Chapter 3

Towards a poststructuralist framework of inquiry

This inquiry was carried out according to a poststructuralist framework. A framework is particularly useful for highlighting the different categories of elements and factors to be included in any analysis and the key issues to be explored (Shields & Tajalli, 2006). This chapter provides a conceptual understanding of the term 'poststructuralism', along with its key elements and features. Additionally, my inquiry was conceptualised around other key constructs like 'discourse', 'gender' and 'curriculum' that had to be positioned within a poststructuralist framework. A detailed conceptual and theoretical exposition of these key constructs and their link to poststructuralism follows the exposé on poststructuralism.

3.1 Poststructuralism

This section starts with a historical perspective of poststructuralism, followed by a look at poststructuralism as a paradigm. Secondly, the key features (parts) of poststructuralism and their inter-relationships and relationships to the 'world' are discussed. This is followed by an analysis of the benefits and uses of poststructuralism. Finally, a justification of why poststructuralism was selected as the main paradigm for this inquiry is put forward, including reasons why it was not meshed with postmodernism.

3.1.1 Origins of poststructuralism

Although the three terms 'poststructuralism', 'postmodernism' and 'deconstruction' have been employed interchangeably, 'poststructuralism' initially referred to those theoretical movements emerging in France in the mid to late 1960s that had grown out of and opposed structuralism and humanism that had earlier been challenged by structuralism (McLaughlin, 2003; Peters, 1999; Pinar et al, 1995; Weedon, 1997; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Poststructuralism therefore comes after, and is a reaction to structuralism. The most prominent poststructuralists have been identified as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Julia Kristeva (Gavey, 1998; Weedon, 1997; Wood &

Kroger, 2000). In order to understand why these poststructuralists rejected structuralism, it is necessary to get some insight into what the latter entails.

Structuralism, described as an intellectual movement, is mostly associated with the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who emphasised that meaning was to be found within the structure of a whole language. In general, structuralism emphasises the examination of cultural phenomena according to the underlying formal systems in which these phenomena are currently to be found. Structuralists advance the view that the individual is shaped by definite sociological, psychological and linguistic structures over which he or she has no control, and that these could be uncovered by using objective methods of investigation (Bush, 1995; Lye, 1997). A wide range of theoretical stances are included in the structuralist paradigm, including Marxism and psychoanalysis. Marxists believe that truth of human existence could be understood by an analysis of economic structures (Weedon, 1997), whereas psychoanalysts describe the structure of the psyche in terms of an unconscious (Alsop et al, 2002). Thus, poststructuralists reacted against the analytical processes of structuralism, which claimed that meaning could be derived from a text or work of art by treating it independently of its cultural context. Secondly, they accused structuralism of being ahistorical, implying that life and thought were static; they did not change. Thirdly, they dismissed the structuralist assumption that there was an already existing reality, just waiting to be discovered through scientific methods (Lye, 1997; McLaughlin, 2003).

Several authors have tried to answer the question on what exactly poststructuralism is by demonstrating the futility and difficulty of trying to define poststructuralism (Foucault, 1984; Gavey 1998; Peters, 1999). Gavey (1998) posits that a definition is not possible, since a definitive attempt would go against the very grain of the nature of poststructuralism, which is inherently against a unifying and singular conceptualisation of any concept. Foucault (1984) states that "[t]he premise of poststructuralism disallows any denominative, unified, or proper definition of itself" (p.108). He adds that in broad terms, poststructuralism "... involves a critique of metaphysics: of the concepts of causality, of identity, of the subject, of power, knowledge and of truth" (p.108). In addition, the futility of defining poststructuralism also lies in the fact that it comprises of a variety of perspectives and therefore the term should not be used to convey a sense of homogeneity, singularity and unity (Peters, 1999; Weedon, 1997).

However, in general, poststructuralism can be summarised as an array of approaches (Burman & Parker, 1993) applied to a range of theoretical positions (Weedon, 1997) that are based on certain assumptions (Lye, 1997). Poststructuralists are united in their concern of going beyond the structure of language to consider a wide variety of features of language use and the ways in which discourses construct objects and subjects. They also pay special attention to various sorts of oppositions and ways to deconstruct them (Wood & Kroger, 2000). McLaughlin (2003) adds that poststructuralists are concerned with finding modes of thought and action able to "… open up structuralist ideas to difference and subjectivity" (p.93), and thus turn to the search for discursive truth, whether in the world itself or in the protocols of science. Peters (1999) views poststructuralism as "… a contemporary philosophical movement that offers a range of theories (of the text), critique (of institutions), new concepts, and forms of analysis (of power)" (p.1). For the Africa Gender Institute (AGI) poststructuralism offers new possibilities of thinking about subjectivity, power and discourse (AGI, 2002).

3.1.2 Poststructuralism in relation to postmodernism and social constructionism

Several authors have pointed out that poststructuralist theories are often termed 'postmodern', leading to the two terms either being used interchangeably, or conflated as one. In some cases, poststructuralism is subsumed under postmodernism and is in this case viewed as a sub-theory of postmodernism (McLaughlin, 2003; Peters, 1999; Weedon, 1997). On the other hand, Zeeman et al (2002) claim that social constructionism and poststructuralism are two distinct theories that developed along the postmodern line of thought that rejects universal theories or "grand narratives" (p.97). In their contribution to this topic, Hodgson and Standish (2009) add that postmodernism and poststructuralism are "… shaped by the rejection both of modernist grand narratives and of the belief in the possibility of universal truths" (p.310). It is therefore important to comment on the convergence and divergence of other theories in relation to poststructuralism in order to position the theoretical framework for this inquiry.

3.1.2.1 Postmodernism

Postmodernism emerged as an area of academic study only in the mid 1980s. The literature indicates that it is also a complex, contested and ambiguous term and, as such, defies definition (Klages, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997). An attempt at defining post-modernism is also futile because postmodernism spreads across a wide range of disciplines or

fields of study such as art, architecture, literature, film, music, communications, sociology, fashion and technology (Klages, 2003; Weedon, 1997). It has therefore been described in various ways by people working from different perspectives (McLaughlin, 2003). Klages (2003) finds it reasonable to regard postmodernism as a term used to describe a variety of trends and ideas. Some of these trends and ideas will be summarised below.

Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1989) are considered as two of the most significant theorists of postmodern thought (McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997). In general terms, postmodernism rejects modernity, a period of the Enlightenment that attempted to describe the world in rational, empirical and objective terms and assumed that there was a universal truth to be uncovered, a way of obtaining answers to the questions posed by the human condition (Klages, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003). According to McLaughlin (2003), postmodernism critiques the status of general universalising theories, the "meta narratives" or "grand narratives" (p.91). Klages (2003) adds that "[i]n rejecting 'grand narratives', postmodernism favours 'mini-narratives', stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Further, postmodern 'mini-narratives' are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability" (p.1).

Bush (1995) refers to poststructuralism as a "second cousin" (p.1) to postmodernism, while Peters (1999) refers to the two terms as having a "kinship" relationship (p.1). Peters (1999) contends that the two terms can be distinguished by recognising the difference between their theoretical objects of study. While postmodernism rejects the major beliefs of modernity, poststructuralism, on the other hand, rejects those of structuralism. Klages (2003) sees the major difference between postmodernism and poststructuralism as the fact that postmodernism is closely associated with an era – a period in history after the modern age – the "post-modern" (p.1). On the other hand, Klages (2003) views poststructuralism as a position in philosophy within the postmodern era, "… which represents views on human beings, language, society, and many other issues, and not just names of an era" (p.1). Peters (1999) states that poststructuralism can be characterised as a "mode of thinking, a style of philosophizing" (p.1).

3.1.2.2 Social constructionism

As already mentioned, Zeeman et al (2002) distinguish between social constructionism and poststructuralism as two theoretical formulations that reject universal theories or grand narratives along the lines of postmodern thought. Poststructuralism, social constructionism and postmodernism all share the same ontological beliefs, specifically that reality is socially constructed and multiple (Michael, 1999). They also share a common epistemological view of knowledge as contextual and historical, and a concern with language and construction of meaning, rather than with measurement and prediction of behaviour (Michael, 1999). (See also Sections 3.1.3.1 and 3.1.3.2.) Furthermore, they reject an essentialist approach that assumes that there is a core and essence of humanity that makes people what they are and that this essence could be studied and discovered (Burr, 1995; Gavey, 1997). According to them, voices that differ from the norm are silenced and suppressed by these assumptions of universal, all encompassing principles (Butler, 1990).

Van Wagenen Wrin (2004) points out that poststructuralist theorising incorporates some constructionist foundations and builds new directions. She identifies the divergence between social constructionists and poststructuralists as follows: for social constructionists, reality arises from interaction; for poststructuralists, reality arises from discourse. (See Section 3.1.3.3.) She also considers poststructuralists' focus on the deconstruction of text as a radical break from social constructionism.

3.1.3 Poststructuralism: key features and assumptions

My inquiry followed a poststructuralist philosophical position (within the postmodern era) that was based on social constructionist assumptions (Klages, 2003; Peters, 1999). I was attracted to poststructuralism because of its strong philosophical position, as well as its well-articulated and convincing assumptions about the nature of reality. In education, poststructuralism questions the very nature, construction and effect of forms of knowledge (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). In this inquiry, I set out to interrogate how knowledge of gender was constructed and the discursive effects of these constructions in the public health curriculum. I was thus guided by a poststructuralist set of beliefs, which will be discussed below.

3.1.3.1 A poststructuralist view of reality (ontological assumptions)

From the works of Blake (1997), Groden and Kreiswirth (1997), Weedon (1997), Gavey (1997), Peters (1999) and Hodgson and Standish (2009) the ontological position of poststructuralism about the nature of reality can be summarised as follows. Poststructuralists believe:

□ There is no one single, universal reality. Grand narratives or universal explanations of reality are critiqued and rejected.

□ Reality is socially constructed through language, implying the existence of more than one reality. Hence there is an emphasis on plurality and tolerance to difference.

□ Language constructs subjectivity and therefore the existence of a natural subject with a core and essence is rejected.

□ The construction of reality depends on contextual factors such as culture and history.

Burman and Parker (1993) therefore suggest that any appeals to human nature must be rejected in favour of a research orientation based on the socially constructed nature of reality.

3.1.3.2 Reality is constituted through language

For poststructuralists, language is key, since all knowledge is conveyed through language and, consequently, language should be the object of study (Gergen, 1994). Weedon (1997) expounds further on the role of language within poststructuralist theory. Firstly, she advances the view that language is the common factor in the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness. Secondly, Weedon (1997) emphasises that language is also the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Language is viewed in terms of competing discourses – that is, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, a site of struggle. She concludes that this struggle implies differences in the organisation of social power. In this case, Weedon seems to have made for us the links between the poststructuralist paradigm and the primary constructs (gender and curriculum) – how gender has been given meaning in the curriculum as text (through discourse, language, subjectivity and power) and its implication for social organisation (public health education). Thirdly, Weedon (1997) acknowledges that language is also the place where "… our sense of our-selves, our subjectivity is *constructed"* (p.21) (emphasis added). Thus, the link between

poststructuralism, language and subjectivity is the belief that language constructs our subjectivity as well. Fourthly, in line with the poststructuralist emphasis on context, Weedon (1997) insists that language needs to be viewed as a system always existing in historically specific discourses. Following this thread of argument, Burman and Parker (1993) assert that language, organised into discourses, has an immense power in shaping the way people experience and behave in the world.

Hodgson and Standish (2009) claim that in recent decades qualitative researchers have come to recognise the poststructuralist assumption about the role of language in the construction of knowledge. In line with this claim, my study was based on the assumption that language is central in the construction and representation of gender in the public health curriculum.

3.1.3.3 Discourse and poststructuralism

Both Cheek (2000) and Weedon (1997) view discourse as a key feature within poststructuralist thought. Since discourse is a central construct that forms part of the title for this inquiry, it is important to explore its meaning, key features, assumptions and its analytic power and to clarify its implications for this inquiry.

a) Discourse as a construct

In very simple terms, Wetherell (2004) refers to discourse as "… all forms of talk and writing – all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (p.2). However, there seems to be a very strong link between language, one of the key features of poststructuralism discussed in the preceding section, and discourse. Gergen (1997) explains that discourses grow from the language used within a culture and, therefore, to participate in the use of language is to participate in a way of life or tradition, while adhering to certain discourses. Finally, Freedman and Combs (1996) describe a discourse as a system of statements, practices and institutional structures that share common values.

Apart from language, another strong link has been demonstrated between discourse, knowledge and power. Nightingale and Cromby (1999) add that discourse reflects prevailing structures of social and power relationships and that these relationships exist within the context of culture (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Many other authors have explored the

concepts of knowledge and power by drawing on Foucault's work (1974; 1982; 1984) (Cheek, 2000; Hodgson & Standish, 2009; McLaughlin, 2003; Van Dijk, 2004; Weedon, 1997). Foucault challenges notions that knowledge is objective and value free, inevitably progressive and universal. Instead, he explores the knowledge-power link through the concept of discourse by arguing that knowledge is inextricably linked to power (Cheek, 2000). Foucault's work on the link between knowledge and power has been expounded on in various ways to demonstrate and emphasise this link. Weedon (1997) explains that discourses create discursive frameworks that order reality in a certain way. However, these discursive frameworks both enable and constrain the production of knowledge in that they allow for certain ways of thinking about reality, while excluding others (Cheek, 2000). Further, at any one point in time, people are confronted with a number of possible discursive frames for thinking, writing and speaking about aspects of reality. However, not all discourses carry equal weight or authority. The discursive frame that will end up carrying more weight is a consequence of the effects of power relations (Cheek, 2000; McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Gavey (1989) refers to these as dominant discourses and elaborates that dominant discourses are those sets of statements by which everyone measures their lives within a given society and that define people's identities and realities. According to Hodgson and Standish (2009), dominant knowledge is a reality that is transmitted through ideology and becomes rooted in institutions and ways of speaking, writing and representing.

The dominant discourses legitimate existing power relations and tend to constitute the subjectivity of most people most of the time (Gavey, 1998). Van Dijk (2004) advances the view that a powerful group may limit the freedom of actions of others but also influences their minds through either recourse to force or through other means such as persuasion or manipulation. He demonstrates the crucial link between knowledge and power by stating that "[m]anaging the minds of others is essentially a function of text and talk" (p.302), that is, discourse. However, Nightingale and Cromby (1999) argue that on the surface it is not easy to recognise these regimes of truth since they seem to be held in place by conditions that lie deeper than what is evident on the surface – the power and materiality of a culture. Van Dijk (2004) supports this line of argument: "Dominance might be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable" (p.302). Thus, discourses possess the power to reproduce and transform institutional structures and power plays an influential role in the social making of meaning (Potter, 1996b). In conclusion, discourse analysis then enables us to search for underlying mechanisms

maintaining power relations and provides an opportunity to explore the discourses that perpetuate, or otherwise naturalise the social order, and especially relations of inequality (Fairclough, 1989; Nightingale and Cromby, 1999).

Hodgson and Standish (2009) caution against the misuse of the Foucauldian conception of power in educational research. They complain that power is interpreted as an entity in line with Marxist thinking that views power in dual terms of oppressor and oppressed. These authors contend:

> The assumption is that if neither oppressor nor oppressed has power, we must all be inert, unable to act. It appears to be informed by Marxist or neo-Marxist understanding of power, which presupposes a dual power relation of oppressor and oppressed. In educational research concerned with social justice the group or individual is seen as without power and the research process is concerned with empowerment – the giving or getting of power – it is perhaps this kind of power that characterizes much of the desire to work for social justice in education research. (p.315)

They explain that in Foucauldian terms power becomes apparent when a person becomes conscious of and acts according to norms that produce the effects of power. In this sense power is not an entity but a process that involves power relations (Peters, 2004).

Several discourse researchers also view discourse as social practice (Antaki et al, 2008; Potter, 1996b; Shaw & Bailey, 2009; Van Dijk, 2001). Language is not neutral, but rather, is used "to do something" (Potter, 1996b, p.3). According to Potter (1996b), "[d]iscourse is the way people construct their world in their talk and texts and what is done with those constructions and the way descriptions are made factual and what those descriptions are used to do" (p.3). This assertion is reinforced by Antaki et al's (2008) statement that one of language's functions is to do things at the societal level. This thread of thought is also found in Van Dijk's (2001) emphasis that the words we use to describe things bring with them a very heavy set of implications that go a long way beyond the dictionary. Consequently, discursive research goes beyond the literal meanings of language by examining the social functions of talk (Shaw & Bailey, 2009).

b) The construction of discourse in this inquiry

In this inquiry, a poststructuralist focus on text as discourse was emphasised by primarily viewing discourse as both spoken and written text (Wetherell, 2004). In this choice, I was

guided by the assumption that texts represent a certain reality, which may appear quite natural and taken for granted but that, on the contrary, when scrutinised analytically as discourse, may reveal certain underlying assumptions about the discourse. However, this inquiry was not only interested in the way a text represented an aspect of reality; rather, it aimed to go further and unearth some of the 'legitimised' practices and assumptions that underpinned the shaping of the text or discourse in question.

However, to focus only on discourse as both spoken and written text would be narrow minded and naïve. The concept of discourse was expanded to incorporate other useful components such as language use and meaning making in these texts. Additionally, discourse was also viewed as social practice, located within specific institutions, which in turn are culturally and historically situated (Potter, 1996a).

This inquiry viewed both gender and curriculum as specific discourses that had been constructed through language and were represented as text. The reality of how gender was represented within the public health curriculum therefore lay in these texts, as mediated through language. However, this inquiry was not only interested in how gender was represented in the public health curriculum but, more importantly, in how it came to be represented the way it was. In order to explore the way gender was represented, the inquiry critically analysed both spoken text (interviews with academic staff) and written text (public health curriculum documents), with an emphasis on language use, meaning making, and how these affected social practice; that is, the representation or non-representation of gender within the curriculum, and how this had come to be legitimised.

Secondly, the inquiry viewed these discourses of curriculum and gender as social practices existing in specific schools of public health in sub-Saharan Africa, which were based on their specific cultural and historical contexts. Their discourses would more or less reflect how the wider society constructed gender as issues included or not included in the development of curriculum, research, programmes, policies and interventions. However, I also viewed curriculum and the construction of gender as a process, as sites of struggle where their constructions were not permanent but fluid and constantly changing. Furthermore, although some conclusions were reached about the constructions of gender in the public health curriculum in this inquiry, it was with the understanding that they were temporary and subject to change, depending on context, specific historical moments and people's subjectivities.

Thirdly, with regard to the issue of discourse, knowledge and power, one of the assumptions of this inquiry was that knowledge reproduced power. It was assumed that public health had specific domains that it used as a framework to organise the public health curriculum – its reality – through text and language use. A history of public health indicates that with time it has grown from its narrow conceptions of public health focusing on curative aspects of disease to more preventive aspects of health such as environmental health (Section 2.2.1.) It was further assumed that any additions to the conception of public health, and thus additional domains to its curriculum, depended on the power relations in an institution and the cultural and historical contexts of the institution and the country. Although the issue of gender has now been laid squarely on the table of public health, negative cultural gender norms and values still persist in Africa (Doyal, 2004a; Doyal 2005; Health Canada, 2000; WHO, 2006b; Wong, 2003).

c) Discourse as analytical tool

Discourse analytic approaches have been influenced by a variety of disciplines such anthropology, linguistics, cultural studies, gender studies, social psychology and philosophy (Potter, 1996a; Potter, 1996b; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Burman and Parker (1993) acknowledge that there are multiple varieties of discourse analytical tools and, as such, one cannot talk of discourse analysis as a single unitary entity. Shaw and Bailey (2009) outline three different approaches to discourse analysis:

- □ *Micro-level studies* (e.g. sociolinguistic discourse analysis) involve the detailed study of language in use (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). These studies emerge from conversation analysis that provides a conceptual framework for systematically analysing face-to-face talk (Silverman, 2000). Micro-level studies focus on the participants' perspective, and in doing so bring to the fore the cultural and communicative patterns that inform their behaviour and perceptions (Roberts et al, 2000). Analysis, therefore, focuses on how interactions are organised moment by moment through subtle processes that appear normal and are taken for granted (Shaw & Bailey, 2009).

- □ *Meso-level studies* (e.g. discursive psychology) focus more on the links between discourses and broader social and cultural contexts (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). In these studies discourse informs specific ways of talking about reality and defines acceptable ways of talking, writing or conducting. Accordingly, discourse is seen as serving a range of social functions (Potter, 1996b).

□ *Macro-level studies* (e.g. Foucauldian approaches) normally focus on the study of language and ideology in society (Traynor, 2006). They examine the role of power and knowledge in society and illustrate how language constitutes aspects of society. These studies are also concerned with how and why language constrains what we are able to think, say and do (Fairclough, 2001). Macro-level approaches are able to unearth taken-for-granted assumptions and the meanings individuals and wider society attach to these. They also explore possible alternatives to accepted ways of doing things (Armstrong, 2002).

My study was guided by a similar distinction between three levels developed by Morley (2007): macro (national and international policy); meso (organisational); and micro (individual experiences, interpersonal and social relations).

Shaw and Bailey (2009) maintain that some discourse studies tend to draw on more than one approach and that despite the variety of origin and definition, discursive approaches share several assumptions and conceptions about social life. The first shared conception is that language and interaction are best understood in context and, hence, interpretation of data involves understanding contexts such as local circumstances. The second shared conception is that reality is socially constructed; hence social worlds are subjectively understood and experienced. The third shared conception is that discourse analysis goes beyond the literal meanings of language and instead examines the social functions of talk.

In general, therefore, discourse analysis has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as texts and talk in social practices (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Potter and Wetherell (1987) highlight some of the major assumptions of discourse as an analytic tool. Firstly, in carrying out discourse analysis, there is a focus on language as action. The focus needs to shift away from the interest in the phenomenon to which the discourse refers to a focus on the discourse itself, since it is the discourse that is constitutive of the phenomenon. For example, in my inquiry, I was not interested in gender as a phenomenon, but in how gender was constructed and represented. Therefore, talk was the event of interest.

Talk constructs different versions of the world and is oriented to different functions (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Variability between persons and within persons is therefore another feature of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Wood and Kroger (2000) also report that their research participants used variability to construct their talk for different purposes, for different

audiences, and for different occasions (see also the section on subjectivity below). This recognition of variability produces multiple realities. Where standard social science approaches search for general laws and consistency, discourse thrives on variability. In this inquiry, it was assumed that the academic members of staff were different people, whose perceptions of gender had been shaped by different social and historical contexts. It was therefore my expectation that there would be different understandings of gender and the way gender was represented within the public health curriculum.

d) Discourse as analytical tool in health

Nearly two decades ago Lupton (1992) lamented the neglect of the use of discourse as analytic tool by public health practitioners, a tool with the potential to unravel the ideological dimension of phenomena such as lay health beliefs, the doctor-patient relationship, and the dissemination of health information. In recent years discourse analysis has been highlighted and used in the field of health care more often, particularly in family practice and nursing. Taken-for-granted and hidden aspects of meaning, delivery and practice of health care in different contexts have been revealed through the analysis of how common words and terms had been used to invoke social practices, knowledge and power (Crowe, 2005; O'Connor & Payne, 2006; Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Shaw and Greenhalgh (2008), on the other hand, used Foucauldian discourse analysis to study the historical, social and ideological origins of policy texts and the role of power and knowledge in policy development. They show how certain discourses shape, enable and constrain health policy and conclude that their insights in this type of research were useful in challenging apolitical accounts of health research and revealing how health research serves particular interests. My study is a further contribution to the growing field of findings in public health, challenging the official accounts of gender in the public health curriculum.

3.1.3.4 Subjectivity

The terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are central to poststructuralist theory and seem to be in direct contrast to humanist conceptions of people as objects and to an emphasis on objective ways of perceiving reality. Weedon (1997) describes subjectivity as "… the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, their sense of self and ways of understanding their relation to the world" (p.32). In a further analysis of subjectivity, Weedon

(1997) also emphasises the importance of context: our subjectivity is the product of the society, culture and historical contexts in which we live.

The second point Weedon (1997) tries to illustrate is that poststructuralism is regarded as a paradigm for transformation and change. She explains that when confronted with new social, cultural and historical situations, our subjectivity may enable us to construct our reality or meaning in two ways. Firstly, there is the possibility of resisting alternative ways of knowing, having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values. Secondly, there is the possibility of embracing new alternatives, as we move out of familiar circles, through exposure to social processes such as education or politics. The transformative notion of poststructuralism lies in its belief of "… decentering the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity" (p.32), thus exposing and opening up subjectivity to change. Lastly, Weedon states that "[p]oststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the processes of political change and to preserving the status quo" (p.21).

As already discussed, our subjectivity enables us to construct meaning. Burman and Parker (1993) maintain that when we talk about any phenomenon, we draw on shared patterns of meaning and contrasting ways of speaking. This manner of speaking also implies that meanings are multiple and shifting rather than unitary and fixed. However, available discourses shape the meanings we give to our daily lives and structure our social realities, which depend on the power and political strength that these discourses present (Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997) furthermore explains that when one is confronted with constructed reality, "… the individual becomes its bearer by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposes and acts upon them" (p.34). In this regard, language is considered to both produce and constrain meaning (Burman & Parker, 1993).

My inquiry was based on the poststructuralist assumption that subjectivity is necessary for the creation of meaning. In line with Hodgson and Standish's (2009) position that claims to knowledge are held to be subjective, one of my points of departure was, therefore, that different meanings of gender were created subjectively in the course of public health curriculum development.

So far some of the key concepts of poststructuralist thought have been explored: language, subjectivity, discourse and power and how they are key in the construction of meaning. The relationship between these key constructs is illustrated in Figure 3-1.
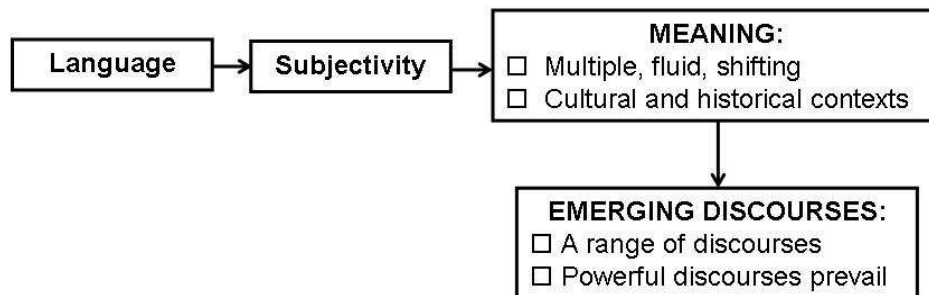

Figure 3-1: The relationship between language, subjectivity, meaning and discourse

3.1.3.5 Poststructuralist focus on text

Cheek (2000) and Lye (1997) view the main distinction between postmodernism and post-structuralism to be the poststructuralist focus on text, both literary and cultural texts. Cheek (2000) elaborates that "[t]exts can be pictures, poems, procedures, conversations, case notes, artwork or articles" (p.40). This view is also supported by Burman and Parker (1993), who refer to text as both spoken (conversations, debates and discussion) and written texts. Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network (1999) describe a text as "… any tissue of meaning which is symbolically significant for a reader" (p.4). Derrida (1998) once remarked that "[n]othing is ever outside a text since nothing is ever outside language, and hence incapable of being represented as text" (p.35). Burman and Parker (1993) write that reality, behaviour and subjectivity (our sense of self) is always in a text. In other words, texts represent reality or conventionalised practices (Fairclough, 1992), which Van Dijk (2004) refers to as everyday forms of talk and text that appear quite natural and acceptable. Cheek (2000) points out that in discourse analysis, we should not only be interested in the way a text represents an aspect of reality – the conventionalised practices and assumptions that underpin the shaping of the text itself – but what the text actually describes. Lye (1997) contends that by reading a text in a reflective and self-conscious way, poststructuralists may find unconscious and unintended meanings, which may be directly contrary to the surface meaning.

3.1.3.6 Poststructuralism and deconstruction

The term 'deconstruction' is closely associated with poststructuralist texts, which were discussed in the previous section. Cheek (2000) and Weedon (1997) consider deconstruction as another approach that is associated with the exploration and interrogation of texts using poststructuralist perspectives. Lye (1997) views deconstruction as an offshoot of post-structuralist theory.

a) Deconstruction as a construct

Deconstruction is popularly associated with Jacques Derrida, who developed it as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts (Bush, 1995; Cheek, 2000; Lye, 1997; Weedon, 1997). This term, similar to 'poststructuralism', is highly resistant to formal definition. Weedon (1997) believes that Derrida was careful not to classify his work as belonging to any particular theoretical orientation. According to Lye (1997), Derrida never offered a straightforward definition of the term (Lye, 1997). Moreover, deconstruction does not represent a unitary concept, but rather represents a range of approaches, each with its own emphasis (Bush, 1995; Lye, 1997).

Derrida's focus (1998) was on language systems, but with a focus on deconstructing them. Through deconstruction he aimed to highlight the role of binary oppositions in constructing meaning in language. He argues that systems of meaning are built from opposition, one of the most important being the 'self' and 'other'. He explains that in each pair, one term (for example, 'white') is valued over the other ('black'). By indicating the relationship between the two terms, the terms no longer appear in opposition; instead, they depend on each other to have any kind of meaning.

According to Cheek (2000), all deconstructive approaches focus on text as their core unit for analysis. They seek to find the meaning within or of any text, thus challenging the very meanings as assumptions on which those meanings are founded. A basic assumption of deconstruction is that a text cannot convey a unitary, stable, just, or even coherent message to all readers or audiences (Gergen, 1994). Upon investigation a text can be shown to contain contradictory meanings that deconstruct whatever meaning it can be said to contain, leading to multiple interpretations (Bush, 1995). That is why poststructuralists call for a

deconstruction of truths we take as for granted (Burman & Parker, 1993); for example, 'truths' in the public health curriculum. Lovlie (1992), on the other hand, defines deconstruction as being a hybrid between "destruction" and "construction" (p.123), conveying the idea that old and obsolete concepts have to be demolished for new ones to be erected. From Gergen's (1994) point of view, deconstruction means disentangling established ideas, whereas Arnot and Fennell (2008) refer to the overturning of metanarratives and the disordering of hegemonic knowledge construction.

Gergen (1994) highlights two criticisms levelled against deconstructive readings. Firstly, they have been accused of being nihilistic, parasitic, and often useless. Secondly, they seem to be out of touch with reality. However, he concludes that despite these criticisms, deconstruction is still a major force in contemporary philosophy and literary criticism and theory.

b) Application of deconstruction theory to the inquiry

I view my inquiry as a deconstruction of the public health curriculum text in anglophone sub-Saharan Africa. It aims to examine and highlight commonly held assumptions about public health curricula and the representation of gender within these curricula. I was guided by the assumption that the public health curriculum as text did not contain a single, unitary truth about public health or about gender. There was more than met the eye. A deeper look underneath the surface had the potential to reveal more layers of 'truths' – the assumptions underlying the construction of a curriculum and that held the text into place as the legitimate public health curriculum that should or should not represent gender within it. In this way, legitimised ways of viewing the public health curriculum and how gender should be represented in that curriculum could be deconstructed and challenged.

Secondly, uncovering other layers of meaning could lead to newer or alternative ways of viewing the public health curriculum and the representation of gender in it, thus leading to the 'deconstruction' of old ways of viewing the curriculum in relation to gender and replacing them with a multiplicity of perspectives. It was envisaged that this could lead to new ways of understanding the public health curriculum in relation to gender, enabling not only the transformation of the curriculum but also broader changes in society, in how gender could be viewed and represented in programmes, policies and interventions.

3.1.4 Political uses and benefits of poststructuralism

Poststructuralism has been termed as a fruitful (Hodgson & Standish, 2009) and productive theory that has the potential to bring about change and transformation by unearthing existing power relations in various social processes and institutions. Our subjectivity, which serves as site of struggle, thus has the potential of bringing about change through resistance and through embracing new realities (Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralism has an emancipatory and empowering potential – it has the potential to open up different and new ways of thinking about research and social practices (Hodgson & Standish, 2009; Youdell, 2006). It was expected that a poststructuralist perspective in this inquiry would have the political edge of unearthing power relations in the construction of gender and how these constructions become legitimised in the public health curriculum (Usher & Edwards, 1994). (See also Section 3.3.4.4.)

3.1.5 Limitations of poststructuralism

One of the major accusations against poststructuralism is that it is abstract and not specific (Arnot & Fennell, 2008). It has been accused of being in denial about the physical existence of the human subject (lack of embodiment). It is argued that the poststructuralist view of decentering the subject weakens the power of agency in changing people's circumstances. The second attack levelled against poststructuralism is that it seems to be in denial about the physical nature of the world we live in, thus failing to acknowledge people's stark material and physical realities and suffering (McLaughlin, 2003; Nightingale & Cromby 1999; Youdell, 2006). Hodgson and Standish (2009) also highlight the limitations of poststructuralism in educational research:

> The use of poststructuralism in educational research is constrained by the tension between, on the one hand, what is considered to be its emancipatory and empowering potential and on the other, a reluctance to be distracted from practical concerns and hence, a fear of alienating the practitioner by speaking in the theoretical or (worse) philosophical terms. (p.309)

Poststructuralists have responded to these criticisms by adopting a much more respectful stance that acknowledges that knowledge is not only produced within a social and historical context, but also within a personal life history context, and one that includes embodiment and materiality. Further, existing structural understandings of the world are limited and, consequently, poststructuralism offers alternative ways of understanding the world (Youdell,

2006). According to Youdell (2006), poststructuralism provides "… an additional set of conceptual, analytical and political tools that might be taken up in order to generate particular types of understanding and pursue particular avenues for change" (p.41).

3.2   Gender as a construct in this inquiry and its relationship to poststructuralism

'Gender' was indicated as the primary construct for this inquiry. Aikin and Unterhalter (2005) confirm that different meanings and understandings have been ascribed to the concept of gender, resulting in different interpretations and actions related to gender work. This section attempts to give an exposition of the different ways in which gender is theorised and conceptualised and some of the debates surrounding the concept of gender. It then ends with a description of the link between gender and poststructuralism and with how gender was constructed in this study.

3.2.1 Feminism(s)

Gender theory is deeply rooted in feminism (Weedon, 1997; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002), as feminist theory has played a significant role in shaping the concepts of gender as they are understood today (Lorber, 1997; McLaughlin, 2003). Therefore, one cannot talk about gender without recognising the contribution of feminism to gender discourse. However, there is no single coherent feminist framework. On the contrary, feminism is a complex concept, with many and diverse perspectives (Lorber, 1997; McNeany, 2004). Because of these many strands, Saulnier (1996) and Lorber (1997) prefer to talk of "feminisms". However, each perspective has made important contributions to improving women's status, but each also has its own limitations. Because some of these perspectives are important to this inquiry, the main issues and debates they raise about gender will be highlighted briefly in one of the subsections.

According to McNeany (2004), feminism is a theory that men and women should be equal politically, emotionally and socially, and those who believe in this theory are called "feminists" (p.1). Thus, the focus of feminism is on equality between men and women in all spheres of life, and this emphasis is referred to as "core feminism" or core "feminist theory" (p.1). However, this core focus of feminism is directed at women, highlighting their great

disadvantage in society, and furthers women's causes (Lorber, 1997). For many decades, feminist work has focused its time, energy and resources on the 'woman' question – that is, an analysis of who 'woman' was, and the implications of being a woman (Jackson & Scott, 2002; McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Viewed as a whole, feminism could be described as a theory, a movement (McNeany, 2004) and a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society (Weedon, 1997).

Historically, feminism is sometimes divided into three phases. The *first wave feminism* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focused on enlarging basic legal and property rights and on women gaining access to education and economic independence and acquiring rights to vote (McLaughlin, 2003; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002). The first wave was thus a political movement aimed at challenging the lack of rights for women in the public sphere (McLaughlin, 2003).

The *second wave feminism* in the late 1960s and early 1970s dealt with the liberation of women from gender-imposed roles and expectations, by advocating that they be free to seek personal fulfilment in all social spheres (Jackson & Scott; 2002; McLaughlin, 2003; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002). Second wave feminism, in different ways, provided a link between the continued gaps in the rights and opportunities women experienced in the public arena and the roles they played in the private sphere (McLaughlin, 2003). The focus on the private sphere brought a new range of issues into activism and the development of feminist ideas. The new areas included sexuality, reproduction, domestic labour and domestic violence. Second wave feminism went on to challenge the masculine values embedded in how social and political thought approached many issues (Jackson & Scott, 2002; McLaughlin, 2003). These feminists fundamentally challenged theory's lack of interest in the private sphere. According to McLaughlin (2003), "[o]nce the private came under investigation, feminists were able to identify patterns of power, harm and abuse women suffered in this sphere and push for legislation to challenge this abuse" (p.2), and accordingly, "the personal became political" (Weiler, 2008, p.1; see also David & Clegg, 2008). Weiler (2008) adds that during this period there was a call to explore how wider social structures such as law, politics, religion, family and the economy affected both men and women, since they were shaped by these broader forces in society.

Postmodern feminism could possibly be considered as *the third wave feminism*. The key concerns of postmodern feminists are the binary divide of gender, an essentialist approach to gender and the view of women as a unitary coherent entity, devoid of multiplicity and cultural, social and political positions (ADB, 2010; Arnot & Fennell, 2008; Butler, 1990; Cornwall, 2007; Elmhirst & Resurreccion, 2008; Gavey, 1997; Jackson, 1993; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002). The binary categories of male and female have been viewed as one of the most natural, common-place categories of identity, so they are rarely questioned (Gavey, 1997; Keating, 2002; Pauw, 2009; Shaw & Bailey, 2009). It has been argued that when constructed as binary categories of male and female, these categories appear as stable categories of identity, that exclude other forms of identity such as intersex and transgender people (Butler, 1990; GWS Africa, 2009). Further, these binary categories assume heterosexual relationships, in this way isolating other sexual orientations such as gay men and lesbian women (Butler, 1990). (See also Sections 2.1.4 and 3.2.1.1b.)

Owing to the inherent problems associated with the theory of the binary gender divide some feminist theorists have begun to question this theory of biological determinism and, instead, have called for a distinction to be made between sex and gender (Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975) – a theory that has came to be known as the "sex-gender system" (Keating, 2002, p.2). According to this system, a distinction is made between sex, which refers to the biological differences between males and females, and gender, which refers to the social meanings that cultures assign to these biological differences (Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975). The Gender and Women's Studies for Africa's Transformation (GWS Africa) reports that the idea of separating 'sex' from 'gender' was proposed as a way of examining societies through a focus on the social construction of gender (GWS Africa, 2009).

But several postmodern gender theorists find the sex-gender system to be problematic (Butler, 1993; Emslie et al, 1999; GWS Africa, 2009; Kriegler, 2003). These authors argue that the distinction between sex and gender has become blurred in its usage as research and scholars use gender differences and sex differences interchangeably or conflate the two terms. Butler (1993) is of the view that, while a distinction should be made between sex and gender, the two could still be studied in conjunction. In the health sector, similar concerns about the conflation of sex and gender have also been raised, leading to calls for gender to be separated from sex so that both are addressed adequately in health (Doyal, 2001; EngenderHealth, 2000**;** WHO, 1998). (See also Section 1.1.1.)

Some of the gender aspects specifically contributed to in this period came from social constructionism and were built on during the postmodern era. Social constructionism and postmodern feminisms are discussed in Section 3.2.1.1c.

Each of these different waves of feminism has produced important approaches to understanding the processes and structures that lie behind the oppression of women and the role of gender in shaping society in different areas of the globe and in different periods. However, feminism is much more complex than described above, for it is not a single unified movement or theory – the issues and debates it raises cannot just be lumped into historical periods (Alsop et al, 2002; Lorber, 1997; McLaughlin, 2003). Instead, these authors suggest a theoretical perspective on gender that captures the main arguments, debates and issues raised among the different feminisms, the contexts in which these have been raised, as well as continuity and convergences over time.

3.2.1.1 Feminist perspectives on gender

A useful way of looking at feminist theories or perspectives on gender is through a framework that groups the different feminist perspectives into three broad categories: "gender-reform feminisms, gender-resistant feminisms, and gender-revolution feminisms" (Lorber, 1997, p.8). The different strands of feminism within these three perspectives are summarised in Table 3-1. (See also Section 2.1.9 on approaches to gender and education.)

Table 3-1: Feminist perspectives on gender

Gender-reform feminisms (1960s and 1970s)	Gender-resistant feminisms (1970s)	Gender-revolution feminisms (1980s and 1990s)
• Liberal feminism • Socialist feminism • Development feminism	• Radical feminism • Lesbian feminism • Psychoanalytical feminism • Standpoint feminism	• Multi-ethnic feminism • Men's feminism • Postmodern feminism • Social construction feminism • Queer studies

a) Gender-reform feminisms

Lorber (1997) identifies three perspectives that fall under this category, namely liberal feminism, Marxist and socialist feminisms, and development feminism. She locates them

within the beginning of the second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s and adds that their ideas were rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal political philosophy.

Liberal feminism aims to achieve full equal opportunities in all spheres of life without radically transforming the present social and political system. The realisation of its aims means the transformation of the sexual division of labour, of social services and of contemporary forms of femininity and masculinity (Weedon, 1997) to ensure equality between men and women (Saulnier 1996; Trigiani, 1999). Drawing out the main gender argument of this perspective, Lorber (1997) posits that theoretically liberal feminism holds the view that gender differences are not based in biology and that, therefore, no basic difference exists between women and men, implying that they should then not be treated differently under the law. It would also require provision for domestic labour and childcare outside of the nuclear family (Weedon, 1997). The main contribution of liberal feminism to the feminist movement was to show how much modern society discriminated against women. It has been credited with breaking down many barriers to women's entry into formerly male-dominated jobs and professions, helping to equalise wage scales, and getting abortion and other reproductive rights legalised (Lorber, 1997).

Liberal feminism has, however, been criticised for its exclusive focus on equal treatment *outside* rather than within the family, thus accepting and endorsing the division between public and private life and implying that freedom of opportunity rests in the public sphere (Saulnier 1996). Liberal feminism has also been accused of ignoring the problems faced by poor white women and women of colour and addressing only the needs of a rather select group – white, middle class women of Western industrialised countries (McLaughlin, 2003; Saulnier 1996). McLaughlin (2003) argues that "[i]n identifying the oppression women faced, their values and the difference they could make to a better society, feminism presumed an identity and perspective shared by all women, and in this way the category hiding a variety of important areas of both identity and division" (p.8; see also Weiler, 2008.)

Socialist feminism is used as an umbrella term for socialist, materialist and Marxist feminisms (Jackson & Scott**,** 2002; Lorber, 1997; Saulnier, 1996). For socialist feminists, patriarchy is an integral component of class and race oppressions and can only be eliminated by fully trans-forming the social system (Jackson & Scott, 2002; Weedon 1997). Socialist feminism does not view gender as an essential entity, but as socially produced and historically changing.

Further, socialist feminists stress the need to take account of biology, but also to see its meaning as historical and social (Weedon, 1997). According to Saulnier (1996), these feminists have been credited with highlighting the need for attention to political-economic systems and in calling for coalitions among economically oppressed groups. At the same time, they have been criticised for characterising men's work as production and women's as reproduction, thus giving a false suggestion that men create society and women maintain it.

Development feminism addresses the economic exploitation of women and makes an important theoretical contribution to feminism by equating women's status with control of economic resources (Lorber, 1997). Lorber (1997) highlights the gendered division of labour, particularly in developing countries where female workers are paid less than male workers at all levels of the economy. This issue of high levels of female poverty leading to unequal access to and control over resources in Africa has already been highlighted in Chapter 1. Secondly, it was also pointed out that in the area of health, gender inequalities may greatly hamper the access to and control over resources and services that promote and protect health. (See Section 1.1.1.) The women in development (WID), gender and development approaches (GAD) and gender-mainstreaming (GM) approaches were discussed in Section 2.1.9.

b) Gender-resistant feminisms

Lorber (1997) considers resistant feminisms as a continuity of gender-reform feminism. She argues that as gender-reform feminisms penetrated the public spheres in the 1970s and as women entered formerly exclusive male workplaces and schools, they were confronted with the stark reality of a male-dominated society that continued to dominate them. She adds that it is out of this awareness that the gender-resistant feminisms of the 1970s were born. Lorber (1997) characterises resistant feminisms as radical, lesbian, psychoanalytical and standpoint feminism.

"*Radical feminism's* theoretical watchword is 'patriarchy', or men's pervasive oppression and exploitation of women, which can be found wherever women and men are in contact with each other, in private as well as in public (Lorber, 1997, p.16; emphasis added). Thus, the only way in which women can assert their autonomy from men and recover their true and natural femininity is in separation from men and from the patriarchal structures of society (Weedon, 1997), by forming "… non hierarchical, supportive, woman-only spaces where

women can think and act and create free of constant sexist put-downs, sexual harassment, and the threat of rape and violence" (Lorber, 1997, p.17). It seems as if the fight against patriarchy still has a long way to go. Connell (2005) asserts that at a global level, the attainment of gender equality would be a great loss to men because they "… collectively continue to receive a patriarchal dividend" (p.1808). Arnot and Fennell (2008) add that current measures of gender equality tend to conceal the historical, economic, social and cultural sub-structures of gender and in doing so, continue to perpetuate male power and privilege. From an educational perspective, the authors call for more nuanced analyses of patriarchal relations, which would address the impact of historical, social and cultural processes on the construction of gender in educational institutions.

In general, radical feminists have been credited for exposing the ideology underlying pornography, sexual harassment, rape, woman battering and prostitution. They have also been instrumental in developing services that centre on women's needs (Saulnier, 1996). A major criticism against radical feminism is its generalisation of women's oppression and its failure to recognise additional oppressions among women such as lesbians, women of colour, women with disabilities, or impoverished women, thereby ignoring issues of race, class, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation (Lorber, 1997; McLaughlin, 2003; Saulnier, 1996; Zein-Elabdin, 1996).

Lesbian feminism emerged in the late sixties mainly in the United States (US), Canada and the United Kingdom (UK), representing one of many social groups seeking liberation from oppression. Their main fight was with patriarchy and the institutionalisation of hetero-sexuality – the "... disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain" (Butler, 1990, p.135). This enforced organisation of sexuality essentially marginalised "othered" sexualities (p.135) that did not conform to the heterosexual matrix and (hetero)normalised constructions of sexuality. According to Ferfolja (2007), "[l]esbian sexualities are publicly forced into the private sphere, and are simultaneously publicly scrutinized, regulated and derided". Despite feeling frustrated and marginalised, lesbian feminists have been credited for bringing private matters such as domestic labour, child care, and birth control to the fore in line with the wider feminist movement's objectives. Lesbian feminists were also able to offer a positive re-analysis of female homosexuality as well as provide a critique of heterosexuality (Chenier, 2004). The lesbian feminist movement

has been credited for mobilising a network of social and political support that assisted lesbians to cope with the isolation, stigma and legal problems that many homosexuals struggled with (Lorber, 1997). According to Chenier (2004), lesbian feminists have, however, been criticised for ignoring and failing to understand the complexities of intersecting and multiple oppressions.

Psychoanalytical feminism has its roots in Freudian psychoanalytic theories (Alsop et al, 2002). It maintains that gender is not biologically based, but is related to the psycho-sexual development of the individual (Brennan, 1999). Psychoanalytical feminists believe that gender inequality originates in early childhood experiences, leading men to believe themselves to be masculine and women to believe themselves feminine (Alsop et al, 2002). Chodorow (1991) further explains that the unconscious awareness of self and gender that we develop from early infancy continues to shape both our experiences as men and women and the patterns of inequality and differences that exist throughout our society and culture. Abel (1990) credits psychoanalytical feminism with improving our understanding of sexual difference, but also reports on severe criticism for doing little to change the concrete social conditions of sex relations and for being indifferent to racial, class, and cultural differences. Psychoanalytical feminism is further criticised for ignoring the material conditions of people that are grounded in their everyday social practices and interactions (Abel, 1990).

Standpoint feminism focuses on confrontation with the dominant sources of knowledge and values. This is an important perspective for my inquiry because it is a critique of the absence and marginalisation of women from knowledge making and research. Standpoint feminism emphasises and foregrounds women's own knowledge as emerging from their situated experiences (Harding, 1997). This 'situatedness' is located within a woman's specific experiences and knowledge in her material world (Olesen, 2000). These feminists argue that "[w]hoever sets the agendas for scientific research, whoever shapes the content of education, whoever chooses the symbols that permeate cultural productions has *hegemonic power*" (Lorber, 1997, p.21; emphasis added). They insist that women's "voices" are different from men's, and they must be heard if women are to challenge hegemonic values (Lorber, 1997, p.21).

c) Gender-revolution feminisms

According to Lorber (1997), revolution feminists "… deconstruct the interlocking structures of power and privilege that make one group of men dominant, and thus have the revolutionary potential of destabilizing the structure and values of the dominant social order" (p.25). She locates the emergence of revolution feminists in the eighties and nineties and lists them as multi-ethnic feminism, men's feminism, social construction feminism, postmodern feminism and queer theory.

Multi-ethnic feminism seems to be a response to the critique against Marxism for homogenising women and their experiences (Lorber, 1997). It recognises that, apart from gender, there are other inequalities that exist alongside it, such as race, ethnicity, religion and social class. There are thus multiple strands of oppression and exploitation that are intertwined in structural relationships. It is argued that these multiple inequalities, including gender, comprise a "… complex hierarchical stratification system in which upper-class, heterosexual, white men *and* women oppress lower-class women *and* men of disadvantaged ethnicities and religions" (Lorber, 1997, p.25). Lorber further points out that according to this perspective, any analysis must also include the viewpoints and experiences of women and men of different races, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic class.

The 'legitimacy' of *men's feminism* is widely contested. Lingard and Douglas (1999) posit that the relationship between men and feminism has been complex. Although many men have engaged with feminism and supported the feminist cause, there is a lot of controversy and semantics surrounding the term 'men's feminism' and there is still a raging debate over whether or not men can be feminists (Brod, 1993; Lingard & Douglas, 1999). There are those who emphasise intrinsic differences between the sexes and maintain that men cannot be feminists simply because they are not women. These protagonists claim that due to inherent privileges that are granted to men, they cannot identify with feminist struggles and with feminism (Funk, 2004). Another school of thought takes the position that the strongest stand men can take in the struggle against sexism is to be identified as a feminist. This school recommends that men should be allowed, or even be encouraged, to participate in the feminist movement (bell hooks fan, 2004; Brod, 1993). In order to get some middle ground, Brod (1993) adopted the term "profeminist" (p.197) because of its seeming neutrality – it offers a degree of closeness to feminism without co-opting the term. This neutrality has allowed a

number of men to continue to engage with feminism by lobbying and campaigning for equal rights for women (Flood, 2004; Messner, 2002).

For *postmodern feminism* the question of how women are produced as a category is central (Jackson & Scott, 2002). The emphasis shifted from culture and linguistic structures to a mere fluid notion of how gender is constituted through discourse – in the words of Barrett (1992), a "shift from 'things' to 'words'" (p.102). According to Alsop et al (2002), this shift was necessitated by feminists who became wary of undue attention to patriarchal structures, "things" (in the earlier liberal, socialist and materialist feminisms), and who thus saw the need to shift to "words" (p.21). Barret (1992) clarifies that "things" refer to women's position in the labour market and in the household, women's education, male control of sexuality and the pervasiveness of rape, while "words" refers to the turn to ideology or "discursive constructions" (p.201). According to Alsop et al (2002), the 'discursive turn' was a time when particularly Marxist and socialist feminists began to examine the role of ideology in defining the processes of the social construction of gender and when attention also began to shift to an evaluation of the meaning of gender for individuals. Finally, another reason for this "shift" is that the materialist accounts of gender construction had failed to accommodate gender as an aspect of subjectivity (Alsop et al, 2002). Lorber (1997) seems to share the views of others that poststructuralism is subsumed under postmodernism. (See Section 3.1.2). The relation-ship between poststructuralism and gender/feminism will therefore be further explored in Section 3.2.2 below.

Social constructionism, as with poststructuralism, is viewed by some authors as part of postmodernism and has been credited for the sex-gender system theory. (See Sections 3.1.2.2 and 3.2.1.) Social construction feminism views society and all its structures as gendered. This implies that as a social institution, gender determines the distribution of power, privilege and economic resources (Lorber, 1997). Thus, the study of the social construction of gender helps us to understand how gender is shaped and given meaning by the social structures of a society (Alsop et al, 2002). Secondly, social construction feminism focuses on the processes that create gender differences and also make the construction of gender invisible, such as the gendered division of labour in the home, gender segregation and gender typing of occupations, and selective comparisons that ignore similarities (Lorber, 1997). Thirdly, social construction feminism argues that the essentialist binary of male and female biology and physiology are produced and reproduced by social processes. The taken-for-granted

expressions of gender as based in natural or biological difference are therefore questioned (Van Wagenen Wrin, 2004). Finally, social construction feminists believe that the processes of gender differentiation are all manifestations of power and social control, where maleness is constructed as strong and powerful and femaleness as weak and submissive (Webb & Macdonald, 2007). In their view, long-term change of this deeply gendered social reality would have to mean a conscious reorganisation of the gendered division of labour in the family and at the workplace. This would also entail undermining the normalised beliefs about the capabilities of women and men that justify the status quo (Lorber, 1997). In health, for example, there is a concern that if the status quo of the social construction of femininities and masculinities that prescribe the behaviour of men and women in society is maintained, it could potentially affect their health, especially in this era of HIV and AIDS (Courtenay, 1998; Courtenay, 2000; Sabo, 1999). Therefore any change in this deeply gendered order is unlikely to occur unless the pervasiveness of the social institution of gender and its social construction are openly contested (Lorber, 1997).

Social constructionist feminists have been credited with "denaturalising" gender and demonstrated that masculinity and femininity are unstable categories that vary across cultural and historical periods (Keating, 2002, p.3). Grodan (2008) also credits social constructionist feminists with being instrumental in shaping research around the concepts of 'gender', 'sex', 'sexuality', 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and how these terms have been socially constructed.

Queer studies gained recognition in the nineties with proponents such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Diana Fuss. As they were all largely following the work of Michel Foucault (Barry, 2002), queer theory is derived to a large extent from poststructuralist theory and deconstruction (Edwards, 1998). 'Queer' as used within queer theory is less an identity than an embodied critique of identity. Major aspects of this critique include: the role of performance in creating and maintaining identity (Green, 2010). "The basis of sexuality and gender, either as natural, essential, or socially constructed; discussion of the way that these identities change or resist change; and of their power relations vis-a-vis heteronormativity" (MedLibrary.org, n.d., n.p.). Critics of queer theory maintain that it completely neglects the material conditions that underpin discourse – that it is nearly impossible to speak of a lesbian or gay subject, since all social categories are produced

through discourse. By ignoring these material conditions, queer theory ignores the social and institutional conditions within which lesbians and gays live (Gamson, 2000).

3.2.2 The relationship of gender and feminism with poststructuralism

This section takes a closer look at gender and how it fits in within the overarching framework for this inquiry: a poststructuralist perspective. In the first instance, poststructuralist feminists argue that gender differences dwell in language. Gender is socially constructed through language and there is therefore nothing "natural" about gender itself (Alsop et al, 2002, p.23). They argue that language contains the most basic categories that we use to understand ourselves. Further, poststructuralist feminism challenges gender categories as dual, oppositional and fixed, arguing instead that gender comprises shifting, fluid, multiple categories (Cheek, 2000; Cornwall, 2007). (See also Section 3.1.3.6a.) Accordingly, poststructuralism challenges stable definitions of gender, while emphasising fluid processes of gendered identification and shifting forms of action (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Rathgeber, 1990). This is one of the reasons why gender researchers tend to reject the singular use of the words 'femininity' and 'masculinity', since they seem to portray static and essentialist gender categories. Instead they support plural forms of 'femininities' and 'masculinities' to depict shifting and multiple ways of being (Cheng, 1999; Craig, 1993; Donovan, 2006; Munro & Stychin, 2007; Person, 2006; Skelton & Francis, 2006).

Secondly, poststructuralist feminism recognises subjectivity in the constitution of gender – this subjective constitution varies greatly in different social locations. Such a perspective requires that gendering should be seen as a process rather than as a 'role'. In this process, the roles of culture and language are key. The emphasis on process implies that gender is a concept that is constantly being reproduced, contested and negotiated and that might yield quite unexpected and contradictory effects (Alsop et al, 2002) such as resistance, indifference or acceptance (Kabeer, 1994).

Weedon (1997) enumerates various uses and benefits of poststructuralist feminism. Firstly, she explains that poststructuralism can aid in the understanding of those social and cultural practices that constitute, reproduce and contest gender power relations. Secondly, poststructuralism enables us to grasp the range of possible normal subject positions open to women, and the power and powerlessness invested in these positions. Finally, poststructuralist

feminism pays special attention to historical contexts that produce women's subjective positions, modes of femininity and women's place in the overall network of social power relations. In this way, we are able to gain "... insights into small gendered acts of citizenship, religious identities, and feminist modes of organization for gender change, the limitations of poverty reduction strategies and public/private partnerships that ignore gender" (Arnot & Fennell, 2008, p.516).

3.2.3 The construction of gender in this inquiry

My inquiry was interested in investigating how gender was represented within the public health curriculum. The foregoing analysis indicates that gender is understood differently in different historical and social contexts. In certain cases there are overlaps and continuities, leading to different responses, in order to arrive at the core project of feminism – gender equality. Often, some of these gender theories oppose or critique each other and this has been highlighted by discussing some of the weaknesses of the various theories as pointed out by the opposing theories. For example, the feminist focus on women has been criticised by gender and development theorists who feel that men should also be included in the gender agenda (ADB, 2010). Another example is a poststructuralist opposition to theories that view gender as having a fixed core essence as opposed to unstable fluid notions of gender. (See Section 3.1.3.1.) The analysis in Section 3.2.3 informed my inquiry in its effort to understand the different ways in which gender was understood by academic staff, and how these understandings then produced different responses to how gender was represented in the curriculum.

It was not the intention of my study to develop or impose a unitary definition of 'gender' but rather to explore and gain further insight into the multiple ways of using and understanding gender within the public health curriculum. Thus, my position on gender was loosely viewed as the way in which we make sense of being male and female. Gender was therefore not viewed as a fixed, stable concept. Rather, my inquiry was guided by the assumption that gender was socially constructed through language, thus yielding multiple and fluid meanings in the different cultural and historical contexts of the different schools of public health under study. Consequently, a range of discourses on gender would emerge, with the most dominant being a reflection of prevailing gender discourses in society. This view of gender is depicted in Figure 3-2.
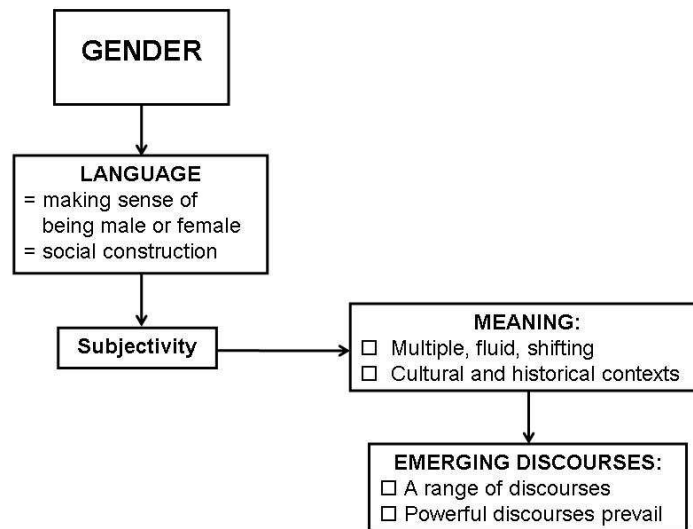

```
                        GENDER

                       LANGUAGE
                    = making sense of
                      being male or female
                    = social construction

    Subjectivity   ──▶        MEANING:
                            □ Multiple, fluid, shifting
                            □ Cultural and historical contexts

                            EMERGING DISCOURSES:
                            □ A range of discourses
                            □ Powerful discourses prevail
```

Figure 3-2: The researcher's construction of gender in the inquiry

3.3 Curriculum as a construct in this inquiry and its relationship to poststructuralism

Another key construct for this inquiry was 'curriculum'. In this section, the different ways in which curriculum is understood are reviewed, followed by a demonstration of the link between curriculum and poststructuralism and, finally, a description of how curriculum was constructed in this study.

Arnot and Fennell (2008) state that investigation of the curriculum with regard to gender has not been given its due importance in research, particularly in developing countries. Yet, according to Hatchell (2006), "[s]chools represent a central arena where learning takes place. It is also one of the places where race/ethnicity and gender are constructed" (p.7). In addition, Marshall and Arnot (2007) argue that school knowledge with its gendered assumptions and attributions plays a key role in the formation of gender identities and, more often than not, helps sustain rather than challenge gender hierarchies and inequalities within a society. In this study, curriculum was chosen as one of the 'sites' for the construction of gender and it was expected that an understanding of curriculum as text would give us more insight into the relationship between curriculum and the construction of gender in the higher education landscape. Higher education institutions serve as an extension of school education, with similar issues and scenarios in terms of gender constructions going on underneath the surface.

3.3.1 Defining curriculum

Many authors have expressed the difficulty of defining the term 'curriculum', since its very definition is based on one's philosophical beliefs, which result in numerous definitions (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Kelly, 1989; Oliva, 1988; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995). However, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) contend that having a plethora of definitions should not be viewed in a negative light, as it is a reflection of the dynamism of varied voices in the field. These authors add: "These voices introduce diverse interpretations by drawing on specific modes of thought, particular ideologies, diverse pedagogies, unique political experiences and various cultural experiences" (p.111).

Available definitions of 'curriculum' tend to range from specific, prescriptive and rather narrow interpretations to broad, all encompassing interpretations (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995). These perspectives are discussed below.

3.3.1.1 The narrow, specific and prescriptive perspective

From the narrow perspective, 'curriculum' is defined as a plan or prescription for action, or a written document that includes strategies for achieving desired goals or ends, for example, a syllabus and policy statement (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995; Posner, 1995). In some cases, curriculum is described as the content of a particular subject or area of study. Expounding further on this narrow perspective, Oliva (1988) observes that curriculum could be viewed as "… a discipline, a subject of study, or a systematic group of courses or sequences of subjects required for graduation or certification in a major field of study" (p.6).

In their critique of this perspective, Hoadley and Jansen (2002) point out some disadvantages of this narrow understanding of curriculum as official documents only, as it

- □ Implies that whatever is not planned must fall outside the concept of curriculum, thus limiting planning to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge that should be transmitted;

- □ Rests on the assumption that the teacher's role is that of transmitting knowledge rather than developing curriculum; and

□ Assumes that knowledge is fixed and should not be changed in classroom practice, which would limit any curriculum analysis.

Adding to the disadvantages of a prescriptive approach, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) warn that a prescriptive approach has the potential of ignoring the power of both the hidden and null curriculum discussed in Section 3.3.2 below, as students often construct more powerful learning from the hidden and null curricula. Further, these authors argue that the omission of both the null and the hidden curriculum may lead students to conclude that what is left out is not considered of value and is thus not important within the purpose of schooling.

3.3.1.2 The broad, all encompassing perspective

The broad, all encompassing view describes 'curriculum' as dealing with the experiences of the learner (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995). This view considers almost anything in school – even outside of school – as part of the curriculum, whether academic, athletic, emotional or social, as long as it is planned (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995; Posner, 1995; SAQA, 2000). Educators who hold this perspective argue that curriculum is more than a set of documents (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; SAQA, 2000), and some even reject the distinction between curricular and extra-curricular activities (Posner, 1995). Pinar et al (1995) suggest that this broad definition introduces a distinction between "directed" and "undirected" experience, with the latter referring to "out-of-school" experience (p.27). The out-of-school curriculum is influenced by various institutions, ranging from the church and temple to the media and business, from day-care centres to the family. Based on the notion of "out-of-school experience", later definitions expanded further to include the unexpected or "unwanted outcomes of schooling", such as the hidden curriculum, the unstudied curriculum and the unwritten curriculum. Additionally, there have been definitions of the curriculum that emphasise what is not offered, the so-called "null" curriculum (Pinar et al, 1995, p.27). Hoadley and Jansen (2002) summarise this broad all encompassing perspective on curriculum as "the total programme of an educational institution" (p.5) and refer to this broad experience as "curriculum in practice" (p.4).

Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) caution that a broad umbrella perspective of curriculum as school experiences could send out the wrong message that almost everything that goes on in school could be classified or discussed in terms of curriculum, while also implying that

curriculum is synonymous with education. This in effect makes it difficult to delineate the curriculum field and separate it from other fields.

3.3.2 Types of curriculum

Even though most curriculum literature focuses on the school curriculum, the principles and issues they raise are also applicable and give some insight into the higher education curricula. Several curriculum models have been hypothesised as existing simultaneously in schools. Different authors classify them differently, although in some cases there are overlaps. The following list summarises these models:

□ The *ideal curriculum* refers to the curriculum that has been recommended as what is 'best' for teaching about a subject. According to Sepinwall (1999), the ideal curriculum must contain a rationale, including goals and objectives, for the programme of study.

□ Sepinwall (1999) refers to the *formal curriculum* as the *written curriculum*, while Posner (1995) and Hoadley and Jansen (2002) refer to the formal curriculum as the *official* or *prescribed curriculum*. The formal, official, prescribed or written curriculum is the one that has been approved and adopted for use in schools, and is set out in official documents, what Hoadley and Jansen (2002) refer to as the "blue print" (p.2). Its scope includes sequence charts, syllabi, prospectuses, curriculum guides, course outlines, lists of objectives and policy statements (Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Kelly, 1989; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Posner, 1995).

□ The *null curriculum* refers to "… those subject matters and/or experiences that are not taught or learnt, but which students know, at least in a general way, exist" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p.12). Any analysis of the curriculum must therefore consider why these matters are ignored by curriculum planners and teachers (Posner, 1995).

□ Sepinwall (1999) explains that the *perceived curriculum* relates to what administrators, parents and others report about what the curriculum is accomplishing, and that anecdotal reports from any or these stakeholders form the basis of the definition of the perceived curriculum.

□ The *hidden curriculum* refers to those unintended but quite real outcomes and features of the schooling process (Pinar et al, 1995), which are not in themselves overtly included in the planning or even in the consciousness of those responsible for school management and curriculum planning (Cornbleth, 1990; Hoadley & Jansen, 2002; Kelly, 1989). According to Tekian (2009), these unintended outcomes stem from "… influences that function at the level of organisational structure and culture" (p.822). Examples include social roles, sex roles, appropriate behaviour, decision making, religious beliefs, rituals, norms and value systems (Hafferty, 1998; Kelly, 1989; Posner, 1995; Tekian, 2009). According to Posner (1995), the hidden curriculum is not generally acknowledged by school officials, but seems to have a deeper and more durable impact on students. He adds that the message of the hidden curriculum addresses issues such as gender, class, race, authority and also deals with the tacit ways in which knowledge and behaviour are produced outside the normal course materials and formally scheduled lessons (Pinar et al, 1995). Thus, according to Hafferty (1998), the hidden curriculum pays special attention to the importance and impact of structural factors on the learning process. However, Aultman (2005) is of the view that the formal curriculum has the hidden curriculum within it – this author states that "… the carefully scripted, formal curriculum carries with it a hidden or unintended outcome" (p.263). Increasingly, the hidden curriculum is perceived by curriculum researchers as a vital part of more general curriculum transformation (Hafferty, 1998; Morley, 2007). In line with this perception, Aultman (2005) urges educators to look beyond the formal curriculum and consider students' learning and social environments.

Hoadley and Jansen (2002) use a different classification. They classify curriculum as *implicit* or *informal* curriculum and further split this into *covert* and *hidden* curriculum. They explain that the *covert* curriculum consists of learning that is not recorded in official curriculum documents, but which is never the less made explicit by teachers. Marsh (1992) summarises the *hidden* curriculum as involving the learning of attitudes, norms, beliefs, values and assumptions often expressed as rules, rituals and regulations, which are rarely challenged and are often taken for granted by curriculum designers and other stakeholders.

□ The *extra curriculum* refers to all those experiences outside of the school subjects that are planned by schools and other educational institutions. Posner (1995) reiterates that

this type of curriculum differs significantly from the official curriculum in two ways: firstly, because of its voluntary nature and, secondly, because of its responsiveness to student interests. Further, the extra curriculum is not hidden, but is openly acknowledged as an important aspect of the school experience. Kelly (1989) adds that this extra curriculum could take place at lunchtime, after school hours, weekends, or during school holidays, and includes activities such as sports, clubs, societies and school journeys.

□ The *operational curriculum* refers to what observers actually see being taught, or what is actually taking place in the classroom. Sepinwall (1999) adds that the operational curriculum can be defined and assessed by lesson plans, observational reports, and videotapes of instructional situations. Posner (1995) identifies two components of the operational curriculum – namely the content and the learning outcomes. He explains that "[t]he content refers to what is actually taught by the teachers (the taught curriculum), while learning outcomes refer to the evaluation of what the students have been taught (the tested curriculum)" (p.11).

□ The *experiential curriculum* refers to what students believe they are learning and what students actually learn from the operational curriculum they are experiencing. Sepinwall (1999) elaborates by stating that the experiential curriculum can be made manifest through student questionnaires, interviews, examinations, and inferences derived from observation. Kelly (1989) refers to this curriculum as the *actual* or *received curriculum*. She emphasises that what is actually received by learners is as important as the planned curriculum.

In conclusion, Kelly (1989) reiterates that whatever definition of the term 'curriculum' is adopted, it must embrace at least four dimensions of education planning and practice "... the intentions of the planners, the procedures adopted for the implementation of those intentions, the actual experiences of the pupils resulting from the teachers' direct attempts to carry out the planners' intentions and the hidden learning that occurs as a by product of the organization of the curriculum and, indeed, of the school" (p.14).

3.3.3 Philosophical approaches to the curriculum

Anyone's philosophy is based on their own personal systems of perceptions, beliefs and values (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Posner, 1995). Philosophy is of great significance to curriculum, since it is said to influence the goals and content as well as the organisation of the curriculum (Oliva, 1988; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). However, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) state that often schools hold more than one philosophy, which adds to the dynamics of the curriculum within the school. Two major philosophical approaches to the curriculum have been identified as the traditional (or conservative approach) and the contemporary (or liberal approach) (Oliva, 1988; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). This study is interested in one of the contemporary approaches, *reconceptualism,* which has a much more direct application to the way in which the public health curriculum has been constructed in this inquiry. This philosophy is explored below.

3.3.3.1 Reconceptualists

Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) describe reconceptualists as the most vocal group within the curricular arena. Reconceptualists view curriculum with much broader lenses to include an "intuitive, personal, mystical, linguistic, political, social and spiritual" (p.52) perspective and an aesthetic perspective (Slattery, 2003). Reconceptualists believe that this broader perspective is comprehensive enough to tackle society's complex and varied problems (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998) and to accommodate all groups of people, while, at the same time, address their human needs (Marsh, 1992). These broader lenses have expanded the curriculum to incorporate "… language and communication skills, personal biographies, art, poetry, dance, drama, literature, psychology, ethics, religion, and other aesthetic, humanistic and spiritual subject matter" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p.53). Reconceptualists shy away from the hard sciences and focus on the development of both cognitive and intellectual aspects of the person. They see the individual as the chief agent in the construction of knowledge – as a culture creator, as well as culture bearer (Marsh, 1992). Their key slogan is liberation, as they aim to liberate people from the restrictions, limitations and control of society, by moving from knowledge to activity, from reflection to action (Marsh, 1992; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Reconceptualists emphasise the necessity of reconstructing and reorganising experiences by individuals and groups.

There is, therefore, a big move away from a preoccupation with curriculum *per se* to an emphasis on the social and political realms within which persons will experience specific curricula (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Reconceptualisation has consequently been popularly and proudly referred to as an orientation that has brought about a shift from curriculum development to understanding curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995). Marsh (1992) expounds on the notion of reconceptualisation by explaining that it includes "… the process of reflecting on curriculum matters and seeking meaning and direction to curriculum experiences. The emphasis is more upon reflection and processes of thinking than the production of documents, curriculum plans or theories" (p.202). Thus, according to Marsh (1992), reconceptualists use different values and methods to portray curriculum and are committed to transforming or reconceptualising an existing curriculum.

Marsh (1992) has credited reconceptualists with raising serious challenges about traditional approaches to curriculum, for generating new concepts and a new language to theorise about curriculum, and with assisting in the demotion of quantitative methods of evaluating education practices from their position of pre-eminence. The author adds that reconceptualists have highlighted the qualitative aspects of educational experiences and broadened the interpretation of evaluation processes and evaluation judgements.

Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) mention that reconceptualism represents diverse voices that promote themes such as social inequality, the marginalisation of groups, and the suffering of the oppressed. In addition, there is a focus on specific issues, including race, class and gender (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995) and, more recently, on feminist, poststructural-ist and postmodern discourses (Pinar et al, 1995). Since the focus of this inquiry is on gender in the public health curriculum through a poststructuralist lens, more attention was paid to gender and poststructuralist perspectives on curriculum, which could be considered to fall within the ambit of the reconceptualists.

3.3.3.2 A feminist/gender perspective on curriculum

A feminist perspective focuses on emancipation from a society, its schools and curriculum, which are considered to be oppressive. Thus, according to Ornstein and Hunkins (1998), a feminist perspective on curriculum raises pertinent questions such as: Who is controlling the

content of the curriculum and for what purpose? How are women depicted in the curriculum? Who has access to the privileged subjects of the curriculum?

A broad overview of *liberal feminism* was given in Section 3.2.1.1a and its application to curriculum is now discussed in this section. In education settings liberal feminists sought to uncover sexism and to examine patterns of gender discrimination in public school administration (Weiler, 2008). They focused on the theme of equity in schools by raising questions related to gender stereotyping, sexual stratification along subject lines and unequal distribution of resources, including power in schools. Liberal feminists have, however, been criticised for failing to institute reforms that would challenge and bring about changes in the structures of power, forms of knowledge and ways of knowing (Pinar et al, 1995). Weedon (1997), for example, asserts that gender relations have structured women's absence from the active production of most theory within a whole range of discourses over the past 300 years.

In Section 3.2.1.1b we looked at the key features, benefits and criticisms directed at *radical feminists.* In educational circles these feminists focused on the production and reproduction of gender in the education system, thereby exposing and challenging the unequal gendered nature of the structures of educational institutions, including the structures of knowledge themselves. They examine the ways in which gender differences are produced and maintained in society and in schools, including their implications for education, curriculum and educational research (Pinar et al, 1995; Weedon, 1997).

According to Pinar et al (1995), the liberal feminist and radical feminist analyses and critiques have had a long-lasting impact on both education and contemporary curriculum discourses, while Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) are of the view that feminist theories have succeeded in creating theories that are useful in addressing perceived inequities.

Pinar et al (1995) make a distinction between a *feminist perspective* that focuses on issues dealing specifically with women and a *gender perspective* that encompasses a feminist perspective but is much wider. A gender perspective on curriculum focuses on gender analysis, which includes meanings we give to femininity and masculinity (being male or female and its implications) and to sexual differences. It also focuses on other aspects such as radical homosexual or gay analysis. Curriculum as gender text focuses on examining the biased ways in which people are categorised due to their gender and sexuality, and the ways

we construct and are constituted by the prevailing system of gender, and the way gender permeates our concepts of knowledge and our ways of knowing. Pinar et al (1995) report that this expansion in interpretation has led to the analysis of concepts such as 'masculinity', 'male sex roles', and 'homophobia' within the curriculum, and the emergence of queer studies. They conclude with a remark that "[w]ith time, the movement, which had originally focused on women's oppression, came to include a radical analysis of and attack on the entire gender system" (p.125). (See also Section 3.2.1.1c.)

3.3.4 The relationship between curriculum and poststructuralism

Hodgson and Standish (2009) caution against using poststructuralist and Foucauldian thought as a template, theory or model by fitting it into the dominant educational research framework. (See also Section 3.1.3 and subsections.) According to them, current educational research is only "… concerned with reaching a conclusion, an outcome that can be translated into policy outcome" (p.309) and in this way "… fixes the account and the subject within it" (p.309), thereby constraining and limiting change and action. This "fixing" of the research process is in direct conflict with poststructuralist thought, which views research as a process and a site of struggle leading to various forms of subjectivities and resistance – thus opening up alternative and new ways of thinking about educational practice, leading to change. In this way, educational policies and practices can be changed. Nudzor (2009) further explains that the persistent paradox between educational policy and practice is because policy is often seen as a fixed entity rather than as arising out of discourse. When the policy and practice arena is viewed as a site of struggle it gives way to various forms of subjectivities, leading to resistance and thus change.

As curriculum is one of the key constructs of this inquiry, it is necessary to explore its relationship within the overarching poststructuralist paradigm. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) maintain that a poststructuralist view of the curriculum, which is embedded within a reconceptualist philosophy, is also concerned with wider social issues rather than with the technical issues of curriculum. These wider issues include cultural, historical, political, ecological, aesthetic, theological and autobiographical discourses. A further concern is to examine how these discourses interact with and impact on human conditions, social structures and the ecosphere. Pinar et al (1995) again emphasise that poststructuralists have brought about a paradigm shift and refocused the field from developing curriculum as a bureaucratic

function, to understanding curriculum as an intellectual, academic, as well as practical and political project.

Key features of a poststructuralist perspective on curriculum are discussed in the subsections that follow. They focus on: reality and curriculum; language and curriculum; curriculum and deconstruction; curriculum as political text; and discourse and curriculum change.

3.3.4.1 Reality and curriculum

As seen in Section 3.1.3.1, a poststructuralist perspective does not subscribe to foundational, universal truths or metanarratives (Pinar et al, 1995; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Usher & Edwards, 1994). Accordingly, poststructuralists are highly sceptical of any appeal to unities, totalities, origins and first principles and view them as discursive strategies used to entrench and legitimise dominant and taken-for-granted paradigms in education that also disguise the exercise of power (Pinar et al, 1995; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Arnot and Fennell (2008) lament that most national education policies still regard education as part of "… a single, uniform package to be offered to all its citizens" (p.517). Instead, they suggest that other broader social issues such as discrimination and exclusion should be incorporated in official education documents, since their exclusion often interferes with the educational experiences of disadvantaged men or women. Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) also cite the current international agenda of Education for All (EFA) with its focus on educational access as a strategy for ensuring that education reaches all girls and boys. These authors argue that this in essence is a homogeneous educational policy that does not take into account, for example, the religious and ethnic differences of the children involved. Arnot and Fennell (2008) also propose that the reduction of EFA goals to a mere statistical category does not allow for deeper analyses of gender power relations.

Poststructuralists reject structured, hierarchical curriculum content with the aim of teaching one single truth and turn out well-educated citizens (Usher & Edwards, 1994). They advance the view that curricular foundations are not static, have no centre and grounding, and are constantly changing (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pinar et al, 1995). Curriculum is considered a controversial field, which is continuously under debate, review and re-construction, and cannot be said to be a fixed, grounded discipline (Pinar et al, 1995). Instead, poststructuralists

advance the view of "… dispersion and multiplicity to replace unity and totality" (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.24), *inter alia* by proposing a type of curriculum that allows for multiplicity of meanings and in which students are guided to construct their own reality. My study is a 'snapshot' on gender issues in the public health curriculum in sub-Saharan Africa at a particular point in time in a constantly changing education system that allows for the construction of multiple realities and meanings.

3.3.4.2 Language and curriculum

Poststructuralism focuses on language and how we come to create and understand it. Curriculum is written and presented in language form. There is, therefore, a need to take language seriously (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Knowledge does not represent reality, but rather, discourse constructs reality (Pinar et al, 1995); discourse constructs curriculum, implying that there is no single unitary curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Durrani (2008), for example, views curriculum as "… a set of discursive practices which position girls and boys unequally and differently constitute them as gendered and nationalised/ist subjects" (p.1). After studying curriculum texts from Pakistan, she concluded that in its current form, education was a means of maintaining, reproducing and reinforcing the gender hierarchies that characterised Pakistani society. Pinar et al (1995) and Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) posit that poststructuralists believe that new meanings are constantly being shaped and reshaped through language, and therefore, no true meaning of curriculum is fixed. Thus, readers deconstruct text in order to reconstruct their personal meaning of text.

3.3.4.3 Curriculum and deconstruction

For poststructuralists curriculum is a type of text and pedagogy a type of language (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Therefore, curriculum as deconstructed text disrupts taken-for-granted notions of knowledge and the ways we conceive of curriculum, as Pinar et al (1995) aptly put it: "The assumed truth of constructions is deconstructed" (p.29). These authors add that by disturbing the usual rational way of thinking about curriculum, deconstructionists seek to "... dissolve, explode, and deconstruct the taken-for-granted and reified forms of curriculum that are frequently mistaken for the reality of educational experience they pretend to map" (p.29). Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) encourage the continual deconstruction of the world in general and the curriculum in particular, maintaining that this is a useful rather than

destructive practice that can lead to reflection on and the creation of new text and, thus, new knowledge. (See also Section 3.1.3.6 and subsections.)

3.3.4.4 Curriculum as political text

Poststructuralists view curriculum as political text shaped by language and power relations (Pinar et al, 1995). They focus on how power relations shape knowledge production and legitimise this knowledge (Usher & Edwards, 1994). For poststructuralists then, knowledge is power. Consequently, they ask four important questions related to knowledge and power:

- □ Who has knowledge/power?
- □ How and under what conditions do particular discourses come to shape reality?
- □ What counts as knowledge?
- □ How are those discourses selected, organised, inscribed and legitimised in a particular society? (Pinar et al, 1995)

Pinar et al (1995) also suggest that by asking these questions, poststructuralists aim at transforming the social relations of knowledge production, the type of knowledge produced, and the structures that determine how knowledge is disseminated.

Curriculum is therefore viewed as a site of contestation and conflict. It is argued that through discursive practices, language is used to persuade us to conceive of curriculum in particular ways, with the dominant group imposing its values on the less dominant group (Pinar et al, 1995). Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) support this view by declaring that politics as varied texts compete for our attention, while Pinar et al (1995) conclude that issues of curricular inclusion or exclusion are largely political issues, and that curriculum is constituted through discourse.

3.3.4.5 Discourse and curriculum change

Finally, Pinar et al (1995) emphasise that a poststructuralist perspective of curriculum, which tolerates plurality and difference, brings with it the promise of increased freedom, more power and change. Usher and Edwards (1994) add that a tolerance for plurality and difference provides alternative discourses, which can be appropriated for a critical examination of the theory and practice of education. They suggest that rather than hold a single, universal and invariant mode of rationality, there is a need to see rationality as having many forms,

validated in many different human practices. However, it is possible to acknowledge many and different points of view whilst denying them equal value. Pinar et al (1995) also suggest that exposing students to alternative discourses enables them to confront controversial ideas and teaches them to navigate through more than one discourse. This empowers them to communicate and make their own decisions and also gives them the ability to alter their conceptions of their self and their surroundings. In conclusion, poststructuralism offers us understandings of curriculum and teaching that open up multiple meanings and allows us to break out of frozen ways of thinking in order to think through and between dualisms and to move through to the other side of prejudices and clichés of education (Pinar et al, 1995).

3.3.5 The researcher's construction of curriculum

Based on the above exposition of curriculum, I constructed the following views of the curriculum for adoption in my inquiry:

3.3.5.1 Curriculum as text and discourse

This inquiry viewed curriculum as text and discourse that needed to be deconstructed in order to uncover the discourses on gender in the public health curriculum as they might still be entrenched in some dominant grand narratives. Using a poststructuralist lens with a focus on representation in texts, I believed that an analysis of discourses that were present could reveal much about the way in which our present understandings of gender and health have come to be as they are. Curriculum was also analysed as political text, by exploring dominant and marginalised discourses and how decisions were made with regard to the curriculum.

The curriculum text was also explored as gender text by adopting Pinar et al's (1995) wider approach to gender issues in the curriculum. It was explored from the perspective of both men and women and the meanings they gave to femininity and masculinity (being female or male), and how these in turn influenced the way in which gender was represented within the public health curriculum. It was assumed that this approach would open up multiple realities about the representation of gender in the curriculum.

Finally, the public health curriculum was deconstructed in order to come up with a reconceptualised curriculum. The aim was to reflect on and seek meaning on the way gender

was represented in order to gain insight into an understanding of this phenomenon. In this regard, there was a deliberate move away from the technical issues of curriculum design and development, to 'understanding' – which I viewed as a process and not a product.

3.3.5.2 Types of curriculum

In line with a poststructuralist paradigm, this inquiry did not rely on a definitive view of the curriculum, but instead viewed the public health curriculum in multiple ways as outlined in Section 3.1.3.1. However, because of the need to delimit the scope of the study, interpretations of only certain types of curriculum (Section 4.2.3.1) were used to answer the research questions. Firstly, data was collected from the *formal, official* curriculum documents. Secondly, the concept of a *null* curriculum was used to explore the representations of gender that were not included in the official curriculum, but which shaped the research participants' understandings and construction of gender. The *hidden* curriculum was important in shaping the formal curriculum in subtle ways and in this case other forces that shaped gender (for example, cultural, social and historical forces) were explored. In the course of the study aspects related to the *perceived* and the *operational curriculum* also came to the fore.

The focus on the above types of curriculum does not mean that other types of curriculum were not important. For example, the *experiential* curriculum is a very important aspect, as it deals with students' experience and constructions of gender, based on their lecturers' constructions. However, for logistical and financial reasons, including the need for delimiting the scope of this inquiry, the exploration of a broader scope of curriculum was not feasible.

3.4   Conclusion: a conceptual framework for this inquiry

Following an exposition of the poststructuralist paradigm and the key constructs of 'discourse', 'gender' and 'curriculum', a summary of the way in which this inquiry was conceptualised and put together is given below. As illustrated in Figure 3-3, poststructuralism is the overarching paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as "… a set of basic beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles, which represent a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual places in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p.107). They add that a paradigm addresses three important questions: an ontological, an epistemological and a methodological question.
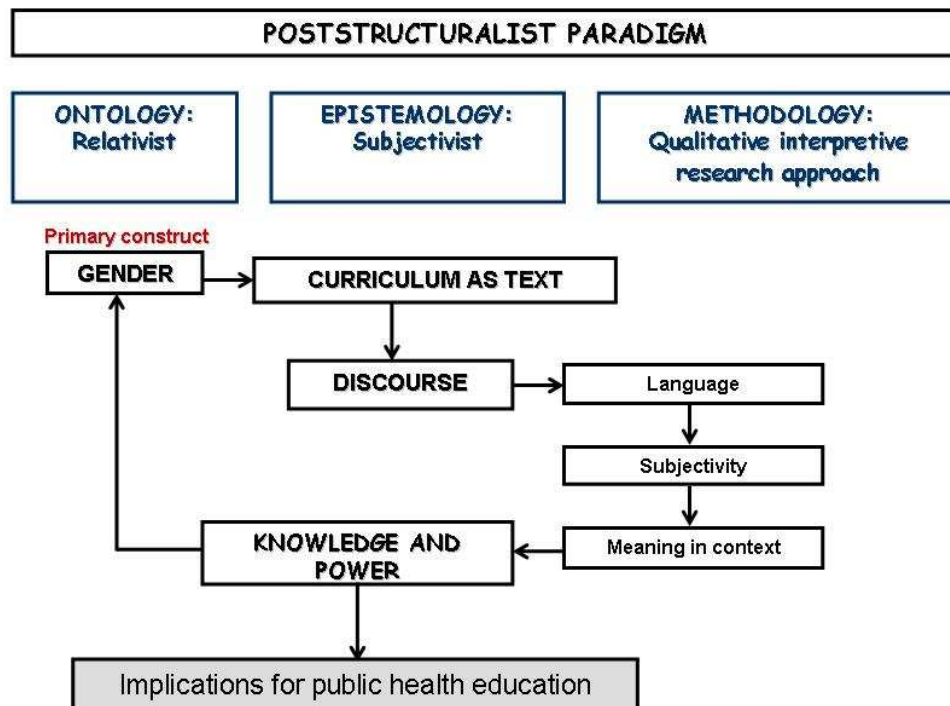
Figure 3-3: A conceptual framework for the inquiry

Firstly, the *ontological* question addresses the issue of the nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it. In this inquiry the ontological question focused on the nature of reality regarding gender, by focusing on the questions: how is gender represented in the public health curriculum, and what are the perceptions of academic staff about gender? This is why gender was labelled as the primary construct of the inquiry. A poststructuralist ontology is *relativist* and promotes the view that reality is multiple and socially constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Lye, 1997; Neuman, 1997). For this inquiry, the aim was to investigate and highlight multiple, alternative and marginalised ways in which gender was understood and represented, rather than to try to reduce these meanings to one singular meaning. (See also Section 3.2.3 and Figure 3-2 on the construction of gender for this inquiry).

Secondly, the *epistemological* question addresses the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known. This relationship is depicted as a process, illustrating how the researcher came to know about how gender was constructed and represented in the public health curriculum. This epistemological process was achieved by

employing the key elements of a poststructuralist paradigm: text (the official public health curriculum documents and transcribed interviews), discourse, language, subjectivity, the creation of meaning in context, and knowledge and power (Lye, 1997; Weedon, 1987). (See also Section 3.1.3.4.and Figure 3-1 on how these elements were linked and how they were employed in this inquiry.) These elements assisted me to explore the discourses on gender in the public health curriculum, including the subjective positions of academic staff and how these enabled them to give meaning to and construct their own reality of gender. This exploration was done in a transactional way, while at the same time creating meaning from this interactive process. This is known as a *subjectivist* epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Thirdly, the *methodological* question addresses the concern of how the inquirer can go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Finally, from a methodological point of view, in finding out how the reality regarding gender was constructed, a qualitative, *interpretive* research approach was used, since the aim was to interpret the public health curriculum text and to unravel how gender was represented in it.

Although it was a difficult task, the pieces of the framework emerged from the title of the study, which included constructs such as discourse analysis, gender, public health and curriculum. In addition, the choice of a poststructural framework that was lodged within a qualitative method of inquiry added to the pieces of the framework. A thorough literature review of each of the constructs and their interrelationships was then carried out and this helped in establishing the linkages between the different constructs. A more practical way in which these pieces of the framework were put together is described in the *bricolage* in Section 7.6 of Chapter 7.

The implications of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a poststructuralist conceptual framework for the research design and process are further unpacked in Chapter 4.