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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

1. Introduction

The concept of the **social construction of gender** is one of the central foundations of contemporary Gender Studies. It challenges the assumption that the social differences between men and women arise naturally and inevitably from biological differences. Social constructionism argues that although human beings possess biological characteristics, societies attach meanings, expectations, roles, identities and hierarchies to those characteristics. Consequently, much of what a society considers “masculine” or “feminine” is produced through social processes rather than determined exclusively by biology.

In simple terms, people are born into biological and social realities, but societies teach them how males and females are expected to behave. Family, education, religion, media, law, economy, language and political institutions participate in this process. Gender therefore becomes not merely an individual characteristic but also an important organizing principle of society.

The famous observation of French philosopher **Simone de Beauvoir**, that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, captures an important constructionist argument. Her point was not that biological differences do not exist. Rather, society transforms biological differences into socially meaningful categories and expectations.

For CSS examination purposes, social constructionism should therefore be understood as a theoretical framework explaining **how gender identities, gender roles, inequalities and ideas of masculinity and femininity are historically and socially produced.**

2. Understanding Sex and Gender

2.1 The Traditional Distinction Between Sex and Gender

Early feminist scholarship made an important distinction between **sex** and **gender**. Sex generally referred to biological characteristics associated with male and female bodies,

while gender referred to socially constructed identities, expectations and roles associated with masculinity and femininity.

This distinction was politically significant because it challenged biological determinism. If women's domestic responsibilities, men's political authority or occupational segregation were not inevitable consequences of biology, then these arrangements could potentially be changed.

Thus, the sex-gender distinction provided feminism with an intellectual foundation for challenging inequality.

Sex

Sex has conventionally referred to biological characteristics such as reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones and other physical characteristics associated with male and female classification.

Gender

Gender refers to the meanings, identities, expectations, behaviours and roles that societies associate with people on the basis of sex and other social classifications.

For example, the ability to become pregnant involves biological characteristics. However, the belief that women should therefore be solely responsible for childcare, domestic work and household management represents a **social arrangement**, not an unavoidable biological consequence.

This distinction is fundamental to understanding social constructionism.

3. What is Social Constructionism?

3.1 Basic Argument

Social constructionism maintains that many categories people regard as natural or self-evident acquire their social meanings through human interaction, culture, history and institutions.

Applied to gender, the theory argues that society constructs particular understandings of masculinity and femininity and then presents these arrangements as normal or natural.

For example, there is nothing inherently biological about associating leadership with men, domesticity with women, particular colours with boys or girls, or particular occupations with one gender. These associations differ across cultures and historical periods. Their variation itself provides evidence of their social character.

Therefore:

Biological difference does not automatically produce social inequality; society interprets biological difference and assigns social meanings to it.

3.2 Gender as a Social Institution

Gender construction operates beyond individual attitudes. It becomes embedded in social institutions.

Families may distribute household responsibilities according to gender. Schools can reproduce expectations about appropriate behaviour for boys and girls. Labour markets may divide occupations into supposedly masculine and feminine professions. Media representations can establish standards of beauty, motherhood and masculinity. Political systems may historically privilege male participation. Laws can either reproduce these distinctions or challenge them.

Gender consequently operates at three interconnected levels:

Individual level: gender identity, behaviour and self-understanding.

Interactional level: expectations governing relations between people.

Institutional level: gender patterns embedded in family, economy, education, politics, media and law.

Social constructionism therefore does not simply claim that individuals “choose” gender. It examines the larger social structures within which gender identities and expectations develop.

4. Historicizing Constructionism

4.1 Meaning of Historicizing Gender

To **historicize gender** means to examine how ideas about masculinity, femininity, sex and appropriate social roles have changed across historical periods.

If gender roles were entirely fixed by nature, one would expect them to remain broadly constant. Historical evidence, however, demonstrates substantial variation.

Women's political participation, property rights, employment, educational opportunities and family roles have changed dramatically across societies and historical periods. Similarly, ideals of masculinity have changed according to economic systems, warfare, industrialization, class structures and cultural developments.

This historical variability forms a major argument for social constructionism.

4.2 From Biological Determinism to Social Constructionism

Traditional approaches frequently explained gender differences through biology. Men were characterized as naturally aggressive, rational and suited to public life, whereas women were portrayed as naturally emotional, nurturing and suited to domestic life.

Feminist scholarship questioned this reasoning. It argued that biological difference was being used to justify socially created inequality.

The development of modern social sciences further demonstrated that behaviour depends considerably on socialization, institutions, economic arrangements and cultural expectations.

The debate therefore shifted from:

“What are the natural differences between men and women?”

towards:

“How does society create, maintain and legitimize gender differences?”

5. Major Intellectual Foundations of Social Constructionism

5.1 Simone de Beauvoir: Becoming a Woman

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) profoundly influenced constructionist thinking.

Her argument that womanhood is something one “becomes” suggests that society produces femininity through education, expectations and social institutions. Girls learn socially approved behaviour and eventually internalize many of these expectations.

De Beauvoir also introduced the influential idea of woman as the **“Other.”** Historically, man was frequently treated as the universal human subject, while woman was defined in relation to him. This process contributed to women's subordinate social position.

Her work therefore helped move feminist analysis away from purely biological explanations toward cultural and existential explanations.

5.2 Ann Oakley: Sex and Gender

Sociologist **Ann Oakley** played an important role in popularizing the analytical distinction between sex and gender.

Oakley emphasized that societies transform biological differences into systems of social classification. Gender roles vary across cultures, demonstrating that many supposedly natural male and female behaviours are learned rather than biologically predetermined.

The sex-gender distinction became particularly influential during second-wave feminism because it allowed feminists to argue that social inequality could be transformed.

5.3 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), **Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann** argued that human beings collectively create social institutions and meanings. Over time, these institutions become institutionalized and appear objective or natural.

Their framework can be applied effectively to gender.

A society may repeatedly assign caregiving to women. Eventually, female caregiving becomes institutionalized through family arrangements, workplace expectations and cultural representations. Later generations encounter this arrangement as if it were natural.

Thus:

Human practice → repetition → institutionalization → normalization

This process helps explain why socially created gender arrangements can appear biologically inevitable.

6. Gender Socialization

6.1 Family

The family is among the earliest agents of gender socialization. Children may encounter different expectations regarding clothing, toys, emotional expression, household responsibilities and career aspirations.

Boys may receive greater encouragement toward independence and physical toughness, whereas girls may face stronger expectations concerning modesty, caregiving or domestic responsibilities.

These patterns vary substantially across families and societies. Their variation reinforces the constructionist argument.

6.2 Education

Educational institutions can both reproduce and challenge gender norms.

Textbooks may depict men as leaders, scientists or breadwinners while disproportionately portraying women in domestic roles. Teachers and peers may also communicate expectations concerning appropriate subjects, careers and behaviour.

Conversely, gender-sensitive curricula, equal educational access and representation of women in diverse professions can challenge traditional stereotypes.

6.3 Media

Television, cinema, advertising and digital media constitute powerful sites of gender construction.

Media does more than reflect society. It can participate in defining desirable femininity and masculinity. Repeated representations of women primarily through beauty, domesticity or dependency and men through strength, authority and economic success can normalize particular gender expectations.

Social media has complicated this process by simultaneously reproducing conventional stereotypes and creating spaces for alternative identities and gender activism.

6.4 Religion and Cultural Interpretation

Religious traditions and cultural practices also influence gender expectations. However, CSS candidates should distinguish carefully between **religious principles, interpretations of those principles, and local cultural customs**. Practices attributed to religion may sometimes reflect patriarchal traditions or historically specific interpretations.

A strong academic answer should therefore avoid treating religion or culture as internally uniform.

6.5 Language

Language contributes to gender construction because words and expressions shape social perceptions.

The routine use of masculine terms for authority or assumptions that certain occupations belong naturally to one gender can reproduce gendered thinking. Conversely, changing linguistic practices may reflect broader transformations in gender relations.

7. Gender Performativity: Judith Butler

7.1 Gender as Performance

Judith Butler, particularly through *Gender Trouble* (1990), transformed debates surrounding gender construction.

Butler argues that gender should not simply be understood as a stable identity that exists first and produces behaviour afterward. Instead, gender identity is continually produced through repeated acts, gestures, language and social practices.

This is known as **gender performativity**.

Performativity does not mean that individuals merely pretend to be male or female, like actors performing a role on stage. Rather, repeated social practices create the appearance that gender is a stable and natural identity.

For instance, particular styles of clothing, bodily presentation, speech and behaviour become repeatedly associated with masculinity or femininity. Their repetition eventually makes the categories appear natural.

7.2 Importance of Butler

Butler takes social constructionism further than the conventional sex-gender distinction. Earlier approaches often assumed:

Sex = biological

Gender = social

Butler questions whether sex itself can be understood entirely outside social interpretation.

This leads directly to another CSS syllabus topic: “**Is Sex Socially Determined, Too?**”

8. Is “Sex” Socially Determined, Too?

8.1 The Conventional Position

Traditional feminist theory often treated sex as biological and gender as cultural.

According to this model:

Biology → Sex

Society → Gender

This distinction was politically useful because it demonstrated that social roles were not inevitable consequences of anatomy.

However, later feminist and queer theorists questioned whether this distinction was sufficient.

8.2 The Constructionist Challenge

Strong constructionist approaches do not necessarily claim that bodies or biological characteristics are imaginary. Instead, they ask how societies **classify, interpret and attach significance to biological characteristics**.

Human bodies possess material characteristics, but societies determine which characteristics receive social and legal importance and how they are categorized.

For example, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive anatomy and secondary sexual characteristics do not always align in identical ways in every individual. The existence of intersex variations complicates an overly simplistic assumption that every biological characteristic falls neatly into one of two completely uniform categories.

Therefore, contemporary debate distinguishes between the **material existence of bodies** and the **social interpretation of bodies**.

8.3 Critical Evaluation

An academically balanced position should avoid two extremes.

Pure biological determinism risks treating historically variable social inequalities as inevitable consequences of nature.

At the opposite extreme, an excessively strong interpretation of constructionism can appear to understate the material significance of reproductive anatomy, hormones and other biological characteristics.

A sophisticated Gender Studies approach therefore recognizes interaction between **biology, culture, institutions, discourse and individual experience**.

9. Queer Theory

9.1 Meaning and Origins

Queer Theory emerged prominently during the late twentieth century under the influence of post-structuralism, feminism and LGBTQ scholarship.

Important intellectual influences include **Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick**.

Queer Theory questions the assumption that categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual are always fixed, universal and mutually exclusive.

Rather than simply adding additional identities to established categories, Queer Theory investigates **how the categories themselves are produced and regulated**.

10. Michel Foucault and the Construction of Sexual Categories

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* greatly influenced Queer Theory.

Foucault argued that sexuality should not simply be understood as a natural private reality that society either permits or represses. Institutions such as medicine, psychiatry, law and religion historically developed classifications and discourses through which sexuality became understood.

His concept of **power/knowledge** is particularly significant. Systems of knowledge can define what counts as normal, abnormal, healthy, deviant or legitimate. These classifications simultaneously produce forms of social power.

Applied to gender, this suggests that definitions of normal masculinity, femininity and sexuality emerge partly through institutional practices rather than solely from nature.

11. Problematizing the Category of “Sex”

Queer Theory questions **binary thinking**, particularly the assumption that sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation must always align according to one predetermined pattern.

Traditional binary reasoning frequently assumes:

Male → Masculine → Man → Attraction to Women

Female → Feminine → Woman → Attraction to Men

Queer theorists argue that these are analytically distinct dimensions and should not automatically be collapsed into one another.

This distinction is particularly important:

Sex characteristics concern bodily characteristics.

Gender identity concerns a person's understanding of their gender.

Gender expression concerns presentation through clothing, appearance, behaviour and other forms of expression.

Sexual orientation concerns patterns of romantic or sexual attraction.

Confusing these concepts produces weak Gender Studies answers, and examiners have apparently decided candidates deserve no mercy on this distinction.

12. Heteronormativity

An important concept in Queer Theory is **heteronormativity**.

Heteronormativity refers to social arrangements that treat heterosexuality and conventional male-female gender roles as the default framework through which society is organized.

It may operate through family expectations, marriage norms, media representations, institutional practices and legal arrangements.

Queer Theory investigates how such assumptions become normalized and how people whose identities or relationships do not fit conventional categories experience exclusion.

13. Masculinities and the Social Construction of Men

Social constructionism does not study only women. Masculinity is also socially constructed.

13.1 R. W. Connell and Hegemonic Masculinity

R. W. Connell introduced the influential concept of **hegemonic masculinity**.

It refers to culturally dominant forms of masculinity that legitimize men's dominant position and establish standards against which other masculinities may be evaluated.

Such ideals may emphasize strength, authority, economic independence, heterosexuality, emotional restraint and control.

Importantly, not every man possesses or benefits equally from the dominant form of masculinity. Masculinities differ according to class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and social position.

13.2 Masculinity Can Also Constrain Men

Gender norms may pressure men to suppress vulnerability, demonstrate toughness, become economic providers or engage in risky behaviour.

Therefore, feminist analysis of masculinity does not simply portray every man as an identical beneficiary of patriarchy. It examines how gender systems distribute power unevenly while simultaneously imposing expectations upon different groups of men.

14. Masculinities and Feminism

The relationship between masculinity studies and feminism is significant because gender equality cannot be understood exclusively as a “women's issue.”

If patriarchal structures are reproduced through expectations concerning both femininity and masculinity, transformation requires changes in both.

Men can participate in gender equality through equitable household responsibilities, opposition to gender-based violence, support for women's political and economic participation, and rejection of harmful masculine stereotypes.

At the same time, feminist scholars caution against allowing discussion of men's problems to obscure structural inequalities historically experienced by women. The objective should therefore be a relational understanding of gender.

15. Nature versus Culture Debate

15.1 Nature Perspective

The nature perspective emphasizes biological influences on human behaviour. Biological approaches may examine reproductive differences, hormonal patterns, evolutionary processes and neurological factors.

Such approaches argue that at least some average behavioural differences may have biological dimensions.

15.2 Culture Perspective

The cultural perspective emphasizes socialization, norms, institutions, economic structures and historical circumstances.

Cross-cultural variation supports this perspective because gender roles differ significantly between societies and across time.

15.3 Beyond the Binary Debate

Contemporary scholarship increasingly rejects a simplistic choice between biology and culture.

Human behaviour develops through complex interactions among:

Biology + social environment + culture + institutions + individual agency.

Thus, biological characteristics may influence human experience without mechanically determining social roles.

This balanced formulation is particularly useful in CSS answers because it demonstrates critical reasoning rather than ideological assertion.

16. Intersectionality and Gender Construction

Social constructionism becomes more sophisticated when combined with **intersectionality**, a concept strongly associated with **Kimberlé Crenshaw**.

Intersectionality argues that gender does not operate independently from class, race, ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality and other dimensions of social position.

Therefore, there is no single universal experience of womanhood or manhood.

For example, the experiences of an affluent urban Pakistani woman may differ considerably from those of a poor rural woman. Similarly, transgender people may experience gender alongside class-based exclusion, educational disadvantage and other forms of marginalization.

Intersectionality consequently prevents Gender Studies from reducing society to a simple male-versus-female model.

17. Social Construction of Gender in Pakistan

Pakistan provides an important context for applying constructionist theory.

Gender expectations are shaped by family structures, socioeconomic class, rural-urban differences, educational opportunities, local customs, religious interpretations, media, labour markets and political institutions.

In some households, men continue to be regarded primarily as breadwinners while women carry disproportionate responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work. Yet these patterns are neither universal nor static. Women's expanding participation in education, medicine, civil services, entrepreneurship, politics, journalism and other professions demonstrates continuing transformation in gender roles.

This changing landscape supports the constructionist argument: if gender roles can change through education, economic development, law and social movements, they cannot be explained exclusively through fixed biological characteristics.

18. Khawaja Sira and Transgender Identities in Pakistan

The Pakistani context also demonstrates that gender diversity cannot simply be imported into analysis as a supposedly new Western phenomenon. South Asian societies possess a long history of communities commonly described through terms such as **khawaja sira** and **hijra**, although these terms encompass complex and sometimes different identities.

Their social status has changed considerably across historical periods. Colonial legal structures, postcolonial institutions, family structures and contemporary rights movements have all influenced their position.

This historical variation itself offers a useful example of the relationship between gender categories and social institutions.

19. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018

Pakistan's **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018** provides an especially important contemporary case study for social constructionism and Queer Theory.

The Act defines **gender identity** in terms of an individual's internal sense of self and defines **gender expression** in relation to how gender identity is presented and perceived. It also established protections against discrimination and addressed rights in areas including education, employment, healthcare, public places, property and political participation.

From a constructionist perspective, the legislation is significant because it legally distinguished gender identity and expression from a purely anatomical understanding of sex.

From a Queer Theory perspective, the debate surrounding the law raises the fundamental question of whether legal recognition must always follow a rigid male-female framework based exclusively on assigned sex or whether law should accommodate more complex forms of gender identity.

20. Controversy Surrounding the 2018 Act

The Act subsequently generated substantial legal, religious and political controversy in Pakistan.

Critics challenged provisions concerning gender identity and self-perceived identity, including arguments about their relationship with Islamic principles and consequences for areas of personal and family law. Supporters and rights advocates, meanwhile, emphasized protection against discrimination and the fundamental rights of a marginalized population.

The **Federal Shariat Court** considered multiple challenges to provisions of the Act. Its published judgment records competing arguments over self-perceived identity, discrimination, legal rights and the scope of transgender protection.

For Gender Studies, the important analytical point is not simply choosing between competing political positions. The controversy illustrates the precise theoretical problem identified in the CSS syllabus:

Who defines sex and gender, according to what criteria, and how do those definitions acquire legal and social authority?

The controversy therefore turns an apparently abstract theoretical debate into a practical dispute involving law, citizenship, identity, religion and state institutions.

21. Social Constructionism and Transgender Rights

Transgender debates illuminate the distinction between biological characteristics and socially recognized gender identity.

A conventional biological approach may emphasize bodily characteristics in determining legal sex. Constructionist approaches draw attention to how governments, medical institutions and societies themselves establish the criteria through which people are officially classified.

Queer Theory goes further by questioning whether requiring every person to conform to fixed binary categories adequately reflects the diversity of human experiences.

However, critical analysis must also acknowledge that questions involving medicine, sport, prisons, inheritance, family law and other institutional settings may involve competing rights and material considerations. Social constructionism provides a framework for examining these disputes, but it does not automatically resolve every legal or ethical question.

That distinction is crucial in a high-quality CSS answer.

22. Agency versus Structure

One common misunderstanding is that social constructionism implies that individuals can freely choose any identity without social constraints.

Constructionist theory actually emphasizes the power of **social structure**.

People exercise agency, but they do so within institutions, cultural norms, economic conditions and systems of power that they did not individually create.

For example, a woman may choose employment, but her decision may be influenced by childcare responsibilities, family expectations, labour-market discrimination and available transportation. Similarly, an individual may express a gender identity, but social

acceptance, legal recognition and institutional treatment affect how that identity can be lived.

Therefore:

Gender is socially constructed, but social constructions have real consequences.

23. Gender as “Doing Gender”

Sociologists **Candace West and Don Zimmerman** introduced the influential concept of “**doing gender.**”

They argued that gender is continuously produced through everyday social interaction. Individuals are socially evaluated according to expectations attached to their perceived gender.

Gender is therefore not simply something a person *has*; it is something repeatedly accomplished through interaction.

This concept complements Butler's performativity but emerges from a sociological interactionist tradition.

For example, expectations concerning dress, emotional expression, occupation, household behaviour and public conduct continuously reproduce distinctions between masculinity and femininity.

24. Institutions and the Reproduction of Gender Inequality

Gender constructions become particularly powerful when incorporated into institutions.

Family

The family can reproduce gender through division of labour, inheritance patterns, decision-making authority and expectations surrounding marriage and childcare.

Economy

Occupational segregation, unequal caregiving burdens and assumptions about breadwinning can reproduce gender differences in economic participation.

Education

Educational institutions can challenge gender inequality through equal access, but curriculum, stereotypes and institutional practices may also reproduce it.

Politics

Political participation can be influenced by gendered expectations about leadership, public visibility, mobility and family responsibilities.

Law

Law can institutionalize gender categories while simultaneously serving as an instrument for challenging discrimination.

Thus, gender construction is both **cultural and structural**.

25. Criticism of Social Constructionism

25.1 Neglect of Biology

One criticism is that strong versions of social constructionism may understate biological realities.

Pregnancy, reproductive anatomy and certain physiological differences have material consequences that cannot simply be reduced to language or discourse.

A balanced analysis should therefore distinguish between acknowledging biological characteristics and using biology to justify predetermined social hierarchies.

25.2 Excessive Relativism

If all categories are treated exclusively as social constructions, critics argue that establishing stable analytical categories becomes difficult.

For example, feminist political movements have historically mobilized around the category of “women.” If that category becomes completely unstable, questions arise about how collective political claims should be formulated.

25.3 Structural Materialist Critique

Some Marxist and socialist feminists argue that discourse-oriented theories may pay insufficient attention to economic structures.

Gender inequality involves not merely language and identity but also property, wages, unpaid care work, poverty and access to resources.

25.4 Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial feminists caution against treating Western gender categories as universally applicable.

Gender must be examined within specific historical and cultural settings. Colonialism itself transformed gender relations in many societies and imposed particular legal and administrative classifications.

This criticism is particularly relevant when analysing Pakistan and South Asia.

26. Strengths of Social Constructionism

Despite these criticisms, social constructionism has made several major contributions to Gender Studies.

First, it exposes the historical variability of gender roles. Second, it explains how institutions reproduce apparently natural differences. Third, it challenges biological determinism. Fourth, it allows researchers to investigate masculinity as well as femininity. Fifth, it provides conceptual tools for understanding transgender and non-binary identities. Finally, it demonstrates that gender inequality can be transformed because social arrangements are neither timeless nor inevitable.

Its greatest contribution may therefore be summarized as follows:

Difference may have biological dimensions, but inequality requires social explanation.

27. Social Constructionism versus Biological Determinism

Biological Determinism	Social Constructionism
Emphasizes biological characteristics	Emphasizes social and cultural processes
Often treats gender differences as relatively natural	Treats many gender roles as historically variable
Focuses on anatomy, hormones and reproductive differences	Focuses on socialization, institutions and discourse
Tends toward relatively fixed categories	Examines how categories acquire and change meaning

Explains behaviour substantially through nature	Explains behaviour through interaction of society and individual
May emphasize male/female differences	Investigates differences within gender categories as well
Risk: naturalizing inequality	Risk: underestimating material biology

A sophisticated CSS answer should **not simply select one column and dismiss the other**. Contemporary gender scholarship increasingly investigates interactions between biological realities and social interpretation.

28. Social Constructionism, Queer Theory and Feminism: Relationship

These three concepts overlap but should not be treated as synonyms.

Social Constructionism asks how society creates meanings, identities and categories.

Feminism examines gendered power relations and seeks to understand and challenge gender inequality.

Queer Theory questions the stability and apparent naturalness of categories involving sex, gender and sexuality.

Thus:

Constructionism asks: How are gender categories produced?

Feminism asks: How do gender relations produce or sustain power and inequality?

Queer Theory asks: Why do we assume these categories are fixed, binary and natural in the first place?

This conceptual distinction can considerably strengthen a CSS answer.

29. Application to the CSS 2026 Question

The CSS 2026 question asks candidates to connect theory with contemporary Pakistan rather than merely reproduce definitions.

A strong answer should proceed through the following analytical chain:

Social Constructionism

↓

Sex differences acquire social meanings through institutions and culture

↓

Queer Theory

↓

Questions the stability of binary sex/gender categories

↓

Judith Butler

↓

Gender is constituted through repeated social practices; even the interpretation of sex occurs through social frameworks

↓

Transgender Identity

↓

Challenges the assumption that assigned sex necessarily determines gender identity

↓

Pakistan's Transgender Persons Act 2018

↓

Provides a legal framework involving gender identity, expression and protection against discrimination

↓

Legal and Social Controversy

↓

Raises competing arguments concerning identity, biological classification, religious interpretation, fundamental rights and state recognition

This is precisely why the 2026 question combines **Historicizing Constructionism + Queer Theory + Is Sex Socially Determined?** rather than testing these as isolated definitions.

30. Important Scholars for CSS Answers

CSS candidates should integrate theorists into arguments rather than merely dropping names into paragraphs.

Simone de Beauvoir — gender as a process of becoming; woman constructed as the “Other.”

Ann Oakley — analytical distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender.

Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann — institutionalization and social construction of reality.

Michel Foucault — discourse, power/knowledge and historical construction of sexual categories.

Judith Butler — gender performativity and critique of fixed sex/gender categories.

R. W. Connell — hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities.

Candace West & Don Zimmerman — “doing gender” through everyday interaction.

Kimberlé Crenshaw — intersectionality and interaction between gender and other structures of inequality.

These scholars allow an examiner to see an argument rather than a memorized catalogue.

31. Critical Analysis

The social constructionist approach revolutionized Gender Studies because it demonstrated that gender inequality cannot simply be explained by biology. Societies transform bodily differences into systems of meaning, roles and power. Gender is consequently produced through socialization, institutions, language, law and everyday interaction.

Queer Theory radicalized this insight by questioning not only gender roles but also the apparent stability of sex and gender categories themselves. Butler's theory of performativity demonstrates how repeated social practices make gender identities appear natural, while Foucault shows how institutions and systems of knowledge participate in defining normality.

Nevertheless, social constructionism should not be interpreted as evidence that material bodies are irrelevant. Biological characteristics remain real and can have significant consequences. The critical question is how those characteristics are **interpreted, classified and transformed into social expectations and legal categories**.

The Pakistani debate surrounding transgender rights demonstrates this interaction vividly. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 introduced statutory concepts of gender identity and expression and protections against discrimination, while subsequent legal and religious challenges demonstrated continuing disagreement over how gender and sex should be defined and recognized.

Thus, contemporary gender debates cannot adequately be understood through either pure biological determinism or an oversimplified claim that biology is irrelevant. They

require examination of the relationship among **body, identity, culture, institutions, power and law**.

Conclusion

The social construction of gender represents a fundamental shift from viewing masculinity and femininity as inevitable products of biology to understanding them as historically changing social formations. Family, education, media, religion, economy, politics and law participate in assigning meanings to bodily differences and reproducing gender expectations.

Social constructionism reveals that many practices once considered natural are historically contingent and therefore capable of transformation. Queer Theory extends this analysis by questioning the stability of sex and gender categories themselves, while masculinity studies demonstrate that men are also shaped by gendered expectations.

However, an academically rigorous approach must avoid replacing biological determinism with social determinism. Human gender experience develops through a complex relationship among biological characteristics, social institutions, cultural meanings and individual agency.

In Pakistan, debates surrounding transgender rights and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 demonstrate that questions of sex and gender are not merely theoretical. They directly influence law, citizenship, identity, equality and social recognition. Consequently, the social construction of gender remains essential for understanding both the theoretical foundations of Gender Studies and contemporary debates in Pakistani society.