Chapter 6

Lived experiences of gender and curriculum

In this chapter I will provide an interpretation of the texts from the transcripts of in-depth interviews that were held with academic staff in two selected schools of public health in sub-Saharan Africa (Schools 1600 and 2500). The sample selection and case-study design have already been described in Chapter 4. The following questions, which were directly linked to the research questions of this inquiry, guided my interpretation in this chapter:

What are the perceptions of public health academic staff in sub-Saharan Africa with regard to gender?

(a) What resources have shaped these perceptions?

(b) How are forms of subjectivity constituted and taken up within these discourses on gender?

(c) How do academics' own perceptions and experiences contribute to the construction of current discourses on gender in the public health curriculum?

Participants from both schools possessed diverse educational backgrounds and qualifications, ranging from Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Science to Social Sciences and Arts. With regard to rank, the directors of both schools were interviewed, as well as four senior lecturers, two lecturers, four assistant lecturers, one curriculum developer and one researcher. The biographic profiles of the participants are captured in Table 6-1 and include the areas in which participants were teaching and their levels of training in gender. The sample reflected sufficient diversity to elicit a wide range of responses.

Contrary to my expectations, most of the participants had received some training on gender or had been exposed to gender-related issues. Seven reported that they had received some form of training on gender, with four of these participants, all from School 1600, reporting to have attended a gender-mainstreaming (GM) course. Two of the participants had been exposed to gender indirectly, through carrying out gender-related work, while five participants had not been exposed to any previous gender training at all. One aspect for analysis was therefore how the previous exposure or non-exposure to gender had aided in shaping the constructions

Table 6-1: A biographic profile of research participants

Code	Sex	Rank	Education	Teaching area	Formal training in gender
1600:1	F	Assistant lecturer	• BSc (Technology) • Master of Public Health	• Epidemiology • Research methodology • Biostatistics • Computer applications	Gender mainstreaming
1600:2	M	Assistant lecturer	• BSc (Statistics) • MSc (Statistics)	• Statistics • Computing	Gender orientation
1600:3	M	Assistant lecturer	• Bachelor of Medicine • MPH	• Health policy and economics • Reproductive health	• Training – around ICPD issues – analysed issues from a gender perspective • Exposure through research evaluating ICPD, Post-Beijing – family planning issues with a focus on women's choice
1600:4	M	Director of School	• Bachelor of Medicine • MPH	• Infectious disease • Epidemiology • HIV/AIDS	Gender mainstreaming
1600:5	F	Lecturer	• Bachelor of Medicine • MPH • Diploma in Family Health	• Environmental health • Ethics and law	Gender mainstreaming
1600:6	M	Lecturer	• BSc (Botany & Zoology) • MSc (Water Resource Management) • PhD (Environmental Toxicology)	• Environmental health	None
1600:7	F	Assistant lecturer	• Bachelor of Dentistry • MPH	• Epidemiology • Biostatistics	Gender mainstreaming

Code	Sex	Rank	Education	Teaching area	Formal training in gender
2500F:1	F	Curriculum materials developer	• Diploma in Adult Education • BA (Honours)	• Curriculum development	• Gender and population education • Methodology for studying gender issues – offered by the women and gender studies
2500:2	F	Senior lecturer	• Bachelor of Nursing • BA (Social Sciences) • MPH (Public Health Nutrition) • PhD (Public Health)	• Nutrition • Monitoring and evaluation	None
2500:3	F	Senior lecturer	• Bachelor of Nursing • MPH • PhD (Epidemiology and Biostatistics)	• Maternal and child health	No training, but did something gender related – working with the women and gender studies unit – supervising a PhD student
2500:4	F	Senior lecturer	• Bachelor in Social Sciences • PhD (Education)	• Human resource development	None
2500:5	F	Researcher	• Bachelor of Nursing • Honours (Public Health)	• Non-communicable diseases	None
2500:6	M	Senior lecturer	• Bachelor of Medicine • MPH	• Health management • Epidemiology	No training, but exposure to gender issues through related work – organising a workshop, working with a consultant on gender issues, and through a research project
2500:7	M	Professor & Director of School	• Bachelor of Medicine • PhD (Public Health)	• Primary health care	None

of gender at both a personal level, in their teaching and in the construction of public health courses. This topic will be presented in greater detail in Sections 6.1.3 and 6.2.

The findings of the analysis of the in-depth interviews will be discussed from the following angles: the ways in which conventional representations of gender were reproduced or resisted through participants' narratives; the resources which participants relied on to shape their constructions of gender; and the ways in which gender was constructed in academic discourses.

6.1 Staff members' constructions of gender

In the analysis of staff members' understandings of gender three dominant discourse groupings emerged: biological, societal and academic. Two themes recurred throughout these discourses like a golden thread: gender as the male-female dichotomy ('two different coins') and gender as lived and situated experience. The metaphor of the 'two different coins' was borrowed from one of the participants who said, *"You cannot address really a problem just by looking at one side of the coin. You need to look at both sides of the coin"* (1600:1F). However, because of the way male and female were constructed as two distinct entities, with sex differences highlighted, I chose to use the term 'two different coins' as a useful metaphor to understand how, in a variety of ways, participants represented gender, men and women, as two different coins.

6.1.1 Biological discourses on gender

This section highlights the presence of discourses in participants' talk that emphasised sexual or biological differences between men and women. These discourses are linked to biological determinism (Alsop et al, 2002), essentialism (Harding, 1997) and natural difference discourses (Pauw, 2009). The term 'sexual differences' will be adopted for the purposes of reporting in the subsections below.

6.1.1.1 On "chromosomes" and "genital organs" – gender as sexual difference

With regard to the biological discourses, gender was constructed as sexual difference between male and female with a heavy emphasis on this difference. This is illustrated by the statement,

"Gender to me, I will take it to mean sexual differences…Whatever happens there is a difference between male and female; that's automatic… Naturally that is what it is" (1600:2M). This participant, with a statistical educational background and exposure to a gender-orientation course embraced the discourse on sexual differences without questioning the implications of such a stance. In doing so, he seemed to (intentionally or unintentionally) be magnifying and perpetuating the sexual differences between men and women, implying that men and women are always two different coins. Further, the participant's use of strong language to explain the sexual differences seemed to constrain the production of any other view on gender. This participant's sentiments on sexual differences have resemblances with first wave feminisms and the women in development (WID) approaches that emphasised the sexual differences between men and women and accordingly, developed programmes that addressed the needs of men and women separately.

Most participants constructed gender as a dichotomous male-female category based on the assumption of sexual difference. For example, the comment, *"Gender to me, it means what sex are you, a female or a male"* (2500:5F) represents gender as an entity and essence, which promotes an essentialist view on gender. According to Alsop et al (2002), discourses on sexual differences assume that gender is an essence and that differences between men and women are natural, innate, fixed and not amenable to change. Our participants insisted *"that's automatic… Naturally that is what it is"* (1600:2M) and you are *"female or male"* (2500:5F). The expressions of these participants seemed so normal and common-place and resonated with Pauw's (2009) argument that "the natural difference discourse is a discourse that calls on the commonsense notion that women and men are naturally different and that these differences cannot be explained away" (p.163). Participants' strong focus on sexual difference points towards a taken-for-granted status that is rarely questioned within public health circles. (See also Gavey, 1997; Pauw, 2009; Shaw & Bailey, 2009; Van Dijk, 2004).

6.1.1.2 "Males … are also gender" – the invisible coin

Even though most participants were categorical that gender was about the sexual differences between male and female, it seemed that in reality, men as the 'other coin' or as the 'one side of the gender coin' were either missing or were invisible. Instead it was the female differences that had been put on the agenda. A number of participants expressed through their use of language their rejection of and resistance to the predominant view held by society that gender

represented only one of the coins by means of a discourse of 'self' (*"I"*) and other (*"people"*):

> *First, I will start with what I don't like, because I have had many people talking about gender and they have always narrowed this to women issues. The broad aspect of gender, to the extent that gender [is narrowed down] to femininity or issues related to women, which I think is wrong.* (1600:3M)

> *But I know that when you think about gender studies, people often think of it as women gender studies, when obviously it shouldn't just be.* (2500:3F)

Even in a bid to distance themselves from the predominant viewpoint, these participants constructed women as a homogeneous, universal category, thus perpetuating an essentialist view about women. Further, in the act of distancing themselves from the dominant stereotype of gender as women, participants also offered a counter-discourse which should include men as 'the other side of the coin' by advocating that in gender mainstreaming (GM), *"The males are just outside and they are also gender – they also belong to gender issues"* (2500:5F). In this way these participants deconstructed the dominant views of gender as 'women'. A male participant offered an even stronger view on this, using a metaphor of male partnership in gender issues and pointing to the vulnerability of men. He seemed to be in agreement with the previous two female participants (2500:3F & 5F) with regard to gender not being only about women when he said:

> *…where a man needs to be brought up more into a discussion, because they actually – well a lot of research anyway showing us that many of the issues that are gender issues, men are strong partners and therefore leaving them behind is not helpful, but also there are areas where men themselves are worse off.* (1600:3M)

One participant used a plural form when talking about men: *"Obviously there are going to be male gender constructs as well"* (2500:3F). This conscious or unconscious acknowledgement of differences among men seems to be a departure from the essentialist perspective on men as a homogeneous group that was present in most of the participants' constructions.

There was a trend among some participants to discursively distance themselves from the conventional construction of gender as women towards a framework that also included men.

However, there appears to be a contradiction in that the official curriculum documents still reflect a status quo, dominant discourse of gender as women. (See Section 5.3.2). According to Pauw (2009), such contradictions are hard to reconcile. On the one hand they open up space for resistance, but on the other hand they provide the space for the discourse of men to remain invisible yet present. When confronted with a number of possible discursive frames, the discursive frame that ends up carrying more weight – in this case gender as women – illustrates how subjectivity is a site of conflict (Weedon, 1997). Consequently, the different discourses and the contradictions between them may support the status quo (Pauw, 2009).

6.1.2 *"Roles that are given to men and women"* – societal discourses on gender

From the analysis of interviews, *"gender is the social construction of roles that are given to men and women"* (1600:5F) emerged as a dominant discourse – *"It's mainly looking at maybe responsibilities, the role of both men and women in society"* (1600:1F). This resonates with a structuralist approach that emphasises the shaping of meaning by sociological structures (Bush, 1995; Lye, 1997). *"Gender is the differentiation between males and females"* (1600:6M) highlights the sex difference discourse co-existing with the fixed and static societal discourse that ascribes roles and responsibilities based on sex differences. According to Pauw (2009), the sex role discourse justifies structural inequalities and requires subjects to submit to its descriptive and prescriptive capacities and its effect is the unequal distribution of domestic labour and the maintenance of structural inequalities in social systems.

The acceptance of sex roles is often accompanied by an assumption that females/women and males/men are singular categories that share similar innate characteristics. Courtenay (2000) asserts that the sex role theory has been criticised for assuming that gender represents dichotomous, mutually exclusive categories of men and women with fixed, static roles. He adds that the theory also assumes that women and men have innate characteristics and also fosters the notion of a singular female or male personality that obscures the various forms of femininity and masculinity that women and men can and do demonstrate. Despite some attempts to unpack the complexities of gender, participants' social construction of gender was generally based on the original concept of sex differences and assumed a natural or biological difference between men and women. The implication of such a perspective is that it would be difficult to break down boundaries on sex so that roles could converge, because roles were originally based on biological sex. In addition, confusion and tension could arise at theoretical

and practical levels due to the depiction of gender as a fluid multiplicity of concepts on the one hand, and the opposing view of sex as an essentialist, fixed and unchangeable essence on the other hand. Kabeer (1994) argues that role differentiation based on sex differences is often the main cause of inequalities, with women's roles being greatly undervalued, thus greatly reducing the status of women in society and denying them power over decision making on issues that affect their lives.

In the foregoing participant talk, gender seemed to generally reside in *"male and female"* and *"both men and women"*, leaning towards a binary, essentialist approach. This tends to lead to an emphasis on differences that are not problematised. In this regard, Gavey (1997) posit that it is quite easy to create the male/female binary category but that in itself does not address the complexities of gender adequately.

However, in contrast to the predominant sexual difference discourse discussed above, participants from School 2500, the school that had not had formal exposure to GM, positioned gender beyond sex differences and in terms of power relationships. Participant 2500:6M sought to make a clear distinction between sex and gender, arguing that gender went beyond sex differences to embrace social aspects of gender. Participant 2500:4F went further and problematised the role of women in society in terms of power relations.

> *Well my understanding of, when one talks about sex, it's about purely biological definition of what sort of genital organs that people have. But gender is much more as well. I think about a social definition of what is a man and what is a woman and I guess it's like the social and legal framework within which we live and identify ourselves.* (2500:6M)

> *But I find it a quite difficult concept to grasp, because I think it's about much more than women doing the job and it clearly talks very much about women's roles in society and how society, I suppose, culturally and in terms of its power allocation and so on, thinks about women and brands women and puts women in certain places.* (2500:4F)

The latter participant's sentiments support the position of several gender researchers who maintain that gender is not about two static categories but is instead a dynamic social structure that involves a dialectic process that produces and reproduces gender continuously through

people's actions and interactions (Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 2000). Courtenay (2000) adds that gender does not reside in the person, but rather in social transactions.

6.1.3 Academic discourses on gender

The ways in which some of the participants constructed gender fell within an academic discourse. Some of the main categories that emerged were gender as: a social construct of roles and responsibilities; equality of outcomes; a statistical/demographic variable; and gender issues in the community.

6.1.3.1 "Gender is more of a social construct" – roles and responsibilities from an academic perspective

The societal discourse on gender as prescribed roles and responsibilities (sex role discourse) as was discussed in Section 6.1.2 emanated from one school. Even though the interview questions did not include the word "construct", the participants from School 1600, which had received a GM intervention (see Table 6-1), used the gender construction jargon in very similar ways. Their responses probably emanated from this exposure.

Viewed from a poststructuralist perspective, this is a good example of a universalising 'grand narrative' (McLaughlin, 2003), which has been circulated and perpetuated through academic discourse. This type of discourse would be questioned by poststructuralists since it seems to advance the structuralist view that gender (roles and responsibilities) are shaped by sociological structures and held together firmly by underlying social systems (society and culture), implying a static situation for men and women over which they have no control, and from which they cannot escape (see also Bush, 1995; Lye, 1997). A universalising theory also does not take into account the different contexts and subjective positions of both men and women (for example, that roles and responsibilities have changed and that there are women who have taken on male-dominated roles and responsibilities, or that there are single mothers and fathers).

6.1.3.2 "But we are slowly getting into mixing the gender" – discourses of access and participation

Some participants represented gender in terms of the achievement of equal outcomes with regard to numbers between male and female staff and students in their schools, also known as formal

equality (Health Canada, 2000). In School 1600, one staff member indicated that there were more male than female students, while in School 2500, the reverse was true, with more female than male students. In terms of staff, both schools indicated that there were more male academics than females. This is how these participants described equality of outcomes:

> *First of all I would like to see that both men and women are given an equal chance when it means being admitted into the programme. We would like to see at least, you know there is the same number of both men and women. Most of our programmes, it's mainly the men or the boys – particularly in the post-graduate – it's mainly the men that are the most. But now like for instance in the class I was we were only nine women to about 26 men. There is that difference. I would like to see that and then for instance, the teachers who are involved in lecturing the students are also mainly men. So I would like to see a fair ratio here and there at least at the different levels.* (1600:1F)

> *Okay. I would say because health profession as such, it's dominated by females. So I would say we are seeing more females than males in public health. We have got more females than males. We are attracting more females than males, although we do have males, but they are very few, because when we have got our winter and summer schools, it's usually maybe 80 percent female and 20 percent male. But we are slowly getting into mixing the gender.* (2500:5F)

> *We have got about three female professors now, which is very rare. If you talk about a professor in a university, you know it's a male. Now it wasn't. But I don't think it was because of being gender sensitive. It just happened that it was their time. It was not just - it was promoted, that let's also have females. But what I like more about our faculty as such, sciences, because that our dean is a female.* (2500:5F)

The discourse of equality of outcomes advanced by the participants resonates the women in development (WID) and liberal feminist approaches that emphasise gender issues in terms of access and equality related to equal numbers (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005) (See also Section 2.1.1.) This does not always translate into gender equity, as it ignores the different conditions from which men and women emerge (Arnot & Fennell, 2008).

6.1.3.3 Gender is "one of the demographical characteristics"

A few members of staff constructed gender in very formal and scientific terms as a statistic and variable where one participant *"…looked at whether you are female or male, the gender issues … It's one of the demographical characteristics"* (1600:7F). In this case the participant's construction made gender appear as if it was an object rather than a subjective position. The other participant talked of *"… whether actually there is a big deviation between males and females and that is similarly given to any statistic"* (1600:3M), which made gender appear as a statistic that could be manipulated to show statistical differences between men and women. According to Schulze and Angermeyer (2003), the construction of gender as a statistical variable reflects a positivistic approach that treats its participants as objects. These authors argue that the findings from a positivist approach are often limited in scope since the findings fail to take human subjectivity into account and are normally disconnected from the context in which research was carried out, thereby hindering a better understanding of social problems.

6.1.3.4 Discourses of intersectionality

Through analysis of her use of language, it became apparent that one participant from School 2500 (5F) was actually highlighting some of the gender issues that might arise while carrying out academic community outreach programmes. The issues may possibly not be so apparent when teaching students inside the university. Through her narrative, the participant showed that intersections with gender and age and gender and race were important factors in determining the success of her programmes in the community. Perhaps, without even being consciously aware of it, she was underscoring the point that sometimes gender alone might not be the sole determining factor, but that there were other factors that were also markers of difference and that might equally have an impact on public health interventions.

a) Gender intersection with age

For participant 2500:5F age was important in making her programme successful. She did not consider women and men as a homogeneous group but, rather, she acknowledged that the group of women and that of men were differentiated by age (the younger and the older) and that each age group had its own peculiar need. For example, while the older women attended the programme with much enthusiasm and commitment, the younger women and men needed an incentive in order to participate.

> *We have negotiated with them to donate some equipment so that at least, because even the females that are coming, it's old females, not young females. So now in trying to attract young females and young males we have adopted a style of – we have negotiated with [Company A], so they have donated equipment in [Township X] for us. So after that we are seeing a great difference. We are seeing more males and females and what is surprising, as it's more males now than – it's more young males than young females that are coming to be trained. I think the equipment has promoted our health promotion side, in bringing now more males than females. They are more into coming to gym.* (2500:5F)

Based on this observation, the participant was able to develop an appropriate intervention, particularly for the younger women and men.

b) Gender intersection with race

In the same case, our participant demonstrated the intersection between gender and race by referring to black women and black men. The importance of doing so was to indicate that she did not consider all women and men as a homogeneous group, but rather, the issue she was dealing with was specific to *"black women"* and *"African males"*, and therefore it would not necessarily have been applicable, for example, to white women and men.

> *And again we have been having a study with students, on the perception, attitude and knowledge of black women about fat and then they said that their husbands like fat women. Their husbands are more pleased and then after that study we also got money and then we further went to do a study now on African males' attitude, knowledge and beliefs ... towards fat [women], tying it to gender ... we also want to know what do they think, the males, because we know now what the females think. So in that we are addressing the gender in [it].* (2500:5F)

Our participant talked about age and race in very practical terms in working with the community. In the official curriculum text age, sex, ethnicity, social class and occupation only appeared as formal epidemiological variables covered as part of epidemiology modules or courses (Section 5.3.2.1.)

c) Gender reflexivity in research

Creswell (2003) calls on qualitative researchers to systematically reflect on their biographies, their biases, values and interests, and to highlight how these could shape the study, an action known as *reflexivity*. The same participant referred to her dilemma as a female working with males in the community and vice versa. In the Non-communicable Diseases course, she constructed gender in terms of gender identity and gender biases and went on to explain how the identity of the researcher as male or female posed a dilemma for the researcher and also in clinical practice. In the excerpt below we find a greater emphasis on the self-awareness and identity of the researcher.

> *But now when we had the research study about perceptions of black men to interview we had a great problem because there are questions that we could not ask, because of being female. So we said, "Oh, we need a male now here". And again I have seen it when we are doing interviews with clients in one clinic, that clients who are females would prefer to be or to say their problems to a male, because they preferred [assumed] that a male has got confidentiality. If a woman has got STI, he is not going to talk about her at tea time. If it's a female nurse she is going to know not to be …* [inaudible]. *And me as an African female, there are questions that I would not ask them. I would just say let me show them respect; let me not ask the question.* (2500:5F)

The above brings a new focus to the researcher-subject relation. In this case the participant was 'unbracketing' her own subjectivity as a researcher – and by doing so, challenging the objectivist ideology associated with bracketing one's own beliefs, assumptions, tastes and preferences – in order to acknowledge how deeply these enter into knowledge constructions and power relations (Peters, 2004).

6.2 Resources that shaped participants' constructions and understandings of gender

We also used the transcribed interview text to explore how participants relied on specific resources to shape and give meaning to their constructions of gender. It emerged that their representations of gender were largely informed by and entrenched in societal, academic and institutional systems, practices and processes and personal experiences. There were often

overlaps and tensions between these discourses. It is important to report that there was probing on religion and culture where this information was not forthcoming.

6.2.1 Discourses embedded in societal systems

Society has a strong influence on people's constructions of their reality (Gergen, 1994). The staff members' constructions of gender were embedded in their socialisation experiences of family, culture and religion.

6.2.1.1 "Probably it starts off in the family and … in one's culture" – culture and socialisation

Both male and female participants from the two schools drew from their cultural and early childhood socialisation experiences to shape their current understandings of gender and gender roles. However, the experiences of the participants from School 1600 and those of School 2500 were markedly different. The differences in the cultural constructions of gender by participants from the two schools appear to be based on geographical, historical, social and racial differences. Participants from School 1600 came from an African background that is still very patriarchal, while participants from School 2500 were of diverse races: white, black and Indian, with some of the white participants raised in the West, where the notion of equality between men and women had been accepted and promoted for a much longer time. The findings therefore demonstrate multiple constructions of gender that differ between cultures.

For participants from School 1600, culture and early childhood experiences shaped their construction of gender into a *discourse of difference,* in which gender roles and expectations, based on sex differences, were fixed and unchangeable.

> *I think culture is the first thing that lets you know what gender is. You may not know that the term is gender, but culture lets you know that this is, what a girl does, this is what a boy does; this is what is expected of a woman and this is what is expected of a man. And then through school and all, it keeps changing. I think it has an influence as in it's the first point of contact probably that you know about gender, even your mother will tell you as a girl you can't do that.* (1600:7F)

> *The culture has had an influence, like you think when you are still young they tell you don't do this; the man doesn't do that, the woman does that. So you grow up knowing this is supposed to be like that. Don't cry in public because a man doesn't cry in public.* (1600:6M)

The potential conflicts and tensions between these cultural prescriptions and socialisation processes with the notions they advance of what is feminine and what is masculine, on the one hand, and the personal beliefs and feelings of the participants on the other are also noteworthy. There are some hints of feeling like a prisoner to societal prescriptions – *"this is supposed to be like that"* (1600:6M). Our female participant in the excerpt above, however, hinted at the possibility of change as one goes through school, implying that constructions of gender were fluid and were shaped by context.

The above findings are linked to the discourse on sex roles where sexual differences are another dominant public health discourse on gender. (See also Sections 6.1.2 and 6.1.3.) Views such as these reinforce the paradox of the sex/gender system where gender as a social construct is derived from sexual differences. The potential effect of such a construction is the confusion and conflation of sex as gender and gender as sex that is so prevalent in the biomedical paradigm. (See also Section 1.1.1.)

In direct contrast to the experiences of participants in School 1600, three participants from School 2500 narrated how culture and the process of socialisation helped in shaping for them a more positive and flexible rather than prescriptive view of gender. They talked about how the environments and types of cultures in which they were brought up encouraged women to get out of stereotyped sex roles and promoted equality between men and women. These processes helped shape gender as a *discourse of sameness and equality of opportunities*.

> *I think for myself I was fortunate. I had a father who was non-traditional, I think, in how he viewed gender roles. He had a very strong mother and my father wished for me to be the first woman astronaut. So that was from when I was very little, so I was pushed that way.* (2500:3F)

> *I suppose it's a mix of own experience and what I have seen around me and it's been quite interesting, because I mean, I have certainly grown up in an environment where*

> *women were expected to – there was comparably little branding of women in a particular role. So I and sort of my peers and also my sister and so on, we had a lot of pretty much the same opportunities as boys and men around us.* (2500:4F)

> *I think people develop ideas about gender. Probably it starts off in the family and how one's parents interact. Also in one's culture. So I grew up in Canada and it's a very social-minded kind of country and has very firm, both legal and, I think, cultural principles around equality of men and women. And I grew up with a very strong mother who defended women's rights, and three sisters. And so I have always been a defender of women's rights.* (2500:6M)

In their narratives, these participants alluded to several factors that were favourable to achieving this sameness and equality of opportunities. Firstly, there was need for a non-traditional environment where obstacles in the way of women were removed, where women were not branded, and which had strong legal frameworks. Secondly, there was a need for 'gender champions' such as strong mothers and defenders of women's rights. The cultural discourses on gender emanating from School 2500 seemed to be transformatory and liberating as opposed to the discourses emanating from School 1600, which appeared to be fixed, rigid and imprisoning. In addition, the discourses offered by participants from School 2500 seemed to be congruent with the notion of substantive equality, which advances the view of equality of opportunities and benefits (Health Canada, 2000).

The sex role discourse was repeated over and over in the participants' talk in School 1600, not only with reference to their academic life, but also in everyday cultural life. According to Gergen (1997), discourses grow from the language used within a culture. Van Dijk (2004) also refers to the reproduction of dominance through subtle, routine, "natural" (p.302) every-day forms of text and talk. The academic discursive framework in School 1600 enabled the production of sex roles as a dominant gender discourse transmitted through ideology (GM course) and had become rooted in the ways of speaking, writing and representing (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). This same action could have constrained other ways of thinking about gender (see Cheek, 2000). In contrast, some participants from School 2500 were able to deconstruct the discourse on sex roles as a result of their upbringing, showing that through change agents or 'gender champions' such as a "*non-traditional father*" and "*a strong mother*", it was possible to break through the rigid sex-role structures. This raises a fundamental question about

gender: are gender norms so deeply entrenched and rigid (Coen et al, 2004; Klugman, 2004) that 'gender champions' were needed to free up the discursive sex-role trap? The language participants used portrayed the image that gender equality was very difficult to achieve and that it took a very special kind of person to intervene in order for equality to be realised.

6.2.1.2 "Even religion yes, that can have a big influence" – religious systems

While most of the participants said that religion had no influence on their construction of gender, a few of them viewed religion as a resource on which they drew to shape their understanding of gender. It was also interesting to note that it was only female participants who acknowledged the role of religion in giving engendered meaning to their lives. They gave personal accounts of how religion had shaped their constructions of gender, either positively or negatively.

a) *"In God's eyes both a man and a woman are equal"* – religion perceived as promoting gender equality

On one side of the coin, religion was seen as constructing gender in terms of equality between men and women. One participant was a firm believer and ardent follower of her religion and its teachings and accepted that her perceptions of gender had their source in her church.

> *Now like for, instance, my religion. I am an Anglican. And you know the way we are taught they look at both men and women equally and the Bible says that in God's eyes both a man and a woman are equal really.* (1600:1F)

Framing men and women as equal through God's eyes gave this construction of gender some sort of unquestionable divine authority and legitimacy that is passively accepted without questioning. This kind of reasoning resonates with Weedon's (1997) assertion 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).

b) *"A second class citizen in your own faith"* – religion perceived as perpetuating gender inequality

On the other side of the coin religion was depicted as being complicit in perpetuating gender inequality. In contrast to the previous participant who accepted the teachings of her church

without question, another participant from the same school actively resisted, rejected and reconstructed her church's representation of gender. Her talk alludes to a perpetuation of gender inequality through a religious discourse of disempowerment of women based on a sex-difference construction of gender, with women being treated as the 'weaker sex' of lower value and position. Through the institution of marriage women are constructed as objects required to be humble, obedient and subservient to their husbands. The reactions of this participant's children to religion open up other spaces for reconstructing God in a discourse of spirituality instead of sexual differences.

> *I am a Christian of the Roman Catholic faith and the Bible and the teachings have always taught women to be humble, to be obedient to men. Even God is a male… that we all grew up with him and the important people, the important angels like Gabriel who brought the news, the people who wrote the Bible, the apostles – all of them were men. You find that you are a second class citizen in your own faith. And this is not only Christianity, it's in Islam. If you are a woman and you are in your period you are not supposed to go into the mosque. And I think up to the – a long time ago – even Christian women were not supposed to go to church if they were having their period.*
>
> *But the whole concept of marriage, ownership, you put on the white veil and you walk around like an angel and this man takes you for his wife. And the tradition, you are supposed to love and obey. And like the Catholic Church you have the women being sisters and the men being priests and they can reach to the highest level. You have been seeing all these issues of women, issues of women priests bringing in so many misunderstanding, and everybody forgetting the simple message of Jesus that you love yourself, you love your neighbour and you love your God. But how come your partner who is [a] woman be subjugated and you say, you love God? So these are the issues as far as religion is concerned.*
>
> *Of course it's all about power, giving men the power over the women and women are being in a lower social position, and it's very difficult to convince the children today. I have got two daughters. They don't go to church, they say: "What is this?" Yes, they say: "Mummy, you have gone to school, [so] how do you explain this? I cannot go to a church where I am a second class citizen. I cannot go to the church that does not respect women. Women of different gender, equally before God, and I cannot go to a church that*

> *thinks God is male, who gives them the right to think that it's him, it's a spirit, it has no sex." You know all these issues and they do affect the way people live and their health.* (1600:5F).

6.2.2 Discourses embedded in academic systems

Training, research, networks, role models and the feminist movement were some of the academic discourses that were common in the participants' talk and which seemed to have kick-started the exposure, interest and, later, the shaping of their understanding of gender. On further analysis, these discourses were divided into two categories: academic discourses acquired by design; and academic discourses acquired by default.

6.2.2.1 "Until this gender mainstreaming came about" – academic discourses acquired by design

Discourses acquired by design refer to the 'social engineering' of gender discourses by means of deliberate academic workshops or training on gender that were offered to academic staff to increase their understanding of gender. The majority of the participants from School 1600 referred to the GM unit that had just been established and from which they had received training. (See Table 6-1.) The GM unit was established to train members of staff across all faculties on gender issues. A detailed background of the unit, including its objectives and functions, is described in Appendix 1. One participant credited the unit for having contributed to the academic staff's awareness and understanding of gender issues as follows:

> *But we do actually have ... a gender-mainstreaming committee that is actually throughout every institute or faculty in the university and that is something. But it has increased our understanding of gender issues. There is a gender-mainstreaming policy at the university and there is actually a department of gender studies. But there is one there and they have been very strong advocates of these issues too … We have seminars on these issues and it has increased our awareness.* (1600:4M)

Other participants from School 1600 also narrated how the GM training had advanced their knowledge of gender. They explained how the training had exposed them and sensitised them to gender issues and, in doing so, aroused their interest. One participant also talked of how the training had helped her know how to identify gender issues in the curriculum. The ways in which

these mainstreaming workshops shaped their own understandings and constructions of gender have already been discussed in Section 6.2.2.1 above. These participants' experiences relate to a technical GM curriculum with an integrationist approach. There was no evidence to show that the training had enabled the participant to address the political question of transforming gender power relations in their curriculum. (See Section 2.1.9.3.)

Another participant from School 1600 who did not attend the GM course talked of how he had received training on gender from elsewhere. Although he had heard about the institutional GM, he was not quite sure how to understand it – to him it sounded like abstract, ambiguous jargon.

> *And I think when you do talk to the people, you will find that there are some initiatives going on. I don't know what kind of – it looks like it's really another project, most likely some resource. It's called "gender mainstreaming" and they elected some people. They actually elected senior staff and one of the staff they appointed to be gender mainstreaming, whatever. What is champion, whatever it is, they appointed two people to be in charge of.* (1600:3M)

Only one participant from School 2500 reported having received some formal training on gender, which enabled her to consciously incorporate gender in her area of work.

> *And so we learned or we developed a way of incorporating gender into our popular education practice. So ever since then, and then I worked in that department later and we always incorporated it into that and then I did a module with women and gender studies here.* (2500:7F)

School 2500 as a whole, however, seemed to have taken a gender-equity approach in contrast to the mainstreaming approach. Participants from this school talked about having a gender-equity unit and how the ethos and the core philosophies of the university reflected human rights and equity. The core functions of the gender-equity unit and the sensitivities around gender revolved around mentoring women academics, harmonising their working conditions amid a predominantly male presence at the top of the hierarchy.

> *I would say it is yes [that the gender-equity unit has had any impact]. I would say quite strongly because they have had a gender-equity unit for a long time, with a strong*

person. The evidence is seminars and visiting academics who have worked with women as academics, to re-write their CVs, to think about salaries. I never looked particularly hard at it, but I think there is sensitivity. At the same time there is awareness that the hierarchy is hugely male, white and so-called coloured male, black women, if you look at the staffing statistics. It's got a long way to go. Black and coloured women are probably more on contract than – I mean I am on contract, that's just one of the things. But in the mainstream I would say it's still very skew. And I think there is consciousness of it but I am not sure what measures and I have seen stats going around. So yes on policies, I am not too sure on practice. (2500:1F)

6.2.2.2 "And that is how by default, I became a sort of expert" – academic discourses acquired by default

Academic gender discourses which were acquired *"by default"* were those that participants had picked up indirectly by being involved in gender-related work. At School 2500, all but one participant fell into the category of acquisition by default. The reverse was true for School 1600 where one member also acquired gender knowledge by default, while the majority received formal gender training. Therefore, while the experiences of staff members in School 1600 were more similar in relation to the academic discourses that they encountered on gender, the ones for School 2500 tended to be more nuanced and diverse due to different avenues of exposure to gender issues.

As I said, I learned it more from having organised this training course, workshops and then involved in this gender consultant and then through the work that I did with this research project on micro finance and AIDS and gender. (2500:6M)

So I was called in., I told my director I know nothing about gender and he said, "But you are a woman". I said well if that is the qualification, you know, I joined that team and we were trained. We went to the reproductive health and gender; that was my first exposure. And since then I started working with our different aspects of gender and health, and that is how by default I also became a sort of expert. (1600:5F)

Another participant from the latter school, for example, indicated that she had had no formal training in gender, but had worked with the institute of gender studies on gender-related issues.

6.2.2.3 Institutional discourses on gender and institutional role models

Academic members of staff talked about how their schools had institutional policies and gender units in place to address and redress gender issues. They also talked about how these policies, units and some role models from certain institutions had increased their understanding of gender. The GM unit associated with School 1600 and the gender-equity unit associated School 2500 have already been discussed in the preceding sections.

a) Affirmative action discourses

Participants from both schools confirmed that there was *"affirmative action towards women"* (1600:4M) in their institutional policies and constitutions, *"in their hiring and in their promotions and in their support of woman professors"* (2500:3F). The assumption behind affirmative action is the notion of substantive equality that takes the conditions from which men and women emerge into account – diversity, difference, disadvantage and discrimination (Arnot & Fennell, 2008; Bennet, 2002a). The primary aim of affirmative action is to level the playing field for women by considering the alleged previous disadvantaged and discriminatory circumstances in various areas of their lives (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Arnot & Fennell, 2008; Barnes, 2007). (See also Sections 6.1.3.2 and 6.2.1.1.)

Despite confirming institutional gender-sensitive policies in place, some participants felt that there was some tension between policy and its implementation.

> *Oh, they have gender sensitive policies, yes. Practice is a different matter, which I think is quite common. No, I mean I think gender issues have been addressed and we have had a gender-equity unit for at least in our last 15 years. You see the practices are much subtler, and also much more complex.* (2500:4F)

The above participant's sentiments on the gap between policy and implementation of gender policies seem to be congruent with arguments advanced by other gender researchers in Africa (Longwe, 2002) and South Africa (Pauw, 2009). (See also Sections 1.1.1 and 2.1.2.) Her reflections on institutional practices on gender, being much more *"subtle"* and *"complex"*, are a replica of Morley's (2006b) findings that discrimination against women in higher education occurred in subtle and complex ways, even in institutions where equity policies

were in place. Ducklin and Ozga (2007) also claim that there is dissonance between the rhetoric of equality of opportunity and the practices of everyday social relations and organisational life.

When our participant pointed to the fact that gender-sensitive policies and the gender-equity unit were in place in her institution, her words seemed to portray a static or fixed impression of the gender policies and the gender-equity unit since, according to her, practice or implementation seemed to be problematic. This sentiment seems to echo the contention of Hodgson and Standish (2009) and Nudzor (2009) that when policy is constituted as a fixed entity in institutions, it makes practice and change impossible.

b) Institutional role models

Another participant talked about a role model based in a certain institution and who had inspired her as a woman to strive to rise to higher levels than women were expected to do in those days.

> *So I had a different sort of thing and interesting, when you talk gender, I don't know if you know Dr X. I don't know if you know her name, but she is the head of Y. Okay. I don't know if she still is, but she was and of course she is from, I think, Bangladesh or Pakistan. She is from a very [conservative background] you know, cultural women are ... It's very difficult for women especially to rise to be a prominent doctor, to become a doctor at all, to become a prominent doctor, to become international, to become a head of an agency such as Y. And I once attended a – she was receiving an award for Public Health, which I was involved in and I remember asking her, because I was curious, how someone coming from, where I knew where she came from, sort of become, you know, as a woman. I asked her what did she think that had allowed her to do that. And her response was actually her father ... [who] felt that the girls in the family should have the same education and the same culture, even though that wasn't necessarily the predominant culture ... her father felt that she should also be educated and also pushed her to think. And I thought that was an interesting situation. Ways that you can look at, broader context of the way that women can then come up, having the support, even a microcosm of support.* (2500:3F)

The above narrative encompasses examples of two different role models. The one is the woman academic being a role model for one of the participants. A secondary role model is presented by this woman's role model, namely the role of her own father. This complements the discussion in Section 6.2.1.1 where reference is made to the role that participant 2500:3F's own father played in the socialisation processes that shaped her constructions of gender, wanting her to become the first female astronaut. Both the academic role model and her own father as role model served as an inspiration for this participant to break through the cultural mould to reconstruct gender as a transformative process rather than a fixed entity, as illustrated by expressions such as *"rise"*, *"become"* and *"come up"*.

Another important point our participant seemed to be making was that gender stereotypes were so deeply seated (Shackleton, 2006), that to break out of this cultural mould, one needed some kind of *"support, even a microcosm of support"*. In her own case and in the case of her academic role model this type of support materialised through their fathers who acted as 'gender champions', or change agents. This enabled the participant to take up a position of agency in shaping her life. This idea of support and agency was reported at the University of Botswana where a masters-level specialisation course on gender and education could be developed as a result of the support of male colleagues and the presence of a female vice-chancellor (AGI, 2002). Finally, the educational opportunities given to the participant and to her academic career against a strong cultural background of disadvantage seems to be another reflection of substantive equality – providing equal opportunities for the attainment of equal benefits (Bartlett & Harris, 1998).

6.2.3 *"Rich"* and *"loud"* discourses embedded in history

Two women participants from School 2500 drew on the women's liberation movement to explain how their understanding of gender was shaped. For one, feminist ideas informed her training curriculum, while for the other, the feminist movement enabled her to construct notions of equality. The latter described these historic periods nostalgically as being *"rich"* and *"loud"* to the extent that she *"wanted to become equal"* (to men?).

> *That came later in the eighties but in the seventies I was reading that. I had some good feminist lecturers at Unisa. So maybe that influenced [me], but there was awareness from early on. I did have a strong sense that I wanted to be equal quite early. So*

> *maybe that shaped it to an extent and I suppose that's cultural. The seventies were quite rich for women. It was in our vision, it was all possible. Whereas I would say for those who grow up through the eighties and nineties, it has taken a much lower profile, except maybe in the development context. But you don't have the same loud discourse as we had in the seventies.* (2500:1F)

The undertone of this participant's construction of gender was a process of 'political activism' that would lead to change. Her nostalgic narrative of the seventies seems to resonate with the 'feminisms' described in Section 3.2.1, which showed how gender theory was deeply rooted in feminism and how feminist theory had played a significant role in shaping the concepts of gender as they are understood today (Lorber, 1997; McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002). The participant's descriptions seem to be particularly congruent with the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s that dealt with the liberation of women from gender-imposed roles and expectations (Jackson & Scott; 2002; McLaughlin, 2003; Wyckoff-Wheeler, 2002) and in which "the personal became political" through activism (Weiler, 2008, p.1).

The participant then contrasted the seventies with the eighties and nineties, which she claims took a *"much lower"* not so *"loud"* profile with regards to gender. AGI (2002) provides a similar argument that donor agencies de-politicised gender by focusing on bringing more women into development without necessarily challenging existing power structures or gender relations, and in this way scholarship on gender lost its political edge and transformative potential.

6.2.4 Discourses on gender as lived experience

Some academic staff members drew from their situated experiences to shape their understandings of gender. This 'situatedness' was located within their specific lived experiences and knowledge in their material world. It was difficult for some participants to come up with concrete constructions of gender. Instead, they chose to explain these through narratives of their own lived experiences, thus emphasising the reality and materiality of gender as a lived experience. Some of the narratives reflecting gender as lived experience go back to the childhood years, whereas others relate to women's experience as academics. (See also Sections 6.1.3 and 6.2.1 and their subsections.)

One participant's narrative illustrated the consequences of a dominant sexual difference discourse arising out of the socialisation process while at school and how she resisted it.

> *I know for instance, this is now some years way back, I was in a mixed boarding school. We were both boys and girls. So you know with the way we were brought up I know each time – I mean that school in particular – each time boys would always look you down, down. With all that exposure kind of it made us … try to stand up and try to tell this, "Hey, we are, why don't you treat us like we are the same level". There is no difference, apart from you being a boy and me being a girl. We are the same.* (1600:1F)

The description of how boys *"look you down, down"* reflects a construction of gender in terms of power relations based on sexual differences that result in an inferior status for women. This participant's opinion mirrors the sentiments of another participant who claimed that society *"brands women and puts women in certain places"* (2500:4F). (See Section 6.1.2.) However, this participant challenged the discourse of sexual difference and instead reconstructed her own notion of gender based on 'sameness', regardless of sexual differences between boys and girls. This reconstruction was emancipatory and enabled her to survive in that environment, as it emphasised the sameness and *"no difference"* philosophy.

In the following narrative the participant narrates how growing up in a polygamous home and a patriarchal society enabled him to construct polygamy as an oppressive gender system for women:

> *Well, first I am the sixth born in a family of seven, so nearly the last but one. And there were only two girls, the rest were boys, but we did not really grow together very much. So I grew up mainly with my aunt and that aunt of mine, that… aunt was married to a guy who had four wives and I think the experience I saw there and this was a unique character. He had the four wives in [under] one roof and each of these women had children, except my aunt. She was barren and she was the one who was officially married. But because maybe she didn't produce, so the man had three others to make sure he fills up. So my aunt used to collect relatives like me to go and be around full time, to fill up, because there were some roles we were supposed to do: cultivate food, pick coffee and all those things. So growing in this family you could see squabbling every day amongst the children, amongst the women. It was just something that I grew up thinking I*

> *don't think I want to be. Because some of the things really, I even was where you have four or five people, all trying to capture the attention of this man who had so many people to take care of. So that upbringing I think that is the one I can say exposed me a lot to some issues that shaped the way I look at things.* (1600:3M)

This gendered lived experience of the participant contributed to his current view of gender as a system with fixed roles for women as reproducers and children as the labour force that *"I don't think I want to be"* part of. The excerpt above turns our attention to the view of women as reproducers and fighters for attention within a discourse of motherhood that could lead to the marginalisation of those who did not fit the expectations created by this dominant discourse (the *"barren"* aunt). His aunt tried to conform to this dominant discourse by *"fill[ing] up"* with relatives.

Apart from drawing on childhood experiences, some women participants raised issues regarding the material conditions of women's academic experiences to highlight how these had shaped their understanding of gender. It also lends credence to the fact that gender is 'embodied' and emphasises the need to address both the practical and strategic needs of women.

> *But coming back to coming to work, you always realise there are challenges for you to come to work as a woman. First of all there are some simple things like our toilets. They are not separate. You know that in our toilets we don't even have bins for sanitary towels and this is public health. Then we have young girls with babies, we have a little type of crèche where you can have a trained person for these girls, even young men who want to bring their babies and look after them. Then of course at the end of the day, there are the issues during the day, the child sick, you are rushing home to take it to hospital. The man has already got somebody to take care of them. Then residential workshops. You know academia, workshop after workshop after workshop, you know these hotels. A man goes to a workshop, no question. For us women, every time we go for a workshop, you negotiate at home. The husband feels that you have to negotiate for him to be co-operative about your going and him having to look after the family while you are away, and always asking: What are you going to do from there that you should leave your home? So that I do every time having to negotiate everything, while the man takes it for granted. It can be very very stressful.*

> *Then in the evening when we leave here all the men go to doctors' club or academic meeting. That is where they discuss all the projects that are coming here, promotion, everything to do with the career guidance* [?]. *For you from here you go to fetch the children, to the market, to prepare the meal. Sometimes your husband has brought visitors without telling you, so you are preparing the meal for the visitors. By the time you go to sleep it's like midnight and yet you still have more work to do. You have to prepare for the classes, mark reports, assignments et cetera, you have to access your e-mails, so you see the men progressing and I admit where they are working hard that they have good opportunities. So that is where you see the difference, when you look at the lowest cadre of academia, the women. If you look at the highest, it is the men*. (1600:5F)

In this narrative, gender is constructed as a lived experience in terms of sex roles, where there is a perpetual struggle for women in which their practical needs are neglected, in which they are always negotiating, and in which they have to work round the clock in order to catch up with their male counterparts in the workplace. It shows a firsthand experience of the construction of gender roles in the workplace and how these privilege men over women. This highlights the convergence of women's productive and reproductive roles and how these could act to perpetuate patriarchal structures and as a barrier preventing women from 'breaking through the glass ceiling' in the workplace. This construction of sex roles seems to align with assertions by many feminists that traditional gender roles are oppressive for women and that the female gender role is constructed as an opposite to an ideal male role – *"at the lowest cadre of academia, the women„… at the highest, it is the men"*. Sex roles are projected as socially determined, with our participant trapped in dual sex roles, resigned to a fixed situation without much evidence of active engagement by her individual agency to challenge or change her situation. Although our participant seemed to have recognised and problematised the negative effects of the construction of sex roles in the workplace, she seemed quite helpless in doing anything about it. Trigiani (1999) captures some of the potential pitfalls and limitations of the sex role discourse narrated by our participant: its rigidity; failure to recognise that traits deemed masculine by a particular society are valued more highly than those labelled feminine; lack of explanation for why and how certain characteristics become attached to men or women; the assumption that gender forms the core of a person's identity; and its failure to acknowledge the role of agency in constructing gender roles.

The participant's construction of gender also appears to be foregrounding the issue of the 'double burden of women'. Her sentiments seem to be in agreement with the reference of School 1200's description of the recursive relationship between women's productive and reproductive roles in Chapter 5. The participants' constructions of the double burden of women also support the views of Tamale and Oloka-Onyango (2005) that women academics carry a dual burden that requires them to pursue both their academic obligations, while meeting traditional obligations such as childcare, household management, and care of the elderly.

Further, the participant's narrative seems to be congruent with standpoint feminism that critiques the absence and marginalisation of women from knowledge making and research and situates women's specific experiences and knowledge in their material world (Harding, 1997; Olesen, 2000). In this case the participant was able to show that her situated experience and thus her 'voice' was different from men's, and it must be heard if women are to challenge hegemonic values (Lorber, 1997). (See also Section 3.2.1.1b.)

6.3 The construction of gender in academic courses

After exploring how the participants constructed gender and what resources they relied on to shape these meanings, the next issue I sought to understand was how they then used their personal constructions to represent gender in the courses and modules that they taught. The following sub-themes emerged from the analysis of this text: courses or modules in which gender was incorporated; gender content of courses and modules; the status of gender in the public health curriculum; and obstacles experienced in the incorporation of gender in curricula.

6.3.1 The taught (operational) curriculum

According to Posner (1995), the operational curriculum refers to the content of the curriculum – what is actually taught by the teachers or the taught curriculum. (See also Section 3.3.2.). In Chapter 5 the findings from the official written public health curriculum were presented, while in Section 6.2.4, the participants' lived experiences related to the hidden curriculum were referred to. Although my inquiry did not include observations of classroom teaching by participants, the operational or taught curriculum was indirectly accessed by means of

participants' reports on their teaching related to gender. Table 6-2 shows the taught courses with gender-related content as reported by the participants.

A few participants did not incorporate gender in any of their courses. In School 1600, where most of the participants had undergone a GM course, only one participant (1600:1F) did not incorporate gender in her courses, while School 2500 had three who did not. Since the participants taught different public health courses, gender was incorporated across this spectrum of courses. These findings differ from the official curriculum where gender was mostly tipped in favour of reproductive and maternal and child health courses (Section 5.3.2.1). In general, gender was mainly addressed as an issue (Section 5.2.2.1b) rather than being incorporated in a common approach to teaching gender. Secondly, it appeared as if most of the participants located their gender content within social discourse, with only a few locating gender within biomedical discourse, as would be expected in statistics and non-communicable diseases. This finding differs slightly from the official curriculum findings, which indicated a much stronger biomedical approach. It also appeared as if participants who were mainly teaching biomedically oriented public health courses found it difficult to incorporate gender into their courses.

However, even though it seemed as if most of the interviewed participants incorporated some gender content in the courses they taught, they reported some challenges they experienced while in this process gender incorporation in the public health curriculum. This is the subject of the next section.

6.3.2 Status of gender within public health curricula

From the way the participants talked about how they dealt with gender in the courses and modules they taught, three sub-themes emerged: gender was not taught by some participants in their courses; gender received low priority; and gender was insufficiently addressed in the public health curriculum. These sub-themes are discussed below.

6.3.2.1 "In my teaching I have not been doing that" – gender as an absent discourse

Some participants from both schools indicated that they did not address gender in the courses and modules they taught.

Table 6-2: Courses with gender content taught by participants and approaches to the teaching of gender

Participant	Course in which gender is incorporated	Gender-related content	Approach
1600:1F	None	None	Not applicable
1600:2M	Statistics	Gender as a statistical and demographic variable – based on male/female differences	Biomedical
1600:3M	Health policy and economics	Gender-responsive policies	Social
1600:4M	Reproductive health Public health programmes	Including men in reproductive health issues Including gender when implementing public health programmes	Social Not clear
1600:5F	Environmental health Ethics and law	Different aspects of gender and health	Social
1600:6M	Environmental health	Gender roles and their impact on the environment	Social
1600:7F	Community health	Reproductive health	Not clear
2500:1F	Health promotion	Gender violence against women and children Gender and HIV – gender issues that affect prevention, PMTCT and stigma	Social Social
2500:2F	Nutrition Monitoring and evaluation	None	Not applicable
2500:3F	Maternal and child health	Not clear but collaborates with gender institute	Not applicable
2500:4F	Human resource development	None	Not applicable
2500:5F	Non-communicable diseases	Obesity and gender power relations Gender and race Gender reflexivity Gender and age Gender and sex	Social Social Social Biomedical Biomedical
2500:6M	Health management Epidemiology	AIDS and gender	Social
2500:7M	Primary health care	Gender equity	Social

> *In the department not even done that, even as an institute we do not. We do have plans of having a workshop where we try to look at our courses that we all have under the various departments.* (1600:1F)

This finding is similar to the finding from the analysis of the official curriculum where gender was also absent, or there was silence on gender in some courses. (See Figure 5-1 and Table 5-5.)

6.3.2.2 Gender "for my thinking, has too low a priority"

The language used by some participants indicated that gender received very low priority in their teaching. They expressed sentiments that showed that gender was glossed over, was not deeply reflected upon in a conscious and systematic way and that there was a lack of conscious effort to address gender – *"we do it as a matter of reflex"* (1600:4MD); *"it didn't come automatically"* (1600:4M); *"through some little issues that were raised"* (1600:1F); and *"we had a bit of brushing around some of these issues of gender"* (1600:3F). Assumptions uncovered in such statements are that either gender was not an important discourse in public health, or that staff lacked the know-how to enable them to venture into more depth and in a more systematic way on inclusion of gender in their teaching. Two participants supported these sentiments by saying:

> *I think we need to think a little more what it means and okay you are designing an implementation programme, public health implementation programme. In the process of designing it, are you thinking about gender issues in order to be able to be more effective?* (1600:4M)

> *Something we know, we take it [gender] for granted as one of the determinants, so if it was important like anything else, we haven't really come out, because we know it is an important determinant of health.* (1600:7F)

The portrayal of gender as a focus with low priority in public health was also supported by findings in Chapter 5, which revealed that gender was neither a core course nor an area of specialisation in the public health curriculum, except in Schools 1700 and 2500. This may

explain why no interview participants from School 2500 related to the idea of gender having a low priority in the curriculum.

6.3.2.3 Gender "seems almost to be the air you breathe and therefore it's not much addressed"

Participant 2500:1F referred metaphorically to the "*air you breathe*" to illustrate the 'taken-for-grantedness' of gender in a nutrition module. To this participant, gender issues should come naturally just as nutrition comes naturally. However, the participant's assertion could lead to insufficient attention to gender in courses.

Other participants expressed similar views about "*the way the content is brought out, they don't try to look at gender issues in a number of things*" (1600:1F). One pointed out that "*[w]e haven't done as much with that since X left, but I think that we would see gender as a structural issue that's very important*" (2500:3F). Another participant acknowledged that gender is an important determinant of health and "*it was something we maybe go into*" but, nevertheless, she confirmed that "*I don't think we really address that [gender]*" (1600:7F).

6.3.3 Approaches to the teaching of gender

Another major issue that emerged when participants talked about teaching gender was about the various approaches they used to incorporate gender in their courses. From the text, it emerged that they used three major approaches in the teaching of gender: gender-embedded or gender-implicit approaches; gender-oriented or gender-related approaches (gender perspective, gender lens); and gender-collaborative approaches (work together, join forces, team up, cooperate with).

6.3.3.1 "It's more embedded than explicit" – gender-implicit curricula

Gender-implicit curricula in which gender was not addressed directly and specifically as an independent course or module were referred to in a variety of ways. Apart from terms such as "*embedded*" or "*implicit*", one participant used the metaphor of infusion to present issue-based gender knowledge in relation to violence against women.

> *So that [gender] is infused into the health promoting schools module, into the health promotion module and then I would say there is another person in health promotion, HIV*

> *AIDS, there is a very strong view on violence against women and it's infused in that way.* (2500:1F)

This participant elaborated further that only one of their courses, Gender and Health, was more explicit on gender, while in courses in health and human resource management, *"I think it's tacitly acknowledged"* (2500:1F). Other participants echoed their sentiments by using other phrases such as *"not in a specific way"* (1600:1F) and *"I don't have a deliberate curriculum to teach gender issues"* (1600:3M). By using this language, academic staff members constructed gender as a hidden and invisible discourse.

Two participants also had specific views on the desirability of having gender so visible in the curriculum:

> *I think it will be more welcomed if it's sort of tacit and embedded, than if it's explicit, although there is no opposition to X's course being brought in.* (2500:1F)

> *I wouldn't think that there should be a special module…, but it's not necessarily having a special module for gender.* (1600:2M)

In trying to comprehend why gender was constructed as an implicit and invisible discourse, one can link this to the fact that gender is an underlying rather than an immediate determinant of health, which is deeply seated and therefore not readily visible on the surface. In public health, it is often easier to address the more immediate and readily visible determinants of health, such as those related to reproductive health.

Some participants actually expressed the difficulty of addressing gender in some specific courses. *"Particularly in some courses that are disease related ... in a way it [gender] would come out but not so direct"* (1600:1F). One participant did not see the need for including gender (constructed as sex differences) in all courses:

> *But you know the other courses I teach, we don't really bring it out. Not that they should come out, but I don't feel there is a need for it to come out. ... Now I am teaching environmental pollution. I don't think there is any need ... to bring out the differences between the sexes, that kind of thing.* (1600:6M)

The narratives of the above participants suggest that there are some courses in which it is difficult to teach gender, especially the biomedically oriented courses. This raises the question of whether it is necessary to incorporate gender into all public health courses. (See also the discussion on add-on and integrationist approaches in Section 7.1.2,)

6.3.3.2 "I would work or go across to gender studies and collaborate" – gender-collaborative approaches

Participant 2500:3F pointed out that due to her lack of knowledge on gender, she normally joined forces with the gender studies unit to help her out with gender issues. By doing so she introduced an alternative way of teaching gender – through collaboration.

In the above subsections we have seen how participants used different forms of language to express how they dealt with gender in their courses. The participants, however, also raised pertinent barriers to the teaching of gender.

6.3.4 Barriers to teaching gender

When the participants talked about how they dealt with gender in curricula, it became obvious, through the language that they used, that they were pointing out some obstacles that hindered them from effectively teaching gender – *"sometimes people find it hard to really operationalise them"* (1600:3M). The obstacles were categorised as: lack of knowledge, resources and commitment; resistance; and competing priorities.

6.3.4.1 "Lack of knowledge, skills … resources and commitment"

Participants from School 1600 acknowledged that gender was a new concept and they were struggling with conceptual understanding –*"the issues of gender have been a little bit confusing to me"* (1600:4M). Participant 2500:3F acknowledged that the understanding of gender is *"sometimes skewed"*. She listed barriers to the teaching of gender as *"lack of knowledge, skills and resources and commitment"* and expressed specific concern about commitment to the implementation of gender in curricula by arguing that if resources were put aside for the teaching of gender, then it *"would tell me more about their commitment"* (2500:3F).

6.3.4.2 "We cannot introduce change without resistance"

Participants from both schools felt that resistance was a barrier to incorporating gender in curricula. *"So they really would like to see that issue being addressed, but of course you can't have something without resistance"* (1600:1F).

To incorporate gender one also needed to see to sensitisation and provide convincing arguments for this position. This entails hard work, *"a bit of a push"*, and perseverance.

> *What I know is that people support something if they are convinced. If somebody doesn't present a good case, that case is likely to lose. That's what I know.* (1600:2M)

> *I would say it will take a bit of a push … So I do think that if you raise consciousness, people respond … But I would say it's a relatively responsive environment, but there probably has to be some quite hard work too.* (2500:1F)

6.3.4.3 Competing priorities

A participant from School 2500 gave a detailed account of how other competing priorities in curricula made gender to be relegated to the backburner:

> *So I would say it's a need, but I also – I can see the tension that we face, because a generic curriculum has been put forward under a lot of pressure and in a way the dust is just settling. We have had a first evaluation by a public health expert who pointed to some gaps around communicable diseases. A lot of the African country users that are using our course, are needing malaria, are needing a stronger orientation to communicable diseases in our curriculum. So, in a way that's one of the first responses. And the mother and child issue was also identified as a gap and that will be gaining from them in the next couple of years. Issues of equity and moving from the medicalised model to the health promotion, preventive model, were the priorities and embedded in that equity move is gender. But in the South African context where the curriculum was formulated to try and change the health system for the South African black population at large, another agenda gained priority and I would say the next 10 years might be when one can refine and actually look at issues like gender more consciously and try and pull*

in, because we have a gender-equity unit on campus and we have a women and gender studies grouping on campus, who run a post-graduate course and with who[m] we talk quite a lot, because we suffer similar problems. (2500:7M)

6.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter have shown the importance of 'mini-narratives' in the production of gender knowledge and how forms of subjectivity were constituted and taken up within discourses on gender. It also showed how, to a large extent, gender is a lived experience shaped by different contexts, and that gender sensitivity does not automatically mean that gender will always be included in the curriculum.

In the next chapter, the findings of this chapter and Chapter 5 will be interpreted and discussed within a poststructuralist framework.