

Gender issues within the workplace can be extremely complicated and difficult to evaluate for both male and females, but a common problem is the double bind confusion within the workplace. The focus on this double bind issue is for women, however, can also be applied for men in certain context. Foremost, an understanding of the double bind issue is needed in order to pursue the question of *why* this double bind exists in the workplace.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary, a double bind is, “A psychological impasse created when contradictory demands are made of an individual, such as a child or an employee, so that no matter which directive is followed, the response will be construed as incorrect; a situation in which a person must choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives; a punishing and inescapable dilemma.” (Heritage, 2006) To recap, a double bind is the basic phrase, “a rock stuck in a hard place.” The double bind issue within the workplace is common for both genders; however, the affects of the double bind issue are different for men and women. Factors for this difference include the setting, context within the workplace, and self-esteem of the individual(s) involved.

First, the setting is obviously the workplace, but the type of workplace, male-dominant vs. female-dominant, is the issue. According to a psychological study of 160 men and 90 women, three major factors impact the double bind issue, “reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perceptions.”(Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986) The settings for all 250 individuals were between five random workplaces with over 70 different job titles in Southern California. (Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986) Within their study, many factors were taken into account like job prestige, age, interaction demand, control over work, routine, but there was not a significant change in all of those factors. The main two factors within the workplace was sex and “self-esteem”, also known as, reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perceptions.

The results of this study shown a significant imbalance between men and women regarding the three factors of self-esteem; reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perceptions which brings insight to the double bind issue within the workplace. First, the results illustrated that, “being male has a negative effect on the importance of reflected appraisals...although females produce a tendency to rely more heavily on reflected appraisals.” (Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986) However, “being male has a positive effect on the importance of self-perceived competence...females had a negative effect on importance of self-perceived competence.” (Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986) In summary, “Getting a lot of work done” was most important for majority of females, while “Solving a problem” was most important for majority of males. (Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986) Therefore according to the study, there is a difference between what males and females find important within the workplace, which can create a double bind issue depending on the context and setting of the workplace.

Workplace environments are all different and have different cultures depending on the type of job, which creates double binds for both genders. For an example, female or male dominance within a workplace can be a large factor that would create a double bind by placing male oriented goals (“solving a problem”) on females, and female oriented goals (“getting a lot of work done”) on males. The double bind comes in effect when a female is in a male dominated workplace and is expected to work like a male, as well as, a male in a female dominated workplace and is expected to work like a female. The third factor of self-esteem, self-perception, now becomes the hinge of the double bind.

Self-perception is the underlying resolution to the double bind issue. Whether a male or female, if one finds themselves in a workplace they feel comfortable, confident, and qualified, then the double bind issue is irrelevant. It is when one finds themselves in a workplace where

they do not feel comfortable, confident or qualified do they begin to feel the double bind issues emerge by allowing additional influences affect their self-perception. These additional influences are abundant within any workplace, but having a positive self-perception shadows these influences and prevents a double bind. Therefore, there are double binds in the workplace for both genders, but there are ways to solve the double bind as well.

### References

“BASIC AND APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY”. Schwalbe, Gecas, Baxter, 1986. 7(1), 63-84  
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The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
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