



Watching a compilation of competent women news media reporters being interrupted, ignored, accused of being emotional or lacking in brain capacity and knowledge triggered an urgent need to pick up the camera and start this entire body of work. Metaphorically, I played with identifiable commonalities in the conscious and unconscious bias and sexism that women point to as prevalent in the work place. Being invisible. Talked over. Ignored. Ideas dismissed, or their male colleagues take credit by simply repeating or rewording that same idea. But then there is this: The notion among some that women cannot be allowed in the board rooms because these poor men get "distracted" and cannot concentrate. That is what inspired the particular expression in this image. What they really see.

Li Westerlund

"I've lived the vicious dichotomies: a desire to be taken seriously while also being attractive; being competent, but then essentially desexualized; being recognized by my peers as capable, yet feeling the need to conform by not being assertive. If left unchallenged, the status quo is doubled-down on from every angle. I hope that this series prompts viewers to contemplate this inherent dilemma that many women still face, which cannot be effectively confronted by society without first being acknowledged as a reality."



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Biography

Li Westerlund focuses her art work on photography, mixed-media and glass; obsessed with the dialectic between light and darkness, the literal and the abstract, nature and man-made, and movement and stillness. In her abstract expressions she often focuses on introspective investigations to capture that which has no structure.

Triggered by certain election rhetoric exposing a deeply rooted cultural bias, Li entered into the space of social commentary with her first body of work responding to sexism, that she refers to as "Double Bind." She recently exhibited "Double Bind" at The Laundry in San Francisco, creating an event that included performance and roundtable discussion on sexism in women's career paths. No stranger to the world of so-called women professionals, as Vice President in a global corporation and a high stake litigator, Li brought together a panel around her art project addressing bias and sexism on several layers that women encounter on their paths toward career opportunities and ultimate goals.



This last image in the series I conceptualized from start, though its title came much later. For some reason I had difficulty titling this expression. I tried to capture the frustration and how powerless one can feel facing deeply rooted prejudices, biases and sexism projected onto you unconsciously, or in and blatant power plays. In psychology a double bind occurs when the person cannot confront an inherent dilemma of conflicting demands, and therefore can neither resolve it nor opt out of the situation. Regardless of the response, the individual will always be wrong. Thus the title: Trapped.



Another video compilation from certain news media outlet surfaced, with sexist verbiage towards competent and capable women boiling down to how women should simply be pretty, focus on her looks and stay silently smiling nicely next to her man. Given sexual harassment at the same news media outlet, the creepy nature of this verbiage had a voyeuristic overtone. The male gaze and voyeurism became the inspiration for this expression. Presenting women as objects of male pleasure, the way in which the visual arts historically depicted women.