

RETHINKING SOCIALIZATION AND STEREOTYPES: REFLECTIONS ON SANDRA BEM'S GENDER PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Gender roles and societal expectations often influence how we see ourselves and how we see and relate with others. Men and women are taught the roles that they should play as male or female from childhood by parents, school and the wider society. This process of socialization takes many forms that are direct and indirect. Stereotypes also influence our perceptions of gender roles and how we perceive what roles men and women should play in the society. These perceptions are usually negative and lead to worsening of already existing cultural and social barriers that institutionalize gender inequality. Gender inequality is a problem that has affected our society and has been of particular disadvantage to women who are conferred a lower status than men in most societies around the world. This disparity in the treatment of men and women is reflected in the unequal access to social goods, social and political offices, economic resources and cultural biases between the sexes. Sandra Bem's work on gender presents an alternative framework for viewing gender roles and presents ways that gender disparities can be corrected. This paper adopts the method of philosophical analysis to present Bem's contribution to the discourse on gender and a close examination of ideas reveals that despite her laudable contributions to gender theory, there are some limitations in her work that borders on the intersection of gender, race and social factors. The paper posits that her work on gender will be more grounded if an intersectional outlook is added to her theory.

Keywords: Sandra Bem, gender theory, socialization, stereotypes, gender inequality, STEM

Introduction

Gender issues have been discussed in the media, academia, politics and religion, gender inequality is a problem which has been identified as one of the many problems that have contributed to social injustice and underdevelopment. Women have been at the receiving end of most gender related issues especially gender inequality. Inequality between men and women has been practiced all over the world and it is necessary that this issue be addressed to reduce and end it. Feminism is the movement that started to end inequality between the sexes. It has made a lot of achievements like getting voting rights for women, property rights, education of women and opening spaces within society that were previously closed to women. Despite the efforts of feminism as a movement, gender inequality is still an issue today and there is need to continue the fight for women's rights to be respected and recognized.

Most societies have different gender roles for men and women and both sexes are taught and expected to perform these roles as members of such societies. From childhood, we are taught what it means to be male or female, often through rigid expectations reinforced by family, media, and society. Boys are taught how to act and become men, girls are also taught how to act and become women. Men are expected to possess different characteristics from women. Men are taught to be aggressive, physically strong, rational, and dominant while women are taught to be passive, physically weak, emotional, nurturing, etc. These gender roles, shaped by socialization, influence how we perceive ourselves and others, limiting individual expression and reinforcing inequality. Gender stereotypes often develop or are a product of such gender roles. Some of these stereotypes can have a lifelong effect on individuals in the society. This enforces inequality not only in our traditional communities but has even spilled over into our modern societies. Nonconformists have often been objects of ridicule and sometimes victims of segregation and violence by members of their own communities of society, such stereotypes teach men and women that certain jobs, social positions, political positions, are more suitable for men or for women. This limits what people can become and also limits the benefits that society can get from the capabilities of men and women.

This paper is concerned with the gender philosophy of Sandra Bem and how her work challenges these traditional gender norms, her work offers a new perspective on how stereotypes are formed and maintained. Through her Gender Schema Theory, she argued that gender is not a fixed biological reality but a socially constructed framework that can be reshaped. It is by rethinking socialization, we can move toward a more inclusive and equitable society where individuals are free to define themselves beyond rigid gender norms.

Clarification of concepts

i. Stereotypes

Stereotypes are defined as generalizations or assumptions made about a group of people based on their characteristics. These characteristics can include things like gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion. While stereotypes can sometimes be positive, they are often negative, inaccurate, and harmful. This is because they reduce individuals to a single set of traits and ignore the complexities and diversity of the individuals within a group. For example, a stereotype of Asian people as being good at math is not only inaccurate, but also ignores the fact that individuals within this group are likely to have a wide range of different abilities and interests.¹ According to Ann Oakley stereotypes refers to "cultural images of masculinity and femininity" that are used for opposite gender, in her book "Sex, Gender, and Society" Oakley argues that gender stereotypes are not based on biological differences, but rather on cultural and social factors.²

ii. Gender Socialization

Gender socialization is the process by which individuals learn and internalize the cultural norms, roles, and behaviors associated with their assigned gender. This learning process begins at birth and continues throughout life, shaping how people perceive themselves and interact with others based on societal expectations of masculinity and femininity.³

Sandra Bem's ideas on Gender Stereotypes

Sandra Bem's work on gender stereotypes was pioneering in challenging traditional

views. She developed the Gender Schema Theory, proposing that individuals organize their understanding of gender based on schemas, which are cognitive structures that guide the processing of information relevant to gender. Bem argued that these schemas influence how individuals perceive themselves and others in terms of gender roles and behaviors. One of Bem's significant contributions was her development of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), a widely used measure of masculinity and femininity that goes beyond mere stereotypes by assessing psychological traits traditionally associated with both genders. This instrument helped illustrate that masculinity and femininity are not polar opposites but rather independent dimensions that can coexist in varying degrees within individuals. Bem's research highlighted the limitations and rigidity of traditional gender stereotypes. By demonstrating that gender roles are socially constructed and that individuals can possess a mix of traits traditionally associated with both genders, Bem challenged the notion of fixed, binary gender categories. Bem's critical examination of these stereotypes reveals how they function within society and impact individuals' behaviors and perceptions. These stereotypes often simplify and exaggerate differences between genders. For examples, Common stereotypes include notions such as men being naturally assertive, competitive, and emotionally reserved, while women are seen as nurturing, passive, and emotionally expressive. Bem emphasized that gender stereotypes are learned through the socialization process, beginning in early childhood. Children absorb these stereotypes from parents, teachers, peers, media, and broader cultural messages. For instance, boys might be encouraged to play with trucks and engage in sports, while girls might be steered towards dolls and dress-up games, reinforcing traditional gender roles from a young age. Cultural institutions such as schools, workplaces, and media play a significant role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Educational materials, advertising, television shows, and movies often depict men and women in stereotypical roles, which reinforces these norms. This continuous reinforcement makes stereotypes seem natural and inevitable, even though they are culturally constructed.⁴ Bem's theory outlines three cognitive schemas through which individuals perceived and interpret gender, the three lenses are the hidden assumptions about sex and gender that remains embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches. These lenses are: androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism. Bem calls them lenses because we are raised with them and we assume that we are seeing the only possible reality when we look through them, but if we learn to remove the lenses, we can see a different construction of reality.⁵ The lenses of gender are problematic because they invisibly and systematically reproduce male power in generation after generation. Exposing the lenses of gender, Bem argues, will transform the sex equality movement, it will be a shift in the feminist debate away from the focus on differences between men and women and towards focus on the way in which androcentric social institutions transform male-female difference into female disadvantage.⁶ The first lens of gender is androcentrism, or male centeredness. Androcentrism is the privileging of male experience and the "otherizing" of female experience that is males and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for the culture or the species as a whole, and females and female experience are treated as a sex specific deviation from that allegedly universal standard. Androcentrism marginalizes women's experiences, making them seem secondary or less important. This leads to a devaluation of qualities and roles traditionally associated with women. Androcentrism reinforces stereotypes that valorize traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and

emotional restraint, while devaluing traits like empathy, nurturance, and emotional expressiveness that are stereotypically associated with women. This lens influences institutional practices and policies, resulting in gender biases in various areas, including education, healthcare, and the workplace. For instance, leadership qualities are often defined in androcentric terms, disadvantaging women in leadership roles.⁷

The second lens of gender is gender Polarization or the ubiquitous organization of social life around the distinction between male and female. This lens polarizes men and women so that we appear to have vast differences in many aspects of life, such as biology, modes of dress, social roles, emotions, and sexual desires. This lens is also the reason why people generally perceived that there are only two sexes.⁸ Bem begins her analysis of gender Polarization by focusing on the way in which scientists have contributed to gender Polarization by stigmatizing homosexuality as a sexual deviation. She concludes that homosexual oppression is as a result of gender Polarization and compulsory heterosexuality.⁹ Bem then analyzes scientific studies that focus on what she calls the "nonsexual" masculinity - femininity disorder especially transsexualism, and the development of masculinity -femininity in normal children, at this point Bem includes the results of an interesting study she did to test children's understanding of gender as a biological concept.¹⁰ Bem showed fifty-eight children (three, four, and five year Olds) a photograph of a nude toddler. She asked the children to identify the sex of the same toddler in two other pictures one in which the toddler is dressed in a sex-consistent way, and one in which the toddler is cross-dressed. The children's responses to the test showed whether they understood that gender is based on genitalia or whether they thought that gender is based on dress or hairstyle. Sixty percent of the children in the study misidentified the gender of the toddler failing the test. Bem argues that this lack of biological gender knowledge leads to gender traditionalism and gender Polarization because children grow up thinking that there are certain things that they must do in order to be male or female. Bem explains:

As I see it, the legacy of learning a social definition of sex last long after a child has learned about the special significance of the genitalia as the defining attributes of male and female. Not only does the social definition set up a pattern of behavior that is culturally consistent with whatever sex the child is told he or she is, it also instills in the child the never to be fully forgotten feeling that being male, or female is something to work at, to accomplish, and to be sure not to lose rather than something one is biologically.¹¹

Gender polarization affects personal relationships by establishing norms for interaction based on gender. It can create barriers to genuine communication and emotional intimacy by enforcing stereotypical gender behaviors.¹² The third lens is biological essentialism, which works to rationalize the other two lenses by claiming that there is a clear biological reason for all the differences between men and women. Bem points out the way in which science has worked to rationalize and legitimize the sexual status quo throughout history and through recent sociopolitical theories.¹³ She criticizes socio biologists and biopsychologists for underestimating the influence of culture and situational context on the individual and for overestimating the importance of the individual's biology. Bem

then offers her own biohistorical account of sexual differences and sexual inequality. She theorizes that men and women developed a gendered division of labor in hunter-gatherer societies. It is because women had to deal with the biological reality of being pregnant or breastfeeding for most of their adult lives men who were responsible for defense and hunting, developed male-dominated political institutions, while women were busy raising children and doing whatever other productive activities they could do with children.¹⁴ This lens legitimizes stereotypes as natural and unavoidable. It suggests that men and women inherently possess different abilities and interests, Biological essentialism makes it difficult to challenge gender stereotypes because they are perceived as fixed and biologically determined. This perception hinders the promoting of gender equality and social change. Educational and Career Limitations, the belief in inherent biological differences influences educational and career choices.¹⁵ Each of these lenses contributes to a feedback loop that reinforces gender stereotypes. Androcentrism centers male experiences, gender polarization creates rigid roles, and biological essentialism naturalizes these distinctions, making stereotypes seem inevitable and justified. These lenses collectively shape societal attitudes and institutional practices, creating a pervasive environment where gender stereotypes are continuously reinforced. Androcentrism and gender polarization in educational materials and practices can discourage girls from pursuing interests in traditionally male-dominated fields and reinforce boys' reluctance to engage in traditionally female-associated activities. Gender stereotypes influenced by these lenses lead to gender bias in hiring, promotion, and professional development, perpetuating occupational segregation and the gender pay gap in the work place. In Healthcare: Androcentric medical research and practices can result in the misdiagnosis and mistreatment of women, as their symptoms and conditions might not fit the male-centric medical model. Cultural and Media Representations, Media often perpetuates these lenses by portraying men and women in stereotypical roles, influencing public perceptions and reinforcing gender norms. This representation impacts individuals' self-concept and societal expectations.¹⁶

Bem's Gender Schema Theory

Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals develop gender-based categories that influence their perceptions and behaviors. According to Bem, gender schema is a cognitive structure that organizes information related to gender.¹⁷ This schema is formed early in life as children learn about the cultural definitions and expectations associated with being male or female. These definitions are internalized through various sources such as family, media, and educational institutions. Bem posited that once these schemas are established, they guide individuals in processing information and in deciding what is considered appropriate behavior for their gender. For example, children might learn that certain toys, activities, or roles are "for boys" or "for girls," and this understanding shapes their interests and choices. This cognitive framework not only influences personal preferences but also affects how people perceive others, often leading to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.¹⁸ A key aspect of Bem's theory is the idea that reducing the rigidity of gender schemas can mitigate the impact of gender stereotypes. She advocated for androgyny, which involves blending traditionally male and female traits, as a means to achieve this. Bem argued that fostering an environment where individuals are encouraged to develop a

wide range of traits and behaviors, regardless of gender, would help dismantle restrictive gender norms.¹⁹ Furthermore, Bem emphasized the importance of creating awareness about the existence and influence of gender schemas. By recognizing how these schemas operate, individuals can consciously challenge and modify their own gender-related assumptions and behaviors. This, in turn, can contribute to broader cultural changes in perceptions of gender roles and expectations. Bem suggested that the rigidity of these schemas could be reduced by promoting androgyny, where individuals adopt a mix of traits and behaviors traditionally associated with both genders.²⁰ Encouraging androgyny allows people to express a wider range of human qualities without being constrained by gender expectations. Additionally, Bem highlighted the importance of awareness and education about gender schemas. By understanding how these schemas influence thought and behavior, individuals can actively challenge and change their own gender-related perceptions. This conscious effort can contribute to reducing the impact of gender stereotypes on both personal and societal levels.²¹ Gender schemas play a significant role in shaping our self-perception in ways that align with societal expectations about gender. These schemas serve as mental structures that help individuals organize and interpret information based on gender-related roles. For example, individuals might adopt behaviors, interests, and self-descriptions that conform to traditional gender roles because these schemas provide a framework for understanding what is considered "appropriate" for their gender. This influence is not limited to how individuals perceive their roles but extends to their self-esteem and aspirations. For instance, a person who internalizes traditional gender roles might limit their career aspirations or personal goals to align with those roles.²² This internalization can affect self-confidence and the pursuit of opportunities, as individuals may feel constrained by and imposed by their gender schema. Moreover, self-perception shaped by gender schemas can also affect how individuals evaluate their own abilities and worth. For example, if societal norms suggest that certain traits or skills are more appropriate for one gender over another, individuals might undervalue their own capabilities if they do not align with those norms. This can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where individuals perform in ways that match their gender schema expectations, reinforcing the stereotypes further. Gender schemas profoundly impact self-perception by filtering how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world according to gendered expectations. This process often results in reinforcing existing gender stereotypes and limits the scope of self-identity and personal development.²³

Androgyny and De-gendering Social Institutions

Bem's theory challenges the traditional binary view of gender, which suggests that individuals must conform strictly to either masculine or feminine roles. Instead, she posited that adopting androgynous traits can lead to greater psychological flexibility and freedom from the constraints of traditional gender expectations. Androgyny, as conceptualized by psychologist Sandra Bem, is a term that refers to a blending of both traditional masculine and feminine characteristics within an individual. Bem's theory of androgyny emerged in the 1970s as part of her work on gender roles and gender identity. She proposed that individuals who exhibit a combination of both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits are better equipped to navigate the complexities of gender roles and stereotypes in society.²⁴ By embracing both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine characteristics, individuals can access a wider range of behaviors,

emotions, and expressions, allowing for a more authentic and holistic expression of self. In terms of addressing gender stereotypes, Bem believed that androgyny could serve as a solution by breaking down rigid gender norms and expectations. By promoting a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender, individuals can feel empowered to express themselves in ways that align with their authentic selves rather than conforming to societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Androgynous individuals are often seen as more adaptable, open-minded, and empathetic, as they are able to draw on a broader range of traits and behaviors in different situations. By embodying a balance of both masculine and feminine qualities, androgynous individuals can challenge traditional gender stereotypes and create new possibilities for self-expression and identity.²⁵ Sandra Bem's approach to de-gendering social institutions focuses on dismantling the ingrained gender biases and expectations that pervade various societal structures, such as education, the workplace, and family life. Her goal was to create environments where individuals are not limited by traditional gender roles, allowing for greater equality and personal freedom. In education, Bem advocated for the removal of gendered assumptions in teaching and curricula. She believed that subjects and activities should be presented in a way that does not favor one gender over the other, thereby encouraging both boys and girls to explore a wide range of interests and skills.²⁶ For instance, by promoting STEM education equally among all students, educators can help dismantle the stereotype that science and technology fields are predominantly male domains. This approach also involves challenging the subtle biases that often influence how teachers interact with students, ensuring that both boys and girls receive equal encouragement and support.²⁷ In the workplace, Bem emphasized the need for policies and practices that foster gender equality and support work-life balance for all employees. This involves implementing fair hiring practices and providing equal opportunities for career advancement, ensuring that both men and women can thrive professionally. Policies such as parental leave and flexible work schedules should be designed to accommodate all employees, regardless of gender, to encourage shared domestic responsibilities. By creating a work environment that values contributions from all genders equally, organizations can break down the barriers that traditionally limit career opportunities for women and promote a more inclusive culture. Family structures play a crucial role in Bem's vision of de-gendering social institutions. She advocated for challenging the traditional roles that designate women as primary caregivers and men as primary breadwinners. Encouraging shared parenting responsibilities and valuing both domestic and professional contributions can help create more balanced and equitable family dynamics. This involves not only changing societal expectations but also providing the necessary support and resources for families to adopt more egalitarian practices. Bem also highlighted the influence of media and popular culture in perpetuating gender stereotypes. She called for more diverse and inclusive representations of gender in media, showcasing a wider range of identities and roles. By challenging the binary and often stereotypical portrayals of men and women, media can play a significant role in reshaping societal norms and expectations. de-gendering social institutions according to Sandra Bem involves a holistic approach to restructuring societal norms and practices. By creating environments free from rigid gender expectations; individuals can pursue their interests and abilities without being constrained by traditional stereotypes. This leads to a more equitable and just society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive regardless of gender.³⁰

Application of Bem Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) in our Contemporary Society

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) holds various applications in contemporary society across multiple domains, reflecting the evolving understanding of gender roles and identities. In psychological research, the BSRI is instrumental in exploring how individuals align with or diverge from traditional gender roles. Researchers utilize it to study the spectrum of gender identities and expressions, and its relationship with mental health. By measuring both masculine and feminine traits independently, the BSRI helps to understand the diverse psychological impacts of gender roles. It also facilitates studies on androgyny, showing how individuals who exhibit high levels of both masculine and feminine traits tend to be more adaptable and resilient. In clinical settings, therapists use the BSRI to gain insights into clients' gender identities, which aids in personalizing therapy. It helps in addressing issues related to gender role stress by identifying rigid adherence to traditional roles, allowing therapists to work on reducing associated stress and anxiety. Encouraging clients to embrace a balance of traits can lead to greater self-acceptance and empowerment. The BSRI also helps in exploring clients' feelings about their gender identity and the societal pressures they face, providing a comprehensive understanding of their psychological issues.³¹ Educational programs benefit from the BSRI by promoting awareness and challenging traditional gender stereotypes. It is used to educate students about the diversity of gender identities, fostering a more inclusive environment. The BSRI informs curriculum development to ensure educational materials reflect contemporary understandings of gender, promoting a culture of acceptance and respect for all students. The BSRI helps students understand their own gender identity and how it influences their behavior and self-concept, which is crucial during adolescence, a period of intense identity formation. School counselors can leverage the BSRI to assist students grappling with gender role expectations, promoting a healthy self-concept that integrates both traditionally masculine and feminine traits. In the workplace, the BSRI is applied in diversity and inclusion training, helping employees understand and respect different gender identities and expressions. It supports the development of policies that promote gender equity and accommodate non-binary and gender non-conforming employees. The BSRI also aids in identifying leadership qualities that combine masculine and feminine traits,³² promoting balanced and effective leadership. Understanding the diverse gender traits within teams can improve collaboration and communication, enhancing overall productivity. Sociological studies utilize the BSRI to track changes in gender roles and expectations over time, offering insights into the evolution of societal norms. It facilitates cross-cultural studies, highlighting differences and similarities in gender expectations across various societies. These insights inform public policies aimed at reducing gender discrimination and promoting equality. The BSRI also aids in designing social programs that address the needs of various gender groups, ensuring that support services are inclusive and effective. On a personal level, individuals use the BSRI for self-reflection, helping them understand their own gender traits and how these influence their behavior and relationships. Recognizing the value of both masculine and feminine traits can foster personal growth and a more balanced self-concept.³³

Gender Role Transcendence

Sandra Bem's concept of Gender Role Transcendence represents a significant shift from traditional views on gender roles. Her idea challenges the conventional belief that individuals must adhere to specific behaviors and traits associated with their gender.

Instead, Gender Role Transcendence advocates for a more fluid and flexible approach to gender identity, allowing individuals to break free from restrictive societal norms. Bem's theory argues that gender roles are socially constructed and not inherently tied to one's biological sex. She posits that by transcending traditional gender roles, individuals can express themselves more authentically and align their behaviors and interests with their personal preferences rather than conforming to prescriptive gender norms.³⁴ This approach emphasizes the importance of personal choice and self-expression, enabling people to explore and adopt a wide range of roles and traits that are not limited by their gender. The concept of Gender Role Transcendence also highlights the need to move beyond the binary understanding of gender, which typically classifies individuals strictly as male or female with associated characteristics.³⁵ Bem's theory promotes the idea that people should not be constrained by these rigid categories. Instead, it supports the notion that individuals can possess a combination of traits traditionally seen as masculine or feminine, and that such traits are valuable regardless of gender. In practice, Gender Role Transcendence can lead to a reduction in gender-based stereotypes and expectations. For example, it encourages individuals to pursue interests, careers, and hobbies that may traditionally be associated with the opposite gender without fear of judgment or limitation. By embracing a broader spectrum of behaviors and traits, individuals can contribute to a more inclusive society where gender does not dictate one's opportunities or self-worth.³⁶ Bem's idea also implies that the societal structures and expectations that enforce traditional gender roles should be challenged and reformed. By promoting the acceptance of diverse expressions of gender, Gender Role Transcendence can create a more equitable environment where individuals are valued for their unique qualities and contributions rather than their adherence to conventional gender norms. Sandra Bem's concept of Gender Role Transcendence encourages us to rethink of how gender roles are defined and experienced. It advocates for a world where people can freely express themselves and pursue their goals without being restricted by outdated and rigid gender expectations. Gender Role Transcendence is highly relevant in contemporary discussions about gender, identity, and equality for several important reasons. It offers a framework for embracing a broader understanding of gender diversity, moving beyond traditional and often restrictive gender norms. By advocating for flexibility in gender roles, it supports the idea that individuals should not be confined by stereotypical expectations tied to their gender. One of the key aspects of its relevance is in challenging entrenched gender stereotypes. Traditional gender roles often come with predefined expectations that can limit personal and professional opportunities based on gender. Gender Role Transcendence encourages individuals to adopt traits and roles traditionally associated with the opposite gender, helping to dismantle these restrictive norms. This shift fosters a more nuanced and inclusive view of gender, which is crucial for reducing societal pressures to conform to outdated stereotypes. Moreover, Gender Role Transcendence promotes equal opportunities by advocating that individual be evaluated based on their skills and interests rather than gender-specific assumptions. This approach helps create a more equitable environment where everyone has the chance to succeed based on their abilities rather than being constrained by traditional gender expectations. Encouraging personal authenticity is another important aspect of Gender Role Transcendence. By allowing individuals to live in alignment with their true selves, free from the constraints of societal expectations, it supports greater self-esteem and mental well-being. This freedom allows people to pursue their passions and interests without the limitations

imposed by conventional gender roles. Embracing Gender Role Transcendence fosters inclusivity and respect by validating diverse expressions of gender identity. It contributes to a more accepting society where different ways of expressing oneself are recognized and valued. This inclusivity helps create a respectful environment for individuals across the gender spectrum. On a broader scale, Gender Role Transcendence addresses systemic inequities by challenging the structural norms and policies that perpetuate gender-based discrimination. It supports efforts to reform practices and institutions that have historically marginalized individuals based on gender, contributing to more equitable social and professional environments. Allowing individuals to transcend traditional gender roles encourages personal growth and innovation. Freed from the constraints of societal expectations, people are more likely to explore new interests and career paths, leading to personal development and diverse contributions to various fields.⁴¹

Intersectionality and Bem's gender thought

According to Oxford Dictionary intersectionality is “the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”.⁴² Intersectionality is a framework that examines how various social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and more overlap and interact to shape a person's experiences, particularly in relation to privilege and oppression.⁴³ The term was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to highlight how traditional feminist and civil rights movements often overlooked the unique struggles of individuals who face multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. For example, a Black woman may experience sexism in ways that differ from a white woman due to the intersection of racism and gender discrimination. Intersectionality helps in understanding that oppression is not experienced in isolated categories but rather as interconnected systems that shape an individual's reality.

Intersectionality, in relation to gender roles, refers to the concept that a person's experiences of gender inequality are not solely based on their sex, but are also shaped by the interplay of other social identities like race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and ethnicity, creating unique and complex experiences of discrimination and privilege depending on how these identities intersect with one another. Bem's work does not reflect the different experiences of different women when it comes to gender oppression and gender inequality. Including an intersectional outlook will make her work richer and will address the problems of gender inequality more wholly. This is because Bem's work addresses the matter that concern white upper class women while not taking into consideration the differences in the experience of women of color or other racial groups.

When intersectionality is applied to gender roles, it reveals how expectations and experiences of gender differ across various social groups. A wealthy woman may navigate gender norms differently than a working class woman, just as a queer person's experience of gender roles may differ from a cisgender heterosexual person's experience. This perspective helps to deconstruct stereotypes and advocate for more inclusive and equitable social structures.

Conclusion

Sandra Bem's philosophy challenges traditional gender norms and encourages a more flexible and inclusive approach to understanding gender. Her work highlights how

gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined, shaping individual experiences through socialization and cultural expectations. By introducing concepts such as gender schema theory and gender role transcendence, Bem provides a framework for deconstructing restrictive stereotypes and embracing a more fluid and authentic self-expression.

Rethinking gender socialization and stereotypes in light of Bem's philosophy invites society to move beyond rigid classifications and toward a more equitable world where individuals are free to define themselves outside societal constraints. This shift is crucial for dismantling structural inequalities and promoting inclusivity across diverse identities. Intersectionality further deepens this conversation by recognizing that gender does not exist in isolation but interacts with other social factors such as race, class, and sexuality, shaping unique experiences of privilege and discrimination. By questioning traditional gender roles and embracing diversity, we create opportunities for individuals to thrive without being limited by outdated norms. Sandra Bem's insights continue to inspire efforts toward gender equality, encouraging societies to evolve in ways that celebrate individuality and challenge systems that reinforce gender-based oppression.

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