorly understood influence on relationship satisfaction (Glenn, 1990; Heppner, Kivlighan & Wampold, 1992; Larson & Holman,

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<sup>1</sup> On the basis that *gender differences*, rather than *sex differences* is the term most commonly used by researchers when examining the discrepancy in relationship satisfaction between men and women, *gender differences* is the term used in the present study. However, literature searches included both terms so as not to omit any relevant findings.

1994). Historically, there have been inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction.

A number of researchers have suggested that gender may exert an important influence on relationship satisfaction, but reports of *how* gender functions with regard to relationship satisfaction vary. Although several researchers have found that men tend to describe their relationship more positively than women (e.g., Markman & Hahlweg, 1993), Feeny, Noller and Ward (1997) found no gender differences in marital satisfaction in their study of 355 married couples. Likewise, other researchers who found no relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction include Fincham and Grych (1991), Howell (1998), Molina (2000), and Moore, McCabe and Brink (2001).

In a turnaround of findings, King (2005) found women to report higher levels of marital satisfaction than men. However, this study was limited in that it did not utilise couples as its unit of analysis. Although King's finding is unexpected and stands in contrast to the usual findings, it is consistent with other research. For example, in Karney and Bradbury's (1995) meta-analysis of 115 articles on the longitudinal course of marital quality and stability, they found wives' satisfaction consistently reported to be equal to or even higher than that of their husbands. This shift in research findings may point toward societal changes that have given wives increasingly more options (Bradbury et al., 2000) and that have moved toward more equalisation of opportunities for women, giving wives more avenues for finding contributors to their sense of identity (Koehne, 2000).

However, research has historically shown male partners to be more satisfied with their IHR than their female partners (e.g., Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Rogers & Amato, 2000; Walker, 1999). Some researchers argue that, although gender differences in relationship satisfaction have been found, most previous studies of gender and relationship satisfaction have not been based on nationally representative samples.

In order to investigate this argument, Schumm, Webb and Bollamn (1998) used a nationally representative sample to explore gender differences in marital satisfaction. Within-couple analyses revealed an overall gender effect (at the 0.001 significance level), with wives significantly less satisfied than their husbands with their marriage. Marriages with substantial differences in reported marital satisfaction represented only 7% of the couples. However, within that minority of couples, there were more dissatisfied wives than husbands, lending support to the notion of a "his and hers" marriage

phenomenon within that minority of couples. Results of this study suggest that findings of gender differences in relationship satisfaction in previous studies were not artifacts of sample selection but may indeed generalise to the entire population of United States couples. Such results provide at least some minimal support for feminist assertions regarding the inequities of marriage that work against the marital satisfaction and possibly also the well-being of women (e.g., Bernard 1972; Steil, 1997). Conversely, the substantial research showing a non-significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and gender might well be argued by non-feminist scholars to be an indication that feminist anxieties about the inequalities of marriage or IHR are unfounded. Deciding among such differential perspectives may depend on how much influence such small relationships of relationship satisfaction and gender might have over extended periods of time across the life cycles of many millions of IHR.

Even in the most recent of years, whereas some studies have found significant gender differences in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Mickelson, Claffey & Williams, 2006; Williams & Frieze, 2005), others have failed to detect any overall differences between men and women in the absolute level of reported relationship satisfaction (e.g., Kito, 2005; Shi, 2003; Weisfeld & Stack, 2002). However, where gender differences within relationship satisfaction have been found, in almost all cases it was women who experienced lower relationship satisfaction than men (e.g., Dillaway & Broman, 2001). For example, studying the change in marital satisfaction scores (using four different measures) over the first four years of marriage, Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that wives were less satisfied with marriage at all eight times of data collection.

Consistent with much data reported in the West (e.g., Fowers, 1991), women have reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction than men in a number of countries other than the United States, for example, China (e.g., Lu, 2006; Shek, 1995; Shek & Tsang, 1993) and Taiwan (e.g., Shen, 2002). However, in a Turkish study (Hamamci, 2005), no relationship between gender and marital satisfaction was found. The findings of a multicultural, multi-country (Canada, Germany, Israel, Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, USA, and Chile) study on long-term marriages indicate that, generally, men reported greater marital satisfaction than women (Roizblatt et al., 1999).

In sum, international findings on gender differences within relationship satisfaction have been inconsistent. Furthermore, a review of the literature reveals that we know very little about the relationship between gender differences in relationship satisfaction and the duration of the IHR (Shek, 1995). For example, are the benefits of IHR for men cumulative in nature?

### 3.4.3 Potential Explanations for Inconsistencies in Findings

Most studies to date have been limited in terms of generalisability because they did not sample couples (Schumm, Webb, et al., 1998). Schumm and colleagues argue that the relationship of gender with relationship satisfaction in previous studies was not an artifact of sample selection but may indeed generalise to the entire population of United States couples.

Reports of relationship satisfaction are very likely affected by social desirability and, thus, the fact that a rather large majority of persons say that they are “very satisfied” in their relationships is not to be taken at face value (Schumm, Milliken, Poresky, Bollman, & Jurich, 1983). A sex difference in response bias seems more likely in the case of reported relationship satisfaction (Schumm, Milliken, et al., 1983), since admission of relationship failure might typically be a greater ego threat to females than to males (Cross & Madson, 1997).

Another potential explanation might be that small sample sizes and/or inadequate measurement did not allow the detection of gender differences in relationship satisfaction (Fowers, 1991). For example, the lack of significant gender differences in previous studies of relationship satisfaction may be due to the use of brief (often single-item) unidimensional measures of relationship satisfaction (Fowers, 1991). The practice of using single-item measures of relationship satisfaction has been criticised given that such measures account for less than 50% of the variance in longer, better validated measures (Donohue & Ryder, 1982; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). While the employment of a single item to assess relationship satisfaction has the advantage of convenience, its reliability cannot be assessed. Prior to 1991, Fowers (1991) found that only one study that did not find significant gender differences in marital satisfaction used a well-validated measure of marital satisfaction (see Schumm et al., 1985). “Given the generally poor quality of measurement, it is not surprising that these studies have not found differences in the way that men and women experience marriage” (Fowers, 1991, p. 211). Thus, the lack of findings pertaining to significant gender differences in relationship satisfaction could in some cases be an artifact of the use of single-item and/or low-quality measurement.

Some researchers argue that patterns of change in reported relationship satisfaction might be a product of different methods utilised by researchers (Whisman, 1997). It has been noted that a variety of instruments have been utilised to measure relationship satisfaction and perhaps differences in item content might partially explain the inconsistent results pertaining to the relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction (Shek, 1995). Whether such differential reports in relationship satisfaction



by gender are an artifact of measurement issues (female partners might evaluate relationships against different standards than their male counterparts; Schumm, Bollman & Jurich, 1997) or of the nature of IHR in society remains to be explored.

### **3.5 Demographic and Relationship Variables and Relationship Satisfaction**

The main assumption of the demographic approach is that relationship satisfaction is associated with personal demographic variables, relationship demographic variables, and child-related variables (Raschke, 1987, cited in Kurdek, 1998). These variables are discussed in the following section:

#### **Socio-economic status and relationship satisfaction**

According to the demographic approach, persons who are young, not well-educated, and unemployed or poorly paid (personal demographic risk factors) may perceive few rewards from their IHR, perceive many costs to their IHR, and generate unattainable standards for their IHR because they are ill-equipped to perform relationship roles and because stressful changes are imminent in their IHR. Most international literature on relationship satisfaction and educational attainment indicates that, when a significant relationship is found between these two variables, the relationship is a positive one. In other words, the higher the educational attainment, the higher the relationship satisfaction (e.g., Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999).

Researchers frequently find that low-income couples experience less relationship satisfaction than couples with higher income (e.g., Dakin & Wampler, 2008). Indeed, two recent state surveys in the United States reported that low-income persons were more likely to have low-quality, unsatisfying relationships (Karney, Garvan & Thomas, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). Similarly, Rautenbach (1994) found income level to have a significant influence on the level of marital satisfaction in the South African context. Economic stress can include emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses that affect the IHR, for example, increased partner hostility and decreased partner warmth (Freeman, Carlson & Sperry, 1993).

Being poor or near poor brings with it a host of factors that place enormous stress on IHR: chronic shortage of money; accumulating debts; high rates of unemployment; low levels of literacy; substance abuse; incarceration; IPV; depression; poor housing; unsafe neighbourhoods (Ooms, 2002; Seefeldt & Smock, 2004). For instance, Dakin and Wampler (2008) found that low-income predicted less marital satisfaction. A demographic comparison of low- and middle-income couples revealed that low-income

couples had significantly less education and were less likely to have full-time employment. Both partners were less likely to have full-time employment. The low-income group was also younger in age and had not been in their IHR as long as the middle-income couples.

Recent research on the relationship dynamics of low-income couples indicates that certain issues may hinder satisfying IHR. For example, some unmarried parents set an “economic bar” as a precondition for marriage that may be unrealistically high (Dion, 2005). Low-income couples may also struggle with issues of trust, commitment, and fidelity (Gibson-Davis, Edin & McLanahan, 2005). The prevalence of trauma such as childhood sexual abuse may be higher among disadvantaged persons and may contribute to difficulty in forming satisfying IHR (Cherlin et al., 2003). Research has found that whether they are married or not, low-income couples frequently struggle with issues related to having children by multiple partners (Mincy, 2002). Compared with the general population, lower-income couples tend to be members of minorities and come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Fein, 2004).

### **Age and relationship satisfaction**

A review of the recent literature reveals that a non-significant relationship is generally found between relationship satisfaction and age (e.g., Brezsnayak & Whisman, 2004; Imhonde, Aluede & Ifunanyachukwu, 2008). Similarly, in the South African context, Van Rooyen (1996) found that marital satisfaction did not vary significantly according to age. There has been little research on the link between age at cohabitation and the relationship satisfaction of cohabiting couples. Likewise, there has also been little recent research on age at marriage and marital satisfaction – the majority of research on age at marriage is conducted in relation to marital stability. One of the few studies conducted found a non-significant relationship between age at marriage and marital satisfaction (see Bahr, Chappell & Leigh, 1983).

### **Religiosity and relationship satisfaction**

Researchers have consistently found religiosity to be associated with higher relationship satisfaction (e.g., Hünler & Gençöz, 2005). Religion influences relationship satisfaction directly by fostering a variety of relationship-related norms, values and social supports, which in turn promote greater investments in the IHR, discourage harmful behaviour to the IHR, and encourage partners to adopt a positive view of their IHR (Christiano, 2000; Wilcox, 2004). For instance, Mahoney et al. (1999) found marital satisfaction to be predicted by perceptions of the sacred qualities of one’s marriage.

A strong positive relationship between relationship satisfaction and church attendance has been well-documented in previous research (e.g., Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank & Murray-Swank, 2003; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). The rituals associated with church attendance may heighten partners' sense of solidarity with one another and their commitment to pro-marriage norms (Durkheim, 1995; Mahoney et al., 2003), contributing to relationship satisfaction. Religious rituals may provide couples with meaning, strength, and direction in navigating the challenges and opportunities of couple life (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008).

### **Previous marriages and relationship satisfaction**

According to the demographic approach outlined by Raschke (1987, cited in Kurdek, 1998) relationship demographic variables include factors such as previous marriages (i.e., divorce history). Individuals in IHR following divorce may have low thresholds for relational costs and high thresholds for relational rewards (Booth & Edwards, 1992). However, researchers typically find few differences in the marital satisfaction of couples in first marriages and those in remarriages (e.g., Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Kitson & Holmes, 1992).

### **Relationship status and relationship satisfaction**

A substantial amount of recent research has found that cohabiting couples are significantly less satisfied with their IHR than married couples (e.g., Brown & Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995; Skinner, Bahr, Crane & Call, 2002). Researchers (e.g., Thomson & Colella, 1992) have argued that there is a selection effect into cohabitation, with couples that are less committed to their IHR or less confident in the success of their IHR being attracted to cohabitation. However, a study by Willets (2006) compared long-term cohabiting couples (cohabiting for a minimum of four years) with married couples and found a non-significant difference in relationship satisfaction.

### **Relationship duration and relationship satisfaction**

Pertaining to relationship duration, longitudinal examination of marital duration across a number of studies reveals that marriages tend to become less satisfying with time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In other words, there is a negative relationship between these two variables. Consistent with Markman and Hahlweg (1993), in a longitudinal study Kurdek (1998) found that the marital satisfaction of husbands and wives decreased over the first six years of marriage. Contrary to international findings, Rudnick and Pretorius (1997) found a non-significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and relationship duration in the South African context.

### **Reason for marriage and relationship satisfaction**

There has also been limited research on marital satisfaction and reason for marriage. A South African study by Ramphal (1991) found non-significant differences in the reasons for marriage between happily married women and unhappily married women.

### **Children and relationship satisfaction**

Children feature prominently in how IHR are experienced by couples and a many studies have examined the link between relationship satisfaction and children (e.g., Cowan & Cowan, 1999). A recent meta-analysis by Twenge, Campbell and Foster (2003) found: parents to experience lower marital satisfaction compared to nonparents (also see Faulkner, Davey & Davey, 2005); a negative relationship between marital satisfaction and number of children (also see Willetts, 2006); the difference in marital satisfaction was most pronounced among mothers of infants (38% of mothers of infants had high marital satisfaction compared to 62% of childless women); the effect of parenthood on marital satisfaction was more negative among high socioeconomic groups, younger birth cohorts, and in more recent years. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that decreases in marital satisfaction following the birth of a child are due to role conflicts and restriction of freedom.

## **3.6 South African Research on Relationship Satisfaction**

The volume of relationship literature from South African studies cannot be compared to that of international literature and, accordingly, South African researchers often draw on international relationship research. South African relationship research is still in its early years of development. A literature search on relationship satisfaction in South Africa revealed 57 studies since 1990 that have either focused on relationship satisfaction as the main variable or included relationship satisfaction as one of several variables.

### **3.6.1 Areas of Focus in South African Relationship Satisfaction Research**

#### **Individual traits and behaviours**

South African research has investigated the link between mental health and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Young, 1992). Specifically, a number of researchers have assessed the relationship between postpartum depression and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Sheldon, 1992; Lacock, 1992; Spangenberg & Pieters, 1991). Certain aspects of physical health have also been focused on (e.g., Van der Poel & Greeff, 2003; Hofmeyr & Greeff, 2002). Other individual traits and behaviours explored in relation to

relationship satisfaction have been emotional intelligence (e.g., Bricker, 2005) and stress management strategies (e.g., Smith, 1994).

### **Couple interactional processes**

Much research has explored the relationship between relationship processes and relationship satisfaction in the South African context. These include conflict management style (e.g., Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000), intimacy (e.g., Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Steyn, 1992), communication (e.g., Hofmeyr & Greeff, 2002; Steyn, 1992), and self-disclosure (e.g., Greeff & Le Roux, 1998). The interactions of partners' variables have been investigated in relation to relationship satisfaction. Such variables include couple attachment style groupings (e.g., Naude, 1996), sex-role identity types (Prinsloo, 2004), and lovestyles (Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997). Relationship satisfaction has also been linked with contentment with the use of leisure time (e.g., Viljoen & Greeff, 2002), sexual satisfaction (e.g., Gous, 2001; Hofmeyr & Greeff, 2002), IPV (Singh, 2003), and power in IHR (Small & Mynhardt, 1998).

### **Background and contextual factors**

A number of studies have examined relationship satisfaction within the family functioning context (e.g., Barkema, 1990; Greeff, 2000; Lowe, 2006). For example, Groenewald (2006) examined the relationship between the level of marital satisfaction of married couples in their middle adult years and their family-of-origin factors. Researchers have also studied the interplay between work and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Froneman, 1991; Narayan 2005; Van Rooyen, 1996), and variables such as stressors (e.g., Rautenbach, 1994) and social support (e.g., Pretorius, 1997).

### **Applied research**

Research has also been conducted in order to inform practice, in other words, applied research like marital preparation (e.g., Duncan, 2000), marital accompaniment (e.g., Alpaslan, 1991; Babedi, 2003), and marital enrichment programmes (e.g., Language, 1998; Prinsloo, 2005). These studies have used relationship or marital satisfaction as a marker to assess how effective the programmes were.

### **3.6.2 Participants in South African Relationship Satisfaction Research**

Similar to international research, most participants in South African research on relationship satisfaction have been married adults (e.g., Gous, 2001; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Naude, 1996; Smith, 1994; Steyn, 1992; Van der Poel & Greeff, 2003; Viljoen & Greeff, 2002). Very few studies

included unmarried participants (e.g., Prinsloo, 2004) and only one study included dating adolescents (see De Villiers, 2006).

The diversity of the South African population has not been well represented, as most studies have sampled White participants (e.g., Prinsloo, 2004; Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997; Spangenberg & Pieters, 1991; Wiggins, 1994). Exceptions include Greeff and De Bruyne (2000), Lacock (1992), Radebe (1994), and Sithole (1992), who sampled Black participants. In a mixed representation, De Villiers (2006) sampled White, Black, and 'Coloured' participants, comparing them in terms of relationship satisfaction.

The majority of studies include participants that are described as middle-class (e.g., Bricker, 2005; Groenewald, 2006; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Small & Mynhardt, 1998; Wiggins, 1994; Young, 1992), with very few including participants of lower SES (e.g., Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000; MacDonald, 1993). Generally, relationship satisfaction research in South Africa has been conducted on urban populations (e.g., De Villiers, 2006; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Prinsloo, 2004; Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997; Sithole, 1992), and to a lesser extent, on suburban populations (e.g., Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000; Prinsloo & Prinsloo, 2004). Only one study was found that included participants from rural areas (as well as urban areas; Spangenberg & Pieters, 1991).

However, contrary to international research, more often than not, South African research on relationship satisfaction has sampled couples (e.g., Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Möller & Van Zyl, 1991; Steyn, 1992; Viljoen & Greeff, 2002; Wiggins, 1994) rather than individuals (e.g., Froneman, 1991; Lowe, 2006; Narayan, 2005; Ramphal, 1991).

### **3.6.3 Methodologies in South African Relationship Satisfaction Research**

The majority of South African research on relationship satisfaction has employed quantitative methodology. Most studies have been correlational and cross-sectional in nature, and have used self-report questionnaires to collect data (e.g., Bricker, 2005; Gous, 2001; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Naude, 1996; Pretorius, 1997; Prinsloo, 2004; Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997; Smith, 1994). However, in some cases quasi-experimental or experimental designs have been used (e.g., Hofmeyr & Greeff, 2002; Van der Poel & Greeff, 2003).

There have been a number of self-report questionnaires used to measure relationship satisfaction in the South African context, including:

- Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS: Spanier, 1976; e.g., Basson, 1992; Dinna, 2005; Lambrecht, 1993; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Möller & Van Zyl, 1991; Pretorius, 1997; Prinsloo, 2004; Prinsloo, 2005; Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997; Small & Mynhardt, 1998; Smith, 1994) and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS: Busby, Crane, Larson & Christiansen, 1995; e.g., Gous, 2001);
- ENRICH marital satisfaction subscale (Olson et al., 1985; e.g., Greeff, 2000; Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Hofmeyr & Greeff, 2002; Van der Poel & Greeff, 2003; Viljoen & Greeff, 2002);
- Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS: Cheung & Hudson, 1982; e.g., Emanuel, 1992; Prinsloo & Prinsloo, 2004; Wiggins, 1994);
- Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS: Schumm et al., 1986; e.g., Dinna, 2005; Prinsloo & Prinsloo, 2004);
- Marital Adjustment Test (MAT: Locke & Wallace, 1959; e.g., Groenewald, 2006; Young, 1992);
- Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R: Snyder, 1997; e.g., Bricker, 2005);
- Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ: Lazarus, 1985; e.g., Barkema, 1990; De Villiers, 1990; Spangenberg & Pieters, 1991);
- Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS: Roach, Frazier & Bowden, 1981; e.g., Greeff & Le Roux, 1998);
- Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS: Hendrick, 1988; e.g., De Villiers, 2006);

Only a handful of relationship satisfaction studies have employed either qualitative methodology (e.g., Marais, 2003; Radebe, 1994) or combined quantitative and qualitative methodology (e.g., Prinsloo, 2002; Prinsloo & Prinsloo, 2004; Small & Mynhardt, 1998). Data collection using qualitative methodology has included observation, interviews, and focus groups (e.g., Prinsloo & Prinsloo, 2004).

### **3.6.4 Findings from South African Relationship Satisfaction Research**

#### **Levels of relationship satisfaction**

Similar to international trends, levels of relationship satisfaction in South African community samples have generally been found to be satisfactory (on average) and have been reported in a number of

different contexts (e.g., Alpaslan, 1991; De Beer, 1990; Wiggins, 1994), albeit usually with middle-class participants. An explanation of why couples are generally found to be satisfied with their IHR includes fewer barriers to leaving the relationship. Because divorce removes unsatisfied couples from the married population, existing marriages may be of a higher quality now than in the past. Furthermore, increases in married women's employment, income, and education have raised women's status and provided wives with greater decision-making power, thereby increasing the potential for less patriarchal and more egalitarian marital relationships (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003). This may be the case for Western middle and high SES women, but less so for many women in the South African context (e.g., Shefer et al., 2008) whose access to employment, income, and education is still limited to varying degrees (e.g., Kritzinger & Vorster, 1998).

### **Gender and relationship satisfaction**

Existing studies of gender differences in relationship satisfaction have largely been conducted in Western societies and there have been few attempts to date to examine this issue in the South African context. In most cases, the relationship between relationship satisfaction and gender was found to be non-significant (e.g., Greeff & Le Roux, 1998; Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Mathews, 2003; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Möller & Van Zyl, 1991; Rudnick & Pretorius, 1997), with only a few exceptions (e.g., Marr, 1985; Radebe, 1994). Interestingly, Dinna (2005) found non-significant gender differences for couples in arranged marriages. Pertaining to the above findings, the potential gender difference in relationship satisfaction was frequently not a specific objective of the study (with the exception of: Greeff & Le Roux, 1998; Mathews, 2003). Thus, the role of gender in relationship satisfaction has rarely been *explicitly* investigated in South African research. From the cross-cultural perspective, the lack of related South African research data would motivate one to ask whether gender differences in relationship satisfaction would also exist in South African contexts, and whether such differences would be similar to those observed in Western culture.

### **3.7 Summary of Chapter**

In this chapter, recent international research on relationship satisfaction and interpersonal processes, and on relationship satisfaction and various contexts, has been reviewed. The complicated relationship between gender and relationship satisfaction has been discussed, and potential explanations for inconsistencies in findings regarding this relationship have been offered. Recent research (both international and South Africa) on the link between relationship satisfaction and demographic and relationship variables has been reviewed, with a particularly in-depth look at SES.



Although marital satisfaction is one of the most commonly researched areas in South African relationship research (Conradie, 2006), the field is in its early stages. Participants in relationship satisfaction research in South Africa are most frequently married, White, middle-class, and living in urban areas. In consideration of this, the sample in the present study offers a number of advantages in that it includes 'Coloured', low-income, semi-rural, and both married and unmarried participants. Participants in South African research have generally been found to be satisfied with their IHR, however, samples have not been representative of different South African populations (e.g., non-White, low SES). Furthermore, gender differences in relationship satisfaction are often not explicit objectives in research. It is argued that the present study contributes new information to the relationship satisfaction field in South Africa in the contexts of 'race', SES, and gender.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

#### **4.1 Objectives of the Present Study**

##### **Primary research objective**

The primary research objective was to explore the relationship satisfaction of heterosexual couples in committed intimate relationships in one low-income, semi-rural Western Cape community. Because of the lack of research (and specifically the lack of relationship research) in such communities, and hence the exploratory nature of the present study, no predictions were made prior to data collection.

##### **Specific research objectives**

Specific research objectives included exploring the levels of relationship satisfaction of couples and examining potential gender differences in these data. Additional objectives included the investigation of the relationships between relationship satisfaction and demographic and relationship variables. Demographic variables included: age, educational attainment, religious status (and partner's perception of), church affiliation, church attendance, employment, income, and sharing of bedroom and bed at night. Relationship variables included: relationship status (type of relationship), relationship duration, age at commencement of current relationship status, previous marriages, number of significant relationships in one's lifetime, reason for marriage (married couples) or for marriage in the future (unmarried couples), and children-related variables.

##### **Secondary research objectives**

There were two secondary research objectives in the present study: firstly, to explore the reliability of the relationship satisfaction measures in order to evaluate their appropriateness for the specific sample studied; and second, to investigate the convergent validity of the three relationship satisfaction measures. Convergent validity was also computed in order to evaluate the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale's (of the DAS) performance as an independent measure of relationship satisfaction.

#### **4.2 Research Design**

Little research has been conducted on IHR in semi-rural Western Cape communities and, specifically, no studies on the community in question could be identified. The present study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative survey-type approach because the main goal of a survey is "to learn about the ideas, knowledge, feeling, opinions, attitudes, and self-reported behaviour of a defined population"

(Graziano & Raulin, 2004, p. 310). A survey, therefore, provided an exploration of a wide range of possible trends within the experience of relationship satisfaction.

### **4.3 Sampling**

Considering that some of the research objectives (and consequently, analyses) proposed relied on the inclusion of a diverse range of couples in the data collection, and bearing in mind that survey research strives for as representative a sample as possible (Mouton, 2001), the present study aimed to collect data from between 70 and 100 couples.

#### **Stratified random sample**

In stratified random sampling, separate random samples are drawn from each of several subpopulations or strata (Graziano & Raulin, 2004). This procedure is used when it is important to ensure that subgroups within in a population are adequately represented in the sample. The research community is a semi-rural, low-income Western Cape farming community, made up loosely of farms, with a centralised semi-formal settlement. Thus, residents of this community reside either on the farms or in the semi-formal settlement. Stratified random sampling was utilised to ensure that the subpopulations in the community were adequately represented in the sample. The total population of the community is estimated to be approximately 3 500 (Census, 1999, quoted in Winelands District Council & Dennis Moss Partnership Inc., 2001), with about 236 people of the 3 500 living in the semi-formal settlement. Therefore, the semi-formal settlement makes up roughly 7% of the community's population. From this it is possible to calculate that if 100 couples are sampled, and if the informal settlement comprises approximately 7% of the community's population, 7 of the 100 couples interviewed should be drawn from the semi-formal settlement.

A list of farm owners in the community was compiled in 2001 by the relevant municipality at the time in conjunction with a local property development company. The list was then revised in 2007 with the assistance of the current municipality responsible for the community in question. This list of farms was arranged into a random order by a statistical consultant. A list of households in the semi-formal settlement was provided by a key roleplayer (minister) in the community who retains various records relating to community affairs. He is a resident of the semi-formal settlement and knows who lives in the settlement and where about in the settlement they live. As with the list of farms, the list of households in the semi-formal settlement was arranged into a random order by a statistical consultant.

#### **4.4 Participants**

Much relationship research has focused on the individual as their unit of analysis (Charania & Ickes, 2006; Conradie, 2006). However, this neglects the other partner's perspective of the relationship. Individual partners can often provide valuable information about their own experiences in the relationship, but the relative lack of data from both partners restrict what this research can tell us about relationships. To redress this imbalance, the present study used couples as its unit of analysis, so that both partner's perspectives as well as gender differences with regard to relationship satisfaction could be investigated. Furthermore, the vast majority of relationship research has been conducted with married couples (Conradie, 2006; Kline, Pleasant, Whitton & Markman, 2006). In light of this and of the trend of marital decline in favour of cohabitation in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2006), both married couples and unmarried couples were considered for inclusion in the present study. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the majority of participants in relationship research in South Africa have been White, middle-class individuals living in urban areas. The community under study is a predominantly low-income 'Coloured' population living in a semi-rural area.

The inclusion criteria for participants were a minimum age of 18 years where partners identified themselves as being in a committed IHR. As we had limited information on the nature of committed IHR in this community and the purpose was to explore a wide range of relationship forms, a minimum relationship duration or a maximum age for participation in the study was not included.

Of the 100 heterosexual couples randomly sampled for inclusion in the study, data from 93 full couples (i.e., where interviews were conducted with both partners) were used in statistical analyses ( $n = 93$ ), as the second partner in 7 of the couples could not be interviewed. The sample was, thus, representative of the subpopulations in the community, as roughly 7% of the sample was drawn from the semi-formal settlement: 87 couples were drawn from the farms (93.3% of the total community population) and 6 couples were drawn from the semi-formal settlement (6.5% of the total community population).

#### **4.5 Measuring Instruments**

##### **4.5.1 Demographic and Relationship Information**

The demographic and relationship history questionnaire comprised of 67 items relating to biographical information, living conditions, financial status, and relationship characteristics such as relationship status, relationship duration, relationships history, and number of children, among others (see Addendum A).

## 4.5.2 Relationship Satisfaction

Defining relationship satisfaction as subjective, global evaluations of the relationship offers numerous advantages and was the approach adopted for the present study. Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the DAS (referred to from this point onwards as the DSS; Spanier, 1976), the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS; Cheung & Hudson, 1982), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm et al., 1986). All measures were administered by means of paper-and-pencil.

### 4.5.2.1 DSS

**Nature and development** The DAS is one of the most widely used measures of marital quality/adjustment and, unlike other frequently used measures (e.g., Marital Adjustment Test: Locke & Wallace, 1959), its items allow for more contemporary relationships, such as unmarried or same-sex couples. Consequently, it has been treated to a great deal of methodological and conceptual critique. The instrument was developed with the assumption that relationship adjustment/quality is multidimensional (Spanier, 1976). Several authors (e.g., Eddy, Heyman & Weiss, 1991; Kurdek, 1992) argue that relationship satisfaction should be tapped by measures that provide overall global assessments so that assessments of relationship satisfaction do not overlap with assessments of the correlates or determinants of relationship satisfaction. Indeed, “if the DAS is to be used, it may be better to use the subscores separately for different purposes” (Kurdek, 1992, p.35). In keeping with the approach of relationship satisfaction as subjective, global evaluations of the relationship, and in an attempt to avoid the complications that arise in the overlap between the constructs of relationship adjustment and relationship satisfaction, the present study utilised only the DSS of the DAS.

The DSS contains 10 items rated on a 5-point (n=1), 6-point (n=8) or 7-point (n=1) Likert scale, with the majority of possible responses ranging from *all the time* and *every day*, respectively, to *never* (the range of total scores is zero to 50; see Addendum B). It includes items 16 to 23 and items 31 and 32 of the full DAS. Higher scores on the DSS indicate higher relationship satisfaction. A number of researchers have used the DSS rather than the full DAS (e.g., Hamamci, 2005). For example, Litzinger & Gordon (2005) did so in order to avoid conceptual overlap and to “provide a more pure assessment of marital satisfaction” (p. 415).

**Reliability and validity** The DSS is a psychometrically sound measure of satisfaction. Spanier (1976) reported the reliability of the DSS to be .94 and Carey, Spector, Lantinga and Krauss (1993)

reported it to be .87. Pertaining to convergent validity, the DSS has been correlated with a variety of theoretically related measures. Kurdek (1998) found correlations of .82 for husbands and .84 for wives between the DSS and the KMSS, a widely used measure of relationship satisfaction. Hunsley, Pinsent, Lefebvre, James-Tanner and Vito (1995) also found these correlations to be acceptable, namely .76 for male partners and .77 for female partners. Furthermore, Kurdek (1992) found the 4-year stability, construct validity, and predictive validity of the DSS to be acceptable for use with heterosexual couples.

**Critique** Similar to international research, the full DAS has been used in South Africa to measure both relationship satisfaction (e.g., Dinna, 2005; Prinsloo, 2004) and relationship adjustment (e.g., Basson, 1992; Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997; Van Zyl, 1990). However, Hunsley et al. (1995) found there to be substantial evidence that the DAS measures a higher order construct typically defined as relationship adjustment, whereas the DSS, although it can be adequately used as a short form substitute for the DAS, measures relationship satisfaction rather than adjustment. Similarly, Eddy et al. (1991) tested whether the DAS is a measure of unidimensional satisfaction or a measure of multidimensional adjustment. They provide evidence to suggest that the multidimensional adjustment model fit the data better than the 1-factor satisfaction model. Such findings highlight the inappropriateness of using satisfaction and adjustment as synonyms.

**Appropriateness for different contexts** An advantage of the full DAS, and consequently of the DSS, is that it has been translated into several languages for use with various nationalities and cultural groups (e.g., Hamamci, 2005; Roizblatt et al., 1999; Shek, 1993). For example, findings by Shek (1995b) in China generally supported the universality of the concept of dyadic adjustment as indexed by the DAS. Likewise, Shek and Cheung (2007) found that, although some minor refinement might be needed, the dimensions of marital adjustment assessed by the DAS could be replicated in the Chinese culture. Of the standardised relationship satisfaction measures utilised within the South African context, the full DAS is one of the more commonly chosen measures (e.g., Möller & Van der Merwe, 1997) and it appears to be appropriate for South African settings (e.g., Dinna, 2005; Prinsloo, 2004). The present study is novel in the South African context in that it uses the DSS only and not the full DAS in measuring relationship satisfaction.

#### 4.5.2.2 IMS

**Nature and development** The IMS is a comprehensive 25-item questionnaire. In the present study, the most commonly used 5-point response scale was utilised for the IMS including: *never, very little, sometimes, most of the time* and *always* (the range of total scores is zero to 100; see Addendum C). Higher scores on the IMS indicate a greater magnitude or severity of problems in the relationship, in other words, lower relationship satisfaction. Scores below 30 on the IMS indicate satisfaction with the relationship. The IMS respondents who participated in the development of this instrument included a range of different individuals such as single and married individuals, clinical and non-clinical populations, high school and college students and non-students (cited in Touliatos, Perlmutter & Straus, 2001). This instrument does not characterise the relationship as a unitary entity but measures the extent to which one partner perceives problems in the relationship (Touliatos et al., 2001). It does not measure marital adjustment since a couple may have arrived at a good adjustment despite having a high degree of discord or dissatisfaction (Touliatos et al., 2001). The original IMS was revised so that it could also be used with unmarried partners (Cheung & Hudson, 1982).

**Reliability and validity** The IMS has exceptional reliability and validity (cited in Touliatos et al., 2001): It has a mean alpha of .96, indicating excellent internal consistency, and an excellent (low) Standard Error of Measurement of four. It also has exceptional short-term stability with a two-hour test-retest correlation of .96. The IMS has outstanding convergent validity, as well as very good known-groups validity and good construct validity. In a revalidation of findings, Cheung and Hudson (1982) strongly recommend the IMS for use in both research and in clinical applications on the basis that it appears to have very high reliability and validity coefficients, as estimated through several different methods.

**Appropriateness for different contexts** The IMS has been used successfully in a wide variety of contexts. In the United States it has been used with different populations, for example, Korean immigrants (e.g., Chang & Moon, 1998) and Chinese immigrants (e.g., Jin, Eagle & Yoshioka, 2007). The IMS has also been successfully applied in countries other than the United States, for example, Israel (e.g., Rena, Moshe & Abraham, 1996), Nigeria (e.g., Adewuya, Ologun & Ibigbami, 2006), China (e.g., Lee et al., 2004), and Portugal (e.g., Cotrim, 2006). Although there appears to be only a handful of studies that have used the IMS to measure relationship satisfaction within the South African context (e.g., Emanuel, 1992; Wiggins, 1994), these studies suggest that the IMS is appropriate for local use.

### 4.5.2.3 KMSS

**Nature and development** In contrast to the lengthier IMS, the KMSS is a brief three-item measure of relationship satisfaction that is most often used with a 7-point Likert scale, with possible responses ranging from *extremely dissatisfied* to *extremely satisfied* (see Addendum D). The range of total scores is three to 21, with higher scores on the KMSS indicating higher relationship satisfaction. Scores of approximately 18 are typical for the scale's mean for intact, non-distressed couples (Schumm, Bollman & Jurich, 2000). The mean scores for distressed couples have been found to be significantly lower. Crane, Middleton and Bean (2000) determined the cutoff score of the KMSS to be 17. The KMSS offers promise for use in survey research and clinical evaluation where a brief but reliable measure of marital or relationship satisfaction is required. Bradury (1995) mentioned the KMSS as providing "simple, unconfounded assessment of how spouses feel about their relationship" (p.462).

The items of the KMSS were modified to make the scale applicable to non-married couples (Hunsley et al., 1995) and the following items were used in the present study (as both married and non-married couples were interviewed):

- a. How satisfied are you with your relationship?
- b. How satisfied are you with your partner in his/her role as your partner?
- c. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner?

In keeping with the attempted distinction between relationship satisfaction and relationship adjustment (the latter typically viewed as a more comprehensive, higher-order construct, e.g., Hunsley et al., 1995), the objective of the KMSS is to measure one dimension of relationship quality, namely satisfaction (Schumm et al., 2000). In addition, it is utilised as a measure of global relationship satisfaction (e.g., Kurdek, 1994).

**Reliability and validity** Research with the KMSS has repeatedly shown its internal consistency to be greater than .90 and it to be a sound measure of relationship satisfaction possessing convergent, criterion-related, and construct validity (e.g., Schumm et al., 2000). The KMSS has been correlated with a variety of theoretically related measures, for example, Herman (1991) found a correlation of .80 between the KMSS and the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (Lazarus, 1985), suggesting good convergent validity. Likewise, Calahan (1997) found a correlation of .93 between the KMSS and the



Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), suggesting that the two scales measure similar information (i.e., good convergent validity).

**Critique** Viewed critically, one could argue that the high reliability of the KMSS is only an artifact of using three questions worded so similarly (Schumm, Scanlon, Crow, Green & Buckler, 1983). However, it must be kept in mind that the items were intended to assess three distinct elements of global marital evaluation (Schumm et al., 2000) as suggested by Spanier and Cole (1976): (i) satisfaction with marriage as an institution, (ii) with husband or wife as a spouse (implicitly in terms of fulfillment of individual spousal responsibilities or duties), and (iii) with the marital relationship (implicitly in terms of factors such as intimacy or quality of communication). The pattern of differences between item means suggests that respondents do interpret the items differently, however, the three items proved to have adequate reliability to be treated as a scale (Schumm et al., 2000). Based on the existing reliability and validity data, Schumm et al. (1986) conclude that the KMSS “seems to be able to assess one dimension of marital quality (satisfaction) with enough items to estimate internal consistency reliability while not requiring the space required for longer scales” (p. 385).

Whereas a number of researchers have developed lengthy measuring instruments to evaluate different dimensions of the marital relationship (e.g., Marital Satisfaction Inventory: Snyder, 1997), some have contended that such lengthy measures might not practically be utilised in research as well as practice settings, and scales with few items have been developed. Current marital satisfaction scales usually vary in length from 15 to 50 items, yet offer the clinician and researcher with overall reliabilities no higher than those estimated for the KMSS (Schumm, Scanlon, et al., 1983). Furthermore, it appears that the KMSS is no more correlated with individual or marital social desirability than the other measures (Schumm, Scanlon, et al., 1983). Therefore, in several characteristics, the KMSS yields an equivalent performance with a great deal less items, a substantial reduction in length, an advantage of no small importance in clinical evaluation or much research where space for measures is quite limited (Schumm, Scanlon, et al., 1983).

**Appropriateness for different contexts** The KMSS has been used successfully in a wide variety of contexts. In the United States it has been used with different populations, for example, Caucasian and African American groups (Green, Woody, Maxwell, Mercer & Williams, 1998), with strikingly similar results, supporting the validity and reliability of the scale. The KMSS has also been successfully applied in countries other than the United States, for example, China (Fong & Lam, 2007; Shek, 1998)





























































































































































































































