

Fizza Raza

Gender Studies - Mock-1

Q 1. Critically evaluate the debate between Biological Determinism and Social-Constructionism.

1. Introduction:

"Biology is not destiny."

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

~ Simone de Beauvoir

The debate between Biological Determinism and Social Constructionism lies at the heart of Gender Studies and revolves around a fundamental question: Are gender differences result of biological nature or social nature? Biological determinists argue that gender roles and behaviours are shaped by innate biological factors such as genetics and hormones, whereas social constructionists contend that gender is a product of social, cultural and historical process. This debate is crucial

for understanding gender inequality, power relations, and policy formulation in contemporary societies.

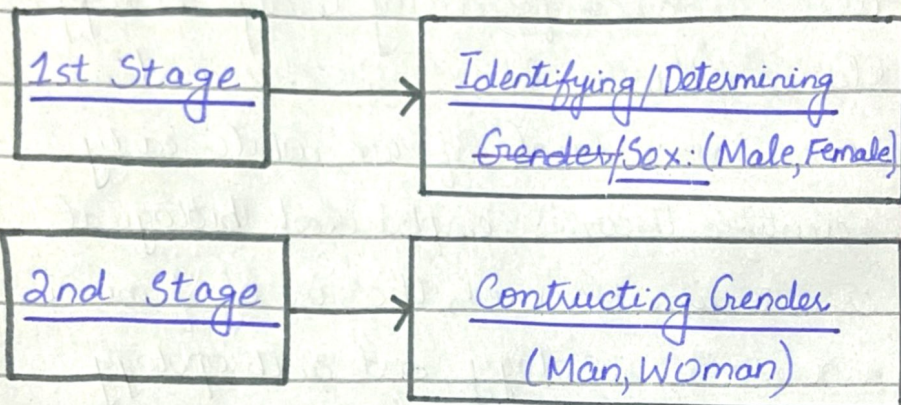
## 2. Background of the Debate:

Historically, gender differences were explained primarily through biology. Classical thinkers like Aristotle viewed women as natural inferior, while early scientific theories emphasized biological essentialism. However, the rise of feminist movements, sociology, and anthropology in 20th century challenged this view. Scholars began to highlight how institutions like family, education, religion and media construct gender identities. Thus, the debate evolved into a contest between nature versus nurture, shaping modern gender discourse.

## 3. Biological Determinism: Gender as Natural and Fixed

Biological determinism asserts that gender differences stem from biological factors, including hormones (estrogen and testosterone), chromosomes (XX and XY), and reproductive roles.

For example: Anatomy has given the role of childbirth to women.



### 3.1 Key Arguments of Biological Determinism:

Following are the key arguments of Biological Determinism

Men and Women possess distinct biological structures influencing behaviour.

Hormonal differences

explain aggression,  
nurturing roles and  
emotional patterns

Evolutionary theory

suggests gender roles  
developed for  
survival efficiency

### 3.2 Strengths of Biological Determinism:

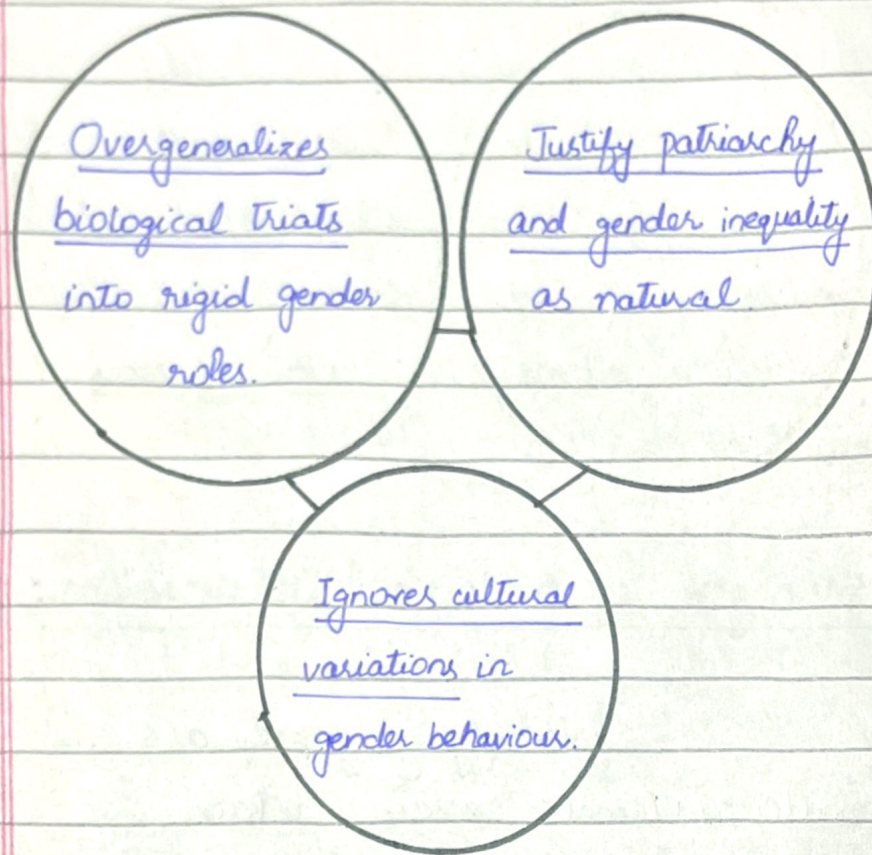
Identifying genders as male or female explains certain physical and reproductive differences as men are more strong than women and recognizes biological realities as role of pregnancy and childbirth is associated with female.

### 3.3 Criticism on Biological Determinism:

"Anatomy is destiny."

~ Sigmund Freud

The criticism on Biological Determinism is as follows:



#### 4. Social Constructionism: Gender as a Social Product

“WHO defining Gender: Characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or a boy and well as relationship with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can

change over time."

Social constructionism argues that gender is learned, performed and reinforced through social interaction rather than biology.

#### 4.1 Key Arguments of Social Constructionism:

##### (i) Role of Society in Gender Construction:

Gender is determined by society, not anatomy.

For example: Difference of gender roles in different societies, religions, cultures, eras, all have different definition of gender. Difference of gender roles in Matriarchal Society versus Patriarchal society where in matriarchal society, women are in leadership position, are breadwinners and lineage and inheritance are usually traced through the mother as opposite of today's patriarchal society.

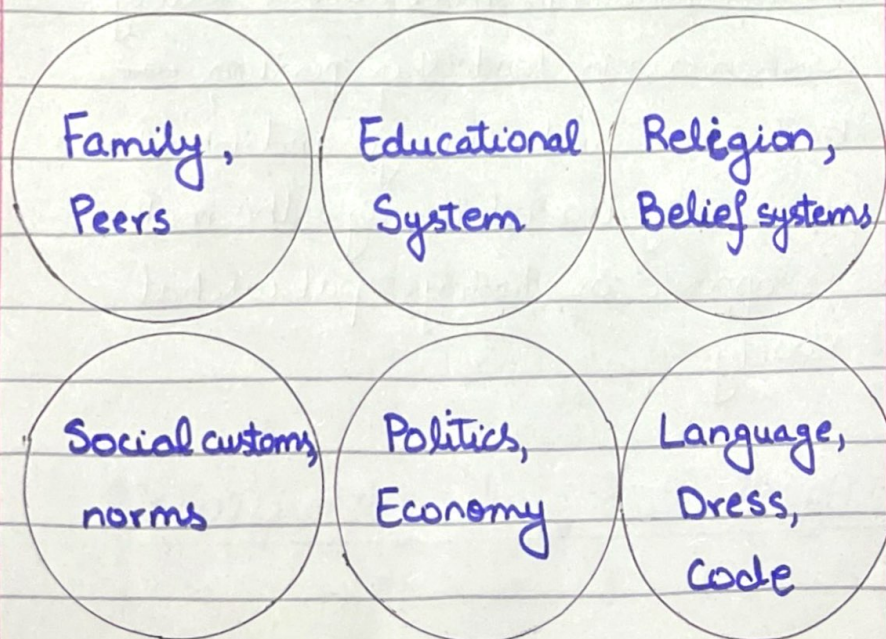
##### (ii) Agents of Social Construction:

Social Constructionism means that anatomy is only important to label someone as male or female, later on, individual molds themselves according to the environment.

"The mind is a blank slate at birth."

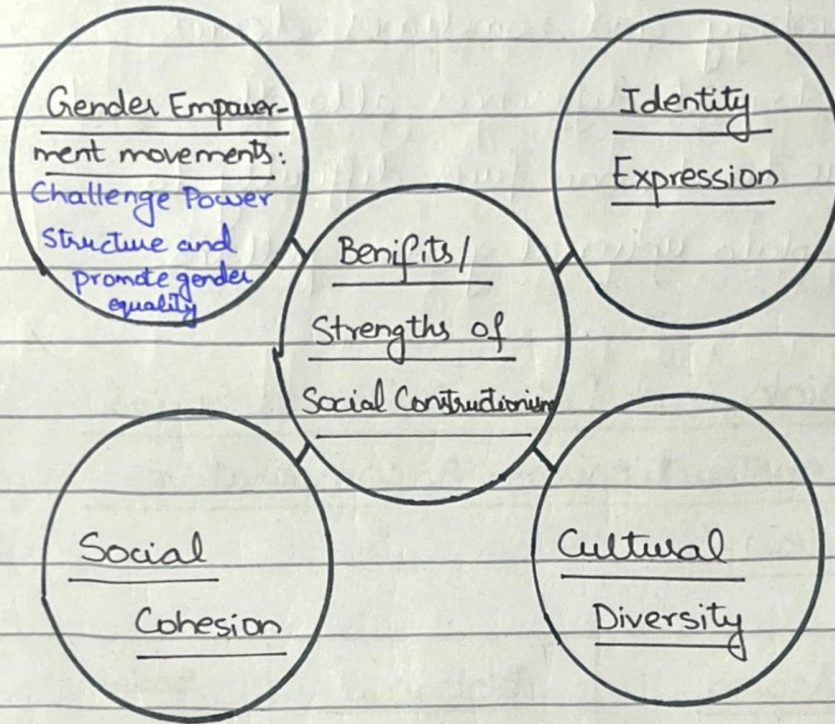
John Locke

So society is the writer of individuals attributes, not his/her anatomy. Agents of social construction are following:

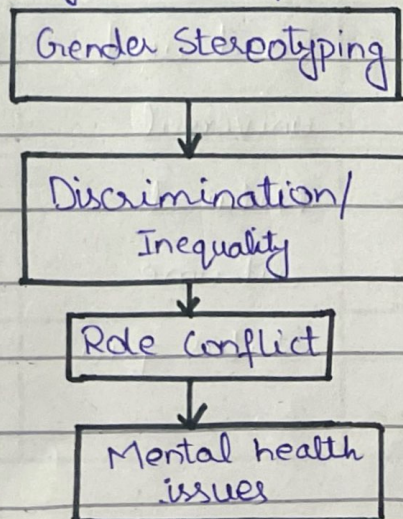


## 4.2 Strengths of Social Constructionism:

The strength of social construction of gender is as below:



## 4.3 Harms of Social Construction of Gender: Following are harms of social constructionism:



#### 4.4 Criticism on Social Constructionism:

Critics argue that social constructionism of gender underestimates the role of biology and sometimes denies biological differences altogether, and due to it, one faces difficulty to explain universal gender patterns.

#### 5. Biological Determinism vs Social Constructionism: A comparative View

| <u>Aspect</u>           | <u>Biological Determinism</u> | <u>Social Constructionism</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| i) Basis                | Biology and Genetics          | Society and culture           |
| ii) Nature of Gender    | Fixed and universal           | Fluid and variable            |
| iii) View on inequality | Natural outcome               | Socially produced             |
| iv) Policy Implication  | Status quo                    | Gender reform                 |

## 6. Critical Analysis:

Both perspectives, when taken in isolation, present limitations. Biology determinism risks enforcing stereotypes and legitimizing inequality, while extreme social constructionism may overlook undeniable biological realities. A balanced approach, often termed biosocial interactionism, recognizes that biology provides the foundation upon which society builds gender meanings. Modern gender studies increasingly support this integrative view, emphasizing that biology influences but does not dictate gender roles.

"Gender is the social organization of sexual difference."

~ Joan Scott

## 7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the debate

between biological determinism and social constructionism highlights the complexity of gender formation. While biology sets certain physical parameters, it is the society that assigns meanings, roles, and expectations to these differences. Thus, the gender ~~should not~~ be understood as <sup>neither</sup> purely natural nor entirely social, but an outcome of continuous interaction between biology and society.

