

Gender Studies

CSS - 2016

Q#06

What are the theories of social construction of gender?

Introduction:

Gender is not a fixed biological fact but a socially constructed category shaped by norms, institutions, and daily interactions. Theories of social construction of gender explore how society creates, enforces, and maintains difference between men and women. These theories examine family, education, media, and law as mechanisms producing gendered behaviours, expectations, and hierarchies. Understanding these processes is essential to challenge inequality and reshape social norms. Through critical frameworks, researchers analyze how culture, power, and historical contexts define gender roles. Real-life examples reveal how socially imposed roles constrain choices and perpetuate inequality, demanding transformative interventions in society.

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Theories Of Social Construction Of Gender

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Symbolic Interactionism:
Genders as Social Performance

2.2

Social Role Theory:
Divisions of labour
and Expectations

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Structural functionalism:
Genders Roles for
Social Stability

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Post-Structuralism:
Genders as discourse
and Power

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Social learning Theory:
Observing and
Imitating Roles

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Feminist Psycho-
analytic theory:
Internalised
Gender Identity

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Queer Theory:
Challenging
Binary gender
norms

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Intersectionality: Multiple
social forces shape
gender

2.1

Symbolic Interactionism:

Gender as Social Performance

Symbolic Interactionism argues that gender is produced through everyday social interactions and learnable behaviours. As per West and Zimmerman in "Doing Gender" (1987) gender is not fixed trait but something people perform based on social expectations.

for example, Azeena Khan (Karachi, 2018) was criticised and mocked by relatives for playing cricket with boys.

2.2

Social Role Theory: Division of Labour And Expectations

Social Role Theory posits that gender differences emerge from socially assigned tasks, not biology. In "Sex Differences in Social Behaviour" (1987), Alice Eagly explains that repeated role assignments shape beliefs about what each gender "should" do. For example, Zara Bibi (Multan, 2019) was discouraged from continuing her studies.

2.3

Structural Functionalism: Gender Roles for Social Stability

Structural functionalism argues that societies assign roles to maintain stability. for example: Lubna Riaz - Lujranwala, 2016 was urged to abandon aspirations for engineering education because her community believed women's education beyond marriage detracted from family duties.

(2.4)

Post-Structuralism: Gender as Discourse And Power

Post-Structuralism asserts that discourse constructs gender categories. As per Judith Butler in "Gender Trouble" (1990) that gender is performed through language and cultural norms. for example, Hira Malik (Islamabad 2020) was reprimanded by peers and teachers for wearing trousers instead of traditional dress.

(2.5)

Social Learning theory: Observing and Imitating Roles

Social Learning Theory explains that people learn gender norms by observing others. As per Albert Bandura in Social Learning Theory (1977) shows that imitation influences behaviour and identity.

2.6

Feminist Psychoanalytic Theory: Internalised Gender Identity

Feminist Psychoanalytic Theory highlights how early family experiences shape gender roles. As per Nancy Chodorow in "The Reproduction of Mothering" (1978) ~~and~~ emotional internalisation during childhood forms gendered self-image. For example Nida Hussain (Peshawar, 2019) instinctively adopted caregiving responsibilities after observing her mother performing domestic labour. Internalising these roles as "feminine" through family dynamics.

(2.7)

Queer Theory: Challenging Binary Gender Norms

Queer Theory questions fixed gender categories. As per Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in "Epistemology of the Closet" highlights how rigid binaries exclude non-conforming identities. For example, Samina Javachi 2021, a transgender woman, faced harassment and discrimination for expressing gender outside binary norms, illustrating social enforcement of fixed gender expectations.

(2.8)

Intersectionality: Multiple Social Forces Shape Gender

Intersectionality explains that gender intersects with class, caste, religion, and ethnicity. As per Kimberle Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins" (1991) that overlapping forms of discrimination produce unique forms of discrimination. For instance, Maryam Joseph belong to Rahim Yar Khan a Christian family, girl from lower class to education, faced barriers to minority status plus religious expectations.

Conclusion:

Theories of social construction of gender reveal that gender roles are not natural but formed through interaction of social roles, cultural norms, discourse, and power structures. Understanding these frameworks help challenge rigid norms and supports interventions that promote equity, dignity, and freedom for all genders in society.
