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POWER YOUR STYLE REPORT

THE EFFECTS OF DOUBLE BINDS ON WOMEN'S STYLE, SENSE OF SELF, AND ACHIEVEMENT

TRESemmé
USED BY PROFESSIONALS



**THE
REPRESENTATION
PROJECT**

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too mature
too immature
too sexy
too prudish
too skinny
too curvy
too loud
too quiet
too masculine
too feminine
too cold
too emotional
too boring
dramatic
too old
too young
too confident
too insecure

Damned if she does,
damned if she doesn't.

THIS STUDY EXPLORES WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH "DOUBLE BINDS"—THE CONFLICTING SOCIETAL MESSAGES, IMAGES, AND QUEUES THAT TELL A WOMAN HOW SHE IS SUPPOSED TO LOOK, SPEAK, AND ACT. DOUBLE BINDS ARE SITUATIONS WHERE EVERY CHOICE ONE MAKES RESULTS IN BEING PENALIZED. THIS STUDY IS THE FIRST TO SYSTEMATICALLY ANALYZE THE DOUBLE BINDS OF SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS WOMEN FACE IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, AND HOW WOMEN NAVIGATE THESE EXPECTATIONS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section presents our major findings from a representative survey of women in the U.S. and Canada, and a content analysis of social media comments on posts from the most prominent women in the world (see p. 19 for more on the methodology). Unless otherwise specified, survey findings in this report combine representative surveys from both the U.S. and Canada. A full presentation of our analysis is in the report below.

SURVEY FINDINGS

- Two-in-three women in the U.S. and Canada say they experience double binds (68% and 73%, respectively).
- Younger women experience double binds at higher rates than older women, with Gen Z women reporting the highest rate (84%).
- The most common double binds involve the way women look (68% of women), followed by the way they act (55% of women), and speak (53% of women).
- The most common place women experience double binds is in the workplace/their career (48% of women). Just under half (45%) face double binds on social media.
- Two-in-five (42%) women say their personal style is important in achieving career goals and ambitions.
- Women who experience double binds at work respond in troubling ways:
 - questioning and doubting themselves (32% of women)
 - speaking up less (39% of women)
 - changing how they present themselves (41% of women)
- Most women say double binds make them feel that they are never good enough (64%) and leave them feeling exhausted (80%).

CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

- One-in-three comments on prominent women's social media are negative (33%).
 - Among negative comments, one-in-ten attack the woman's appearance (11%).
 - One-in-three negative comments criticize the way the woman acts (33%).
- Nine-in-ten (92%) of the most prominent women on social media experience double binds.
- *Every* prominent woman ages 50+ and *every* prominent Black, Indigenous, and person of color (BIPOC) woman we analyzed faced at least one double bind on social media.
- Here are the most common double binds prominent women experience:
 - too confident/insecure (84%)
 - too lazy/ambitious (80%)
 - too sexy/modest (52%)
 - too young/old (44%)
 - too skinny/curvy (40%)

REPORT

STUDY OVERVIEW

The objective of this research is to explore women’s experience with “double binds”—the conflicting societal messages, images, and queues that tell a woman how she is supposed to look, speak, and act. For example, women are often told they are “too loud” or “not loud enough;” “too bossy” or “not assertive enough;” “professionally ambitious” or “a neglectful parent;” “kind” or “a pushover.” We examine how these double binds impact women’s lives, and how they navigate them, especially in their professional careers and jobs.

This study seeks to better understand how and how often women experience double binds, where they experience them, how it affects them, and how they navigate double binds. The concept of the double bind was coined in 1956 by British anthropologist Gregory Bateson and his colleagues.¹ They defined double binds as situations where every choice you make results in being penalized in some way. Women have faced sexist double binds for centuries. In medieval times, when women were accused of witchcraft and drowned, they could prove their innocence by staying drowned, but were considered guilty if they were able to rescue themselves. Communications professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson uses this anecdote to demonstrate the impossible situations women face from double binds. Women are damned if they do and damned if they don’t when it comes to choices about leadership, professionalism, balancing paid labor in the workforce and unpaid care work at home, the way they speak, the way they act, how they express their personal style, and many other aspects of women’s lives.

This study is the first to systematically study double binds using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It is also the first study to examine the double binds faced by both famous women and everyday women to examine the nuanced landscape of double binds for different women. We surveyed a representative sample of women in the U.S. to learn about their experiences with double binds and conducted a content analysis of comments on social media posts for famous women. Taken together, this analysis provides a clear picture of how often women experience double binds, where they experience them in their lives, the consequences of impossible choices, and how they navigate double binds.



THE CONCEPT OF THE DOUBLE BIND
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BATESON AND HIS COLLEAGUES.

**THEY DEFINED DOUBLE BINDS AS
SITUATIONS WHERE EVERY CHOICE
YOU MAKE RESULTS IN BEING
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SURVEY FINDINGS

We present our major findings pertaining to how common it is to experience double binds, who experiences them, where they are experienced, the types experienced, their impact on the lives of women, and strategies women use to navigate the double binds they encounter. We address each of these topics in turn.

Prevalence of Double Binds

Our first major finding is that experiences of sexist double binds are common for women in the U.S. and Canada. At least two-thirds of women in both countries say they have experienced double binds often/sometimes—68% in the U.S. and 73% in Canada.

About one-in-five women experience double binds “often,” meaning they experience sexist microaggressions on a regular basis (17% in the U.S. and 20% in Canada).

Nearly all women who experience double binds in the U.S. and Canada say it’s an issue for them (89%), and 41% say they are a “very big issue” in their life. To summarize, double binds are simply part of life for women in North America, and they pose a significant issue for women who experience them. For the remainder of this report, we combine findings from the U.S. and Canada.

Who Experiences Double Binds

Not all women experience double binds at the same rate or in the same ways. Women of different races and ethnicities experience the double bind at similar rates, but we find significant differences by age and sexuality.

Younger women experience double binds at much higher rates than older women, with Gen Z women reporting the highest rate (84%). This means that, despite the progress women have made when it comes to economic, social, and political equality, sexist double binds have not gone away for young women.

We also find differences by sexuality. LGBTQ+ women are more likely to face double binds than heterosexual women (73% compared to 69%).

TWO-IN-THREE
WOMEN IN BOTH THE U.S.
AND CANADA SAY THEY
EXPERIENCE DOUBLE BINDS



TABLE 1: DOUBLE BINDS ACROSS GENERATIONS

GENERATION	OFTEN/SOMETIMES EXPERIENCE DOUBLE BINDS
GEN Z (AGES 18-25)	84%
MILLENNIALS (AGES 26-41)	78%
GEN X (AGES 42-57)	65%
BOOMERS (AGES 58-65)	58%

TABLE 2: DOUBLE BINDS BY SEXUALITY

SEXUALITY	OFTEN/SOMETIMES EXPERIENCE DOUBLE BINDS
LGBTQ+	73%
NON-LGBTQ+	69%

Types of Double Binds

When it comes to different types, we measured double binds for the way women look, act, and speak. The most common double binds involve the way women look (68%), followed by the way they act (55%), and the way they speak (53%).

For example, when it comes to appearance double binds, 42% of women have been told that they're "too pretty" and "too homely." About one-in-three (28%) women have been told that they're both "too modest" and "too sexy" in the way they dress.

For double binds that pertain to the way women act, one-in-four (26%) have been told that they're both "too bold" and "too timid." One-in-three (29%) women have been told that they are both "too insecure" and also "too confident."

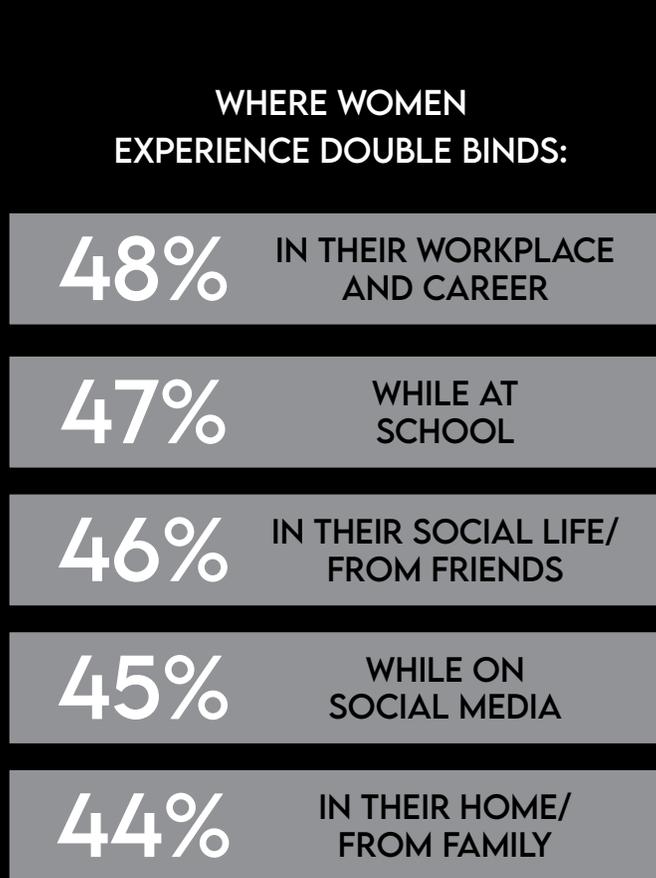
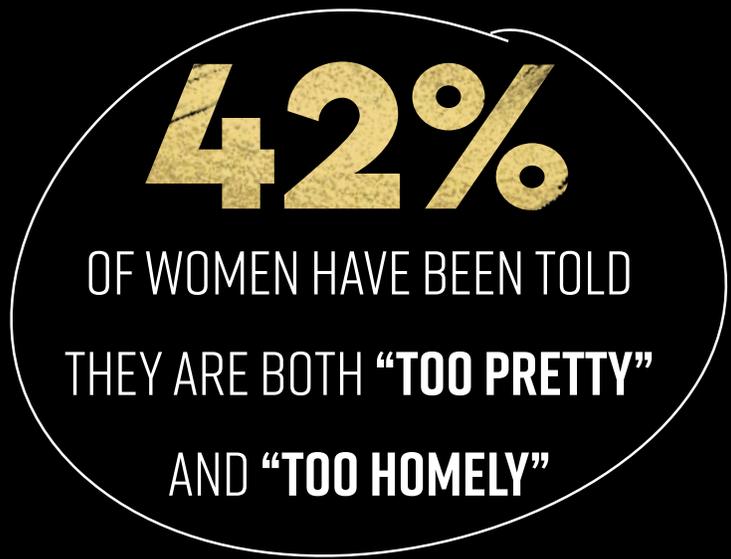
Women also face double binds that are specific to the way they speak. One-in-three (34%) women have been told that they are both "too loud" and "too quiet." Over half of women (51%) have been told that they are "too direct" and "not assertive enough" when they speak.

Where Double Binds Occur

Women experience double binds in many aspects of and places in their lives. The most common place women in North American experience double binds is in the workplace. This is an important finding because career success is vital to economic success and well-being for women. Women also commonly experience double binds at school, an important step in the economic ladder.

Just under half of women in the U.S. and Canada say they experience double binds from friends (46%) and family (44%). This is a troubling finding given that friends and family are often primary sources of support for thriving in the world. As this study shows, sometimes friends and family are primary sources of gendered microaggressions.

Just under half (45%) of women say they experience double binds on social media. These double binds often come in the form of contradictory feedback on the same image or video. The point of the double bind is that no matter how you dress, speak, or act, you will be penalized.



Of the five domains we measured (workplace, school, friends, family, and social media), women report experiencing double binds in an average of 2.9 different areas. About two-in-three women (65%) face double binds in at least two different domains of their life.

Double Bind Impacts

In this section, we report findings about how double binds affect women's personal style, their professional lives, and their personal lives. One overarching finding is that almost all of the women we surveyed (90%) say the double binds prevent them from being their authentic selves, and this has negative effects on their professional and personal lives.

Professional Life

We asked women about the impact of double binds on their professional life. Two-in-five (40%) women say double binds negatively impact their career/job. Gen Z women (ages 18 - 25) are more likely to say double binds have negatively impacted many areas of their life, just as they are starting to navigate a life of adulthood and independence:

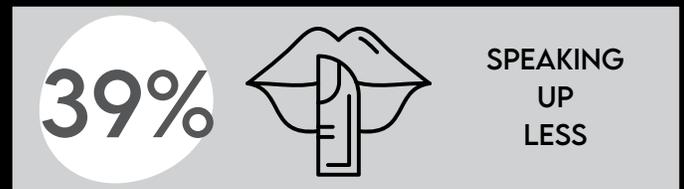
- 44% of Gen Z say double binds have negatively impacted relations with their immediate family
- 40% of Gen Z say double binds have hurt their career/job
- 39% of Gen Z say double binds have negative affects their friendships
- 38% of Gen Z women say their romantic/dating life has been negative impacted by double binds

Women who experience double binds at work respond in many different ways: by changing how they present themselves (41%), speaking up less (39%), and questioning and doubting themselves (32%).

One-in-four women say they didn't apply to a job because of double binds they experienced related to work. Two-in-five (40%) homemakers report this, which suggests that many women may be staying out of the paid workforce due to double binds. This is an especially pressing problem given that 2 million women have left the paid workforce during the global pandemic and double binds may be making it harder for them to return.²



WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE DOUBLE BINDS AT WORK RESPOND BY:



ONE-IN-FOUR
WOMEN DIDN'T APPLY TO A JOB
BECAUSE OF DOUBLE BINDS
THEY EXPERIENCED RELATED
TO THEIR WORK

Women who experience double binds at work receive little support for managing them. Very few women reached out for mentorship (6%) or advice (11%) on how to handle double binds in the workplace. This presents a great opportunity to mentors and sponsors to learn about double binds in order to better support their mentees.

About two-in-five (42%) women say their personal style is important in achieving career goals and ambitions. This means that personal style helps many women achieve career success, but they are inhibited by double binds. We asked women what they would do differently with their personal style if they did not face double binds. Some women noted that they would be bolder and more confident with their style:

SOME WOMEN NOTED
THEY WOULD BE **BOLDER**
AND **MORE CONFIDENT** WITH
THEIR PERSONAL STYLE IF
THEY DID NOT HAVE TO FACE
DOUBLE BINDS.

HOW WOMEN WOULD CHANGE THEIR PERSONAL STYLE WITHOUT DOUBLE BINDS:

- "BE BOLDER WITH MY CHOICES."
- "DRESSING THE WAY I WANT. I JUST WANT TO WEAR CLOTHES WITHOUT BEING JUDGED ABOUT MY SHAPE OR HOW WELL THE DRESS FIT OR NOT. I JUST WANT TO FEEL FREE AND CONFIDENT."
- "I WOULD WANT TO WEAR MORE FORM FITTING CLOTHES INSTEAD OF THE OVERSIZED CLOTHES I USUALLY WEAR."
- "I WOULD REALLY LOVE TO DYE MY HAIR BRIGHT PURPLE BUT MY FAMILY THINKS PEOPLE WILL TREAT ME DIFFERENTLY IF I DO IT AND IT WILL BE HARDER TO FIND A JOB."
- "BE MORE CONFIDENT IN WHAT I LIKE TO WEAR."
- "DYEING MY HAIR FUNKY COLORS."
- "BE MORE OUTGOING WITH MY CLOTHING."
- "I WOULD JUST LIKE TO HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO WEAR WHATEVER MAKES ME HAPPY. I'M A BIGGER WOMAN AND IT'S HARD TO FEEL CONFIDENT WHEN YOU CAN'T DEFINE YOUR STYLE DUE TO FEELING LIKE YOU'RE TOO MUCH AS WELL AS BEING NOT ENOUGH."

Other women noted that they would like to be more confident in the way they speak, and judged less:

HOW WOMEN WOULD CHANGE THE WAY THEY SPEAK WITHOUT DOUBLE BINDS:

- "I WISH I WAS MORE CONFIDENT TO CONTRIBUTE WHAT I KNOW THAT COULD ADD INFO OR ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE TO A GROUP DISCUSSION."
- "I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE AN OPINION WITHOUT BEING CALLED A B*TCH."
- "DIFFERENT CLOTHES. DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES. SPEAKING OUT MORE."
- "I AM OUTSPOKEN WITHIN REASON, ALSO OPINIONATED WITH POLITICS,LAW, LIFE. I LISTEN TO OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS. WHEN I STATE MINE, I AM TOO LOUD AND OUTSPOKEN! WHEN I STOP BECAUSE THEY COMPLAIN... THEN I AM TOO QUIET/NOT FEELING WELL/DEPRESSED!"

Personal Life

Most women say their personal style affects their happiness (75%), and 61% think they would be happier if they had more freedom to express their own personal style. We asked women how having more freedom to express their personal style would affect them. Many said it would increase their happiness and confidence:

“I THINK I WOULD JUST FEEL HAPPIER. I KNOW I LOOK GOOD IN MY PERSONAL STYLE.”

HOW WOMEN WOULD FEEL BETTER ABOUT THEMSELVES WITHOUT DOUBLE BINDS:

- “I WOULD FEEL MORE CONFIDENT WITH MYSELF AND MY BODY.”
- “I THINK I WOULD JUST FEEL HAPPIER. I KNOW I LOOK GOOD IN MY PERSONAL STYLE.”
- “IT WOULD MAKE ME HAPPIER AND MORE CONFIDENT AND COMFORTABLE.”
- “I WOULD HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN MYSELF.”
- “IT WILL MAKE ME MORE WHAT I AM.”
- “I WOULD BE HAPPIER WHICH IN TURN WOULD MAKE ME LESS DEPRESSED.”
- “MAKE ME MORE BOLD.”
- “IT WOULD MAKE ME TRUER TO MYSELF.”

We assessed how women respond to double binds in their life beyond work, and their responses and coping mechanisms are troubling:

- Two-in-five women started questioning themselves (40%) and became quieter and started speaking up less (37%).
- Nearly a third of women say they have become sad/depressed (29%), while one-quarter stopped socializing or became isolated (26%).
- Some women have even changed how they look or act – how they dress (16%), how they do their hair/makeup (14%), how they speak (21%) or how they act (28%) because of double binds they’ve encountered in their everyday lives.
- A majority of women say double binds make them feel like they will never be good enough (64%) and make them feel exhausted (80%).

Navigating Double Binds

As reported above, double binds are a common experience for women in the U.S./Canada, one that has profoundly negative effects on their professional and personal lives. We asked women how they navigate double binds, and they have many different strategies.

61%
SAY THEY WOULD BE HAPPIER IF
THEY HAD MORE FREEDOM TO
EXPRESS THEIR STYLE

MOST WOMEN SAY DOUBLE BINDS
MAKE THEM FEEL THEY ARE
NEVER GOOD ENOUGH (64%)
AND LEAVE THEM
FEELING EXHAUSTED (80%).

Some women say they just ignore double binds or tough it out:

HOW WOMEN ATTEMPT TO IGNORE DOUBLE BINDS:

- "SOMETIMES I TRY TO IGNORE ANYTHING THAT IS BEING SAID AND MOVE ON AND SOMETIMES IT REALLY BOTHERS ME, AND IT GETS ME UPSET AND I WILL SAY SOMETHING."
- "I IGNORE THEM AND TRY NOT TO ADJUST MY BEHAVIOR FOR THE SAKE OF OTHER PEOPLE."
- "I DON'T REALLY DO MUCH TO PERSONALLY NAVIGATE AND HANDLE THE DOUBLE BIND I TRY TO AVOID PEOPLE WHO ARE THE MOST EGREGIOUS OFFENDERS I'M MOSTLY WORRIED ABOUT AGE DISCRIMINATION AND ACCOMPANYING BINDS THAT COME WITH THAT AT THE MOMENT."
- "I TRY TO IGNORE THEM AND FOCUS ON WHO I NATURALLY AM AND IF THAT UPSETS OTHERS THEN SO BE IT."
- "WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I FELT VERY MUCH LIKE I HAD TO CONFORM TO A CERTAIN WAY TO ACT, LOOK AND DRESS. AS I'VE AGED, I DON'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO THAT ANYMORE, HOWEVER, SOCIAL MEDIA CAN HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON WOMEN WHEN WE ARE BOMBARDED WITH FILTERED PICTURES AND UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ON HOW WE'RE SUPPOSED TO LOOK, ACT AND DRESS."

A few women say they try to cater to the conflicting expectations posed by double binds:

HOW WOMEN ATTEMPT TO CATER TO DOUBLE BINDS:

- "USUALLY WHENEVER I WANT TO GO OUT I CHANGE MY OUTFIT MULTIPLE TIMES NOT BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE THEM BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT SAY"
- "I USUALLY TRY TO FIT IN MORE, SOMETIMES I TRY TO SPEAK UP IF I FEEL LIKE IT WILL NOT NEGATIVELY IMPACT MY JOB. BUT IT'S HARD."
- "I TRY TO ACT DIFFERENTLY TO CATER TO THE DOUBLE BINDS."

Other women remove themselves from situations where they will face double binds:

HOW WOMEN ATTEMPT TO AVOID TO DOUBLE BINDS:

- "THERE WERE PEOPLE IN MY LIFE THAT I REGULARLY HUNG OUT WITH WHO KIND OF MADE ME FEEL LESS THAN BECAUSE OF THE WAY I WAS. I AVOIDED HANGING OUT WITH MEN AND SURROUNDED MYSELF WITH MORE WOMEN."
- "I TEND TO DISTANCE MYSELF FROM THE SITUATION. I LEFT MY CAREER/DREAM JOB AND BECAME A STAY-AT-HOME MOM."
- "AVOID PEOPLE THAT CONSISTENTLY DO THIS, WORK IN JOBS THAT HAVE REDUCED AMOUNTS OF THIS, TRY TO CALL OUT PEOPLE WHEN THEY DO SAY SUCH THINGS. LEFT MY HUSBAND."
- "I'VE JUST BECOME BIG ON CUTTING PEOPLE OFF IN GENERAL"

Some women push back against the double binds they encounter:

HOW WOMEN ATTEMPT TO PUSH BACK AGAINST DOUBLE BINDS:

- “THAT I WAS BEING TOO AMBITIOUS IN MY CAREER. I TOLD THEM THAT IT IS MY RIGHT TO HAVE SUCH FEELING AND DON’T CARE IF THEY ACCEPT IT OR NOT”
- “I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OUTSPOKEN ABOUT MY FEELINGS THAT IF SOMEONE DOESN’T LIKE ME THE WAY I AM THEY DON’T HAVE TO BE AROUND ME.”
- “I DO MY OWN THING AND IF SOMEONE DOESN’T LIKE IT, THAT’S TOO BAD.”
- “I SPEAK OUT BUT THEN I GET LABELED AS RUDE, AGGRESSIVE OR A TROUBLEMAKER.”

CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Beyond everyday women, we measured double binds faced by prominent women from all walks of life to see whether they face similar challenges. We conducted a content analysis of the most circulated social media posts about the top influential women in the world in order to explore how women at the top of their respective industries experience double binds. We find that even women who have reached the apex of their careers cannot seem to win when it comes to how they look, speak, and act. We present our major findings pertaining to the breakdown of comment tone, the content of negative comments, the prevalence of double binds, followed by an intersectional look at how prominent BIPOC women and women ages 50+ experience double binds online.

Negative Posts/Comments

Our first major finding is that prominent women face an abundance of negative comments, simply because they are women daring to have a public presence. We find that one-in-three comments aimed at the most globally prominent women on their top social media posts take on a negative tone and are critical in nature (33%).

The adverb “too” is commonly used as a direct way to critique women on social media, but suggesting that they have violated some unwritten societal rule by acting, speaking, or appearing a certain way. When it comes to comments that include a “too” statement (e.g., “she’s too hot,” “she’s too washed up”), 98% of “too” comments are negative and only 2% are



TABLE 3: COMMENTS BY TONE

COMMENT TONE	% OF COMMENTS
POSITIVE	50%
NEGATIVE	33%
NEUTRAL	17%

TABLE 4: “TOO” STATEMENTS BY TONE

COMMENT TONE	% OF COMMENTS
“TOO” STATEMENTS THAT WERE POSITIVE	2%
“TOO” STATEMENTS THAT WERE NEGATIVE	98%

positive. This indicates that commenters use “too” statements mostly to criticize women’s appearance and actions.

Women face online criticism for how they look, speak, and act. One-in-ten negative comments attack the woman’s appearance, while one-in-three criticize the way she acts.

The most common ways women are criticized for their appearance are posts accusing them of being too fake (24%), too sexy (16%), or too curvy (9%).

When it comes to how prominent women act, they are most often criticized for being too selfish (22%), too unprofessional (11%), and Not Smart Enough (9%).

Double Binds

We find that double binds are used to negatively criticize 92% of the most prominent women on social media. This means that regardless of a woman’s influence, nearly all women are subjected to double binds on public platforms. In other words, women who dare to be public will face a cascade of negativity, and some of that comes in the form of sexist, impossible double binds.

As shown in Table 8, the most prominent women (as measured by search volume, total social following, number of GIFs about them, and Wikipedia hits) face the most double binds in their social media posts. The top five most prominent women experience 10.2 double binds on average per post compared to 7.3 for women ranked 21 – 25 in terms of prominence.³

A staggering 84% of prominent women are told they are accused of being both too confident and too insecure. Here are some examples that illustrate posts that use this double bind:

TABLE 5: NEGATIVE COMMENTS BY CONTENT

COMMENT CONTENT	% OF COMMENTS
APPEARANCE	11%
PERSONALITY	30%

TABLE 6: NEGATIVE “TOO” COMMENTS ABOUT LOOKS

“TOO” STATEMENT	% OF COMMENTS
FAKE/PLASTIC	24%
SEXY	16%
CURVY	9%

TABLE 7: NEGATIVE “TOO” COMMENTS ABOUT ACTIONS

“TOO” STATEMENT	% OF COMMENTS
SELFISH	22%
UNPROFESSIONAL	11%
NOT SMART ENOUGH	9%

NINE-IN-TEN (92%) OF THE MOST PROMINENT WOMEN EXPERIENCE DOUBLE BINDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

TABLE 8: DOUBLE BINDS BY PROMINENCE

PROMINENCE RANKING	AVERAGE # OF DOUBLE BINDS
1 - 5	10.2
6 - 10	11.8
11 - 15	9.6
16 - 20	8.8
21 - 25	7.3

84% — CONFIDENT/INSECURE

TOO CONFIDENT

- “These chicks are all about themselves, it’s really pathetic. So embarrassing.”
- “Put your ego away you silly woman.”
- “Too full of her own importance. Don’t see any beauty.”

TOO INSECURE

- “What a spineless t***”
- “She is a desperate, insecure, needy woman.”
- “She needs to trust herself more.”

Four-in-Five women are told they are both too lazy and too ambitious (80%). This double bind is evident in some of the verbatim examples of posts below:

80% — AMBITIOUS/LAZY

TOO AMBITIOUS

“She’s a work-a-holic.”

“This woman wanna be judge, jury, executioner and still plastic. How many titles does she want?”

TOO LAZY

“Bruh women just salty cuz they don’t work hard for their physique.”

“When you’re insanely rich and STILL too cheap to pay someone to do the thing you are too lazy to do for yourself.”

When it comes to physical appearance, over half (52%) of prominent women are told they dress and/or act too sexy and too modest. Here are some examples of verbatim comments on prominent women’s posts that reflect this:

52% — SEXY/MODEST

TOO SEXY

“When you have to expose yourself.. you’re stooping to the lowest level of humanity. So tired of these so called ‘Queens!’ All the great ones are shaking their heads in shame!”

“Two weeks ago she got pissed when someone touched her a**. Now she shakes it for the whole world. Pig.”

TOO MODEST

“You know everyone wants to see a little more ‘skin’ Princess!! Just sayin’ what everybody else is thinkin’!!!”

“She is so gorgeous, why hide in that dress? come in now, who’s idea was that?”

“You need to show more!!!”

When it comes to how women act, over half of women (52%) are told they are both too politically correct and not politically correct enough. These examples show how this double bind sets an impossible standard for prominent women to achieve:

52% — TOO/NOT POLITICALLY CORRECT

TOO POLITICALLY CORRECT

“Has to announce her ‘pronouns’? What is our country turning into?”

“OMG I can’t keep up with the things we can’t say! Like some words have more than one meaning. This is too much.”

“Too woke for me.”

NOT POLITICALLY CORRECT ENOUGH

“Sometimes women like her need to shut up because their ignorance is showing. Nothing that girl says makes sense.”

“[She] isn’t a feminist, and [she] never was.”

“Every time she talks I feel like she’s so out of touch.”

When it comes to age, 44% of the most prominent women influencers are accused of being too young and too old. The examples below show the absurdity of the same women being criticized about her age— using both ends of the age spectrum:

44% — YOUNG/OLD

TOO YOUNG

“Hopefully [she] doesn’t get that role. Too much of a little girl. She hasn’t grown yet.”

“It was about character assassination honey, I guess you’re too young to understand why that matters yet.”

“She look like she just got of 1st Grade.”

TOO OLD

“Even with airbrush, high heels and too much makeup she looks old and tired. Her days of looking good are long gone.”

“She’s too old for this.”

“You’re acting like teenagers but you’re too old.”

Two-in-five prominent women are criticized for being both too skinny and too curvy (40%). In other words, the same woman posting the same image received contradictory comments about her body size:

40% — SKINNY/CURVY

TOO SKINNY

“You need a man to buy you tacos, you are too much on the thin side.”

“Someone get [her] a meat lover’s pizza. B**** looks like she just walked back from Africa with her kids.”

“Yeah she’s got a boy’s body. Zero boobs, zero curves, zero. Nothing to offer just blah.”

TOO CURVY

“[She] is vegan? Would never guess ‘cause she still looks like she’s eating 12 buckets of KFC a day.”

“Wow, she is so fat! Not just fat, but her body is out of shape, she is not toned at all, flaky skin hanging! For someone who has so much money I would expect she would look better”

“Not enough room for him with her double wide butt.”

Two-in-five prominent women are accused of being too dramatic and too boring (40%). Here are some examples that illustrate posts reflecting this double bind:

40% — DRAMATIC/BORING

TOO DRAMATIC

“I’m a be real that dress is too much.”

“Her stuff is getting a little too detailed.”

“Ugh this woman... Too dramatic.”

“Trying way too hard for the paparazzi.”

TOO BORING

“Looks like a bra and simple skirt.”

“Ur boring now baby boo.”

“Omg she doesn’t get tired of the same style of clothes?”

Over a third of women are criticized for looking and acting too masculine and too feminine (36%). In other words, as shown in the posts below, the same woman posting the same image is being criticized using opposite messages. Some of the comments discuss gender roles in terms of appearance while others talk about the way women talk:

36% — MASCULINE/FEMININE

TOO MASCULINE

“Trying too much to be a man. Fighting her hormones within causing her to be angry at the world.”

“Does this woman know that there is such a thing called a dress or maybe a skirt and blouse?”

“She’s not qualified to identify as a woman.”

“Am I seeing an Adam’s Apple????”

TOO FEMININE

“She’s soo nasally.”

“I can’t stand [her] voice. It’s so breathy and annoying.”

“[Her] high pitch voice is not a good fit.”

“There was way to much estrogen in that room.”

When it comes to the way they act, 16% of women were told they were both too mature and too immature. The examples below show how comments about prominent women will find any reason to criticize how they act or appear:

16% — IMMATURE/MATURE

TOO IMMATURE

“GROW UP CHICK.”

“Two attention seeking Babies.”

“She needs to grow up and act like a decent woman.”

TOO MATURE

“Ya’ll ain’t as old as yall act.”

“She’s 30, but sounds like a disenchanted 70 yr old.”

Over one-in-ten prominent women are criticized for being both too emotional and too cold (12%). As these comments show, the same woman faces contradictory critiques on the same posts, creating an impossible double bind when it comes to the way she acts:

12% — COLD/EMOTIONAL

TOO COLD

“She does a lot of good and all but she is so ‘disconnected’ from her kids. She seems very cold, emotionally.”

“Devoid of any emotion or personality.”

TOO EMOTIONAL

“Why’s she always crying, I love her but damn!”

“She’s too sensitive for fame.”

“Stop behaving like a victim . You are behaving like a special, crazy, stupid girl.”

When it comes to socioeconomic status, 8% of prominent women are accused of being both too broke/too rich, as illustrated in the comments below:

8% — BROKE/RICH

TOO BROKE

“You can tell when a [woman] is broke.”

“She ran out of money.”

TOO RICH

“Congratulations, you have all that money for one person while the rest of the world is dying.”

“Too rich and too dumb.”

“Boohoo let’s all feel sorry for the multi millionaire.”

About one-in-ten (8%) prominent women are accused of acting and/or looking too white and not white enough. The following comments show how racism is used to create impossible double binds for women:

8% — TOO/NOT WHITE ENOUGH

TOO WHITE

“Yes she does that fake accent to get rid of her Indian accent, bleached her skin, wears western clothing and hardly showcases Asian wear at events where she can.”

“[SHE] IS OBVIOUSLY BLEACHING HER SKIN SHE’S NOT PROUD OF HER SKIN.”

“[She] is teaching latino kids to hide their latino features to look more white... she is no hero... there’s a reason her fan didn’t know she’s latina.”

NOT WHITE ENOUGH

“Why don’t you just go back to Africa where you belong?”

“Same old story, the race card is being pushed.”

A small but significant percentage (4%) of prominent women are accused of being too fake and too natural, as illustrated in these comments:

4% — FAKE/NATURAL

TOO FAKE

“God built me but her doctor built her.”

“She is not desirable. Too much fake stuff”

“Looks like she’s made of plastic, already. Chick was perfect before.”

“She got way too much work done :/”

TOO NATURAL

“She needs to buy some breast implants.”

“She needs another fat transfer like her sisters.”

“Without that makeup on there’s nothing to love.”

Intersectional Analysis

Intersectionality is an approach that recognizes how different categories of identity are interconnected. First used by Black feminist Maria Miller Stewart in 1830 and coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality means we analyze the effects of multiple, overlapping systems of marginalization. In this case, we analyze how gender overlaps with race and with age to create more intensive experiences of sexist double binds for prominent women.

Our intersectional analysis indicates that every prominent woman ages 50+ and every BIPOC woman we analyzed faced at least one double bind on social media. In comparison, 90% of women under 50 and 88% of white women faced double binds. This means that while virtually every prominent woman we analyzed experienced at least one double bind, older women and women of color were more likely to face this than other prominent women.

Compared to white women, prominent BIPOC women are significantly more likely to experience certain double binds, including too lazy/ambitious (100% compared to 69%), too confident/too insecure (100% compared to 75%), too curvy/too skinny (56% compared to 31%), too fake/too natural (11% compared to 0%), as well as too prudish/too sexual (11% compared to 0%).

When it comes to age, women ages 50+ are far more likely than women under 50 to be told they are both too timid/too bold (100% compared to 58%), too emotional/too cold (50% compared to 0%), too masculine/too feminine (50% compared to 32%), too confident/too insecure (100% compared to 79%), as well as too politically correct/not politically correct enough (83% compared to 42%).

As with our analysis of everyday women, prominent women face sexist double binds at alarming rates. If the most powerful women in our society are held to gendered double standards, what does this mean for women more broadly? It means that societal double binds affect us all in ways that hamper our professional and political lives, and force us to navigate a world of “wrong” choices.

100%
OF WOMEN AGES 50+ AND
BIPOC WOMEN THAT WE ANALYZED
FACED AT LEAST ONE DOUBLE BIND
ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

TABLE 9: SPECIFIC DOUBLE BINDS BY RACE

DOUBLE BIND	% WHO FACE SPECIFIC DOUBLE BIND
LAZY/AMBITIOUS	69% 100%
CONFIDENT/INSECURE	75% 100%
CURVY/SKINNY	31% 56%
FAKE/NATURAL	0% 11%
PRUDISH/SEXUAL	0% 11%

PROMINENT WHITE WOMEN
 PROMINENT BIPOC WOMEN

TABLE 10: SPECIFIC DOUBLE BINDS BY AGE

DOUBLE BIND	% WHO FACE SPECIFIC DOUBLE BIND
TIMID/BOLD	58% 100%
EMOTIONAL/COLD	0% 50%
MASCULINE/FEMININE	32% 50%
CONFIDENT/INSECURE	79% 100%
TOO/NOT POLITICALLY CORRECT ENOUGH	42% 83%

PROMINENT WOMEN UNDER 50
 PROMINENT WOMEN 50+

CONCLUSION

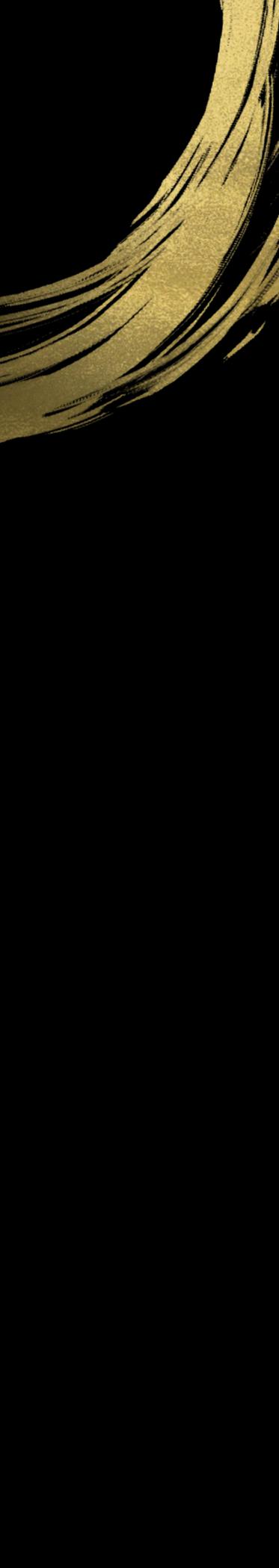
We set out to examine women's experiences of double binds, conflicting expectations for women about how they are supposed to look, dress, and act. We find that two-in-three women in North America experience double binds, with Gen Z women and LGBTQ+ women facing the highest rates. Women most commonly report double binds around the way they look. Women say they commonly experience double binds in different domains of their personal and professional lives. They most commonly experience double binds in the workplace, but also from friends, family, and social media.

Double binds have a chilling effect on how women express their personal style, in ways that negatively affect their personal and professional lives. Our research confirms that many women see their personal style as an important part of their happiness and their ability to achieve career goals. A majority of women say they would be happier in life if they could express their personal style free of societal expectations. At work, women say they doubt themselves, speak up less, and change the way they dress because of double binds. It is no wonder then that eight-in-ten women say double binds leave them feeling exhausted.

We also analyzed social media comments on posts for the most prominent women in the world. Nearly all of these prominent women faced double bind comments on posts about them, but especially women ages 50+ and BIPOC women. Beyond double binds, one-in-three comments on each post are negative, which speaks to the general hostile environment prominent women face on social media. Additionally, we find that the more prominent a woman is, the more she is held to sexist double binds.

What does it mean that the vast majority of women face sexist double binds in their personal and professional lives that inhibit their happiness and career progress? What does it mean that the most prominent women in the world are commonly held to impossible double bind standards? We hope that this report will launch a national conversation about the existence of double binds and their negative effects on women. The next section details actions we can all take to address the pressing gender equity problem of sexist double binds.





CALLS TO ACTION

FOR CORPORATE LEADERS

Normalize the use of the term “double bind” in the workplace by including examples of double bind comments and their negative consequences within onboarding materials, workforce training materials, and required curriculum. For example, assess where double binds show up in sexual harassment or code of conduct trainings. Also, be on the lookout for informal double bind practices. For example, do workplace dress code expectations limit women’s ability to express their personal style in ways that harm their career. Another action step is to partner with your organization’s women’s business resource group (or all BRGs) to host a staff webinar to encourage self-reflection of how double binds show up specifically in your business, and involve everyone in the discussion of intervention tactics.

FOR MENTORS

Directly address the concept of the double bind with mentees to create space for a brave conversation about double binds they have experienced or may currently be experiencing. Brainstorm ways you can support your mentee to eliminate double binds or reduce their negative impacts.

FOR CONTENT CREATORS

Create content that directly defines what the double bind is and the negative consequences it has on women. For example, include storylines of how women recognize and navigate double binds in their personal and professional lives. Also, share examples of how you personally experience the double bind in your industry to raise awareness of its universal effect on women.

FOR SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

Train content monitoring and anti-harassment teams to identify sexist double binds and establish rules against users posting such content or comments, suspending accounts as needed.

FOR WOMEN

Share personal examples of experiencing sexist double binds with women in your life in the workplace, social networks, and family. Discuss ways to prevent double binds or minimize their impacts with the women in your life as a way of normalizing dialogue on this topic.

FOR EVERYONE

Take time to study examples of sexist double binds and their use in the workplace, social, and family environments. Also, reflect on instances where you yourself may have contributed to women or girls in your life experiencing double binds. You may also consider having a brave conversation with a girl/woman in your life about double binds they have experienced and how you can support them.

METHODOLOGY

We used mixed methods for this study to assess experiences of double binds for everyday and famous women.

For our first method, we conducted a quantitative study with Wunderman Thompson's research consultancy SONAR. We sampled 1,000 women in Canada and 1,000 women in the U.S., ages 18 - 65, from July 15th - July 26, 2022. These opt-in samples are representative of women in each country based on age, race/ethnicity, household income, and region.

For our second method, we conducted a content analysis to analyze how social media posts about the most prominent women reflect the sexist double binds women experience. We generated a sample of 158,615 viewer comments from the top 50 most circulated posts on Facebook and the top 50 most circulated posts on Tik Tok (using each platform's sort function for most circulated post) about the top 25 most globally prominent women. In order to generate the list of influencers, "prominence" is based on search volume, total social following, number of GIFs, and search hits on Wikipedia. Our list organically included prominent women from business, media and entertainment (including social media influencers), politics, as well as sports. From there, 15 researchers were trained extensively and passed interrater reliability testing to ensure coding uniformity. The research team achieved absolute agreement, and intra-class correlations (ICC) were calculated to further assess inter-coder reliability.⁴ Observed ICC values were in the excellent range with the minimum ICC value at 0.97.⁵

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ABOUT TRESEMMÉ

For 70 years, TRESemmé has helped women express their personal style confidently as they make their mark on the world. TRESemmé is dedicated to creating salon quality hair care and styling products that help women harness the power of their personal style and the power that it brings. Through TRESemmé's "Power Your Style" project, the brand is advocating for every woman's truest expression of her personal style, so that she can achieve more. To learn more about the TRESemmé, visit www.tresemme.com or follow @Tresemme on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

ABOUT THE REPRESENTATION PROJECT

The Representation Project is a leading global gender justice non-profit organization. We use films, education, research, and activism to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes. In 2011, Jennifer Siebel Newsom founded The Rep Project in response to the overwhelming public demand for ongoing education and social action in support of her first film, *Miss Representation*. Since then, Siebel Newsom has released two more acclaimed films, *The Mask You Live In* (2015) and *The Great American Lie* (2019). Her latest film, *Fair Play*, premiered earlier this year. The organization also runs a global youth filmmaker program to train the next generation of change agents. The Rep Project is also known for its impactful social activism campaigns, including #NotBuyingIt, #AskHerMore, and #RepresentHer.