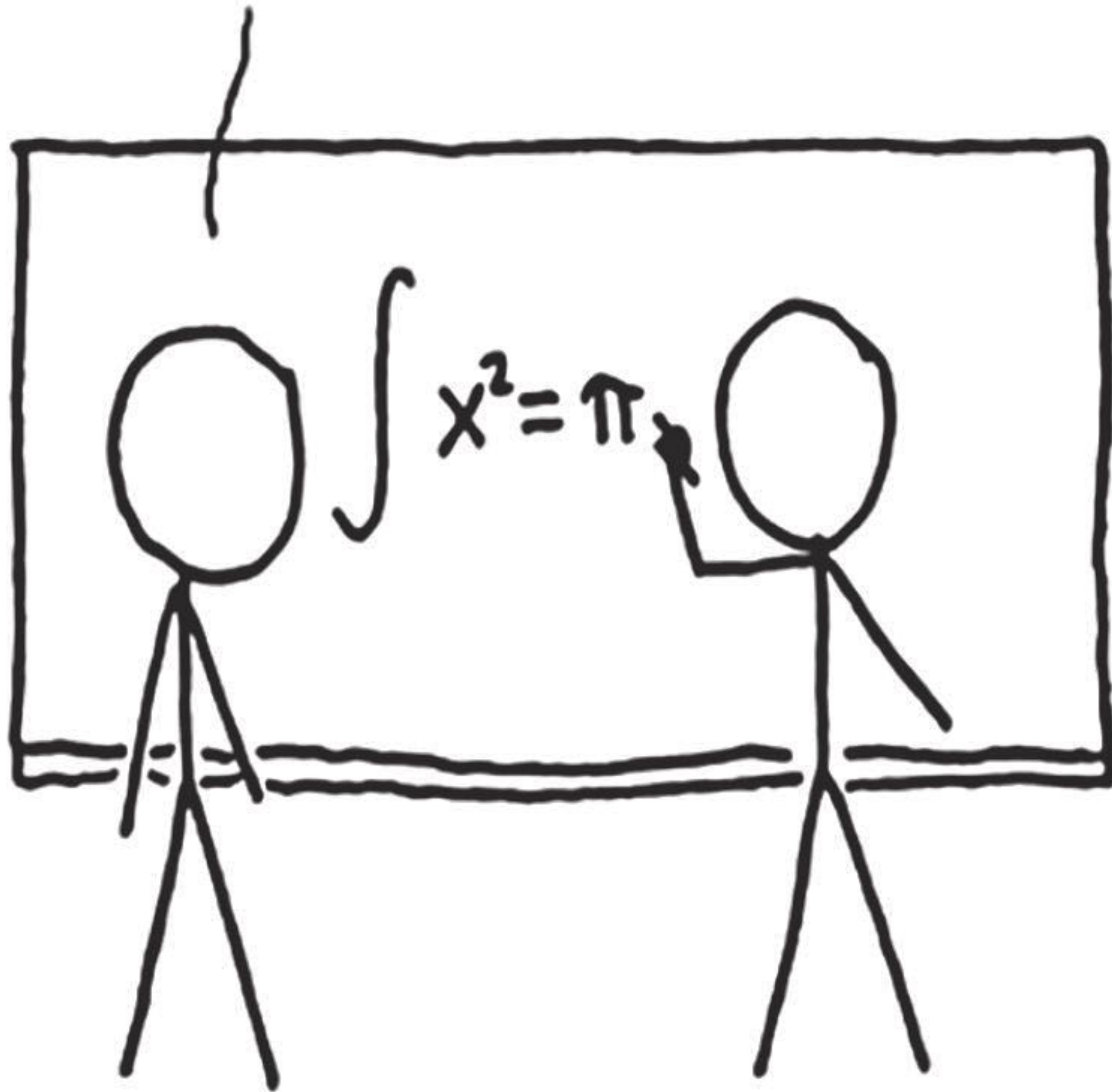
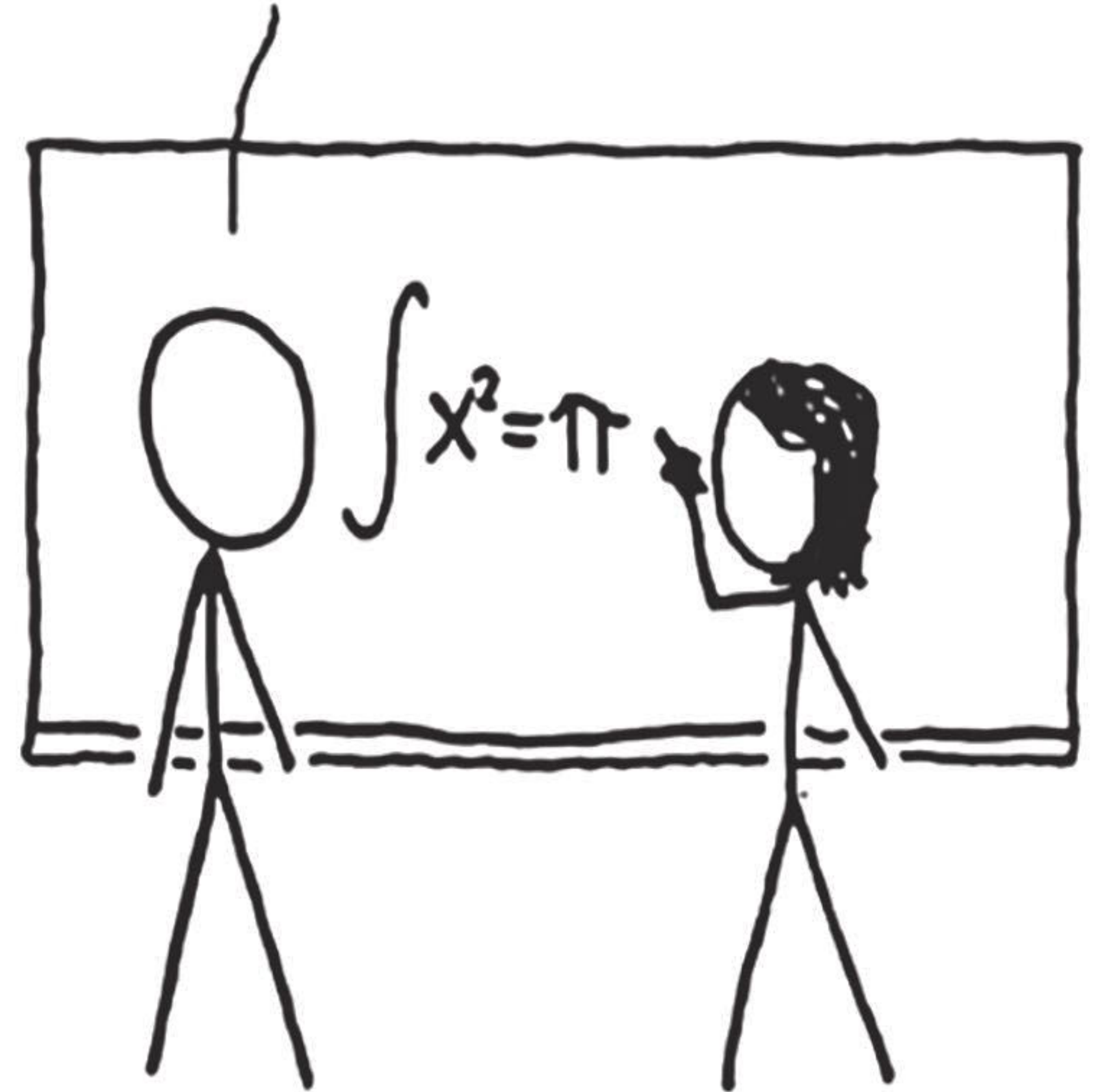


WOW, YOU
 SUCK AT MATH.



WOW, GIRLS
 SUCK AT MATH.



The Subtleties of Sexism

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Sexism is the prejudice against someone based on their gender (especially against women). It can also be behaviour or attitude that fosters stereotypes of social roles. The picture that comes to mind while reading this definition or hearing the word 'sexism' is the more obvious expression of sexism, called hostile sexism (based on the framework of ambivalent sexism), an instance of which may be believing someone is inferior and incompetent because of their gender. While these can be identified as wrong easily, there exist more subtle forms of sexism that are more difficult to detect.

These are often extremely internalised and nuanced to notice; and even the realisation that we're being sexist can be difficult to have when called out. However, women still suffer from it regularly in school and workplaces, and research concludes that it can be as harmful, if not more, than hostile sexism. Furthermore, they contribute to normalising detrimental stereotypes and problematic stances far more than we understand. For these reasons, it's important that we talk about it; especially at this point in time when we're more conscious than ever before.

One of the ways of engaging in subtle sexism is to disguise it under the pretext of caring for women, called benevolent sexism. This is defined as being 'subjec-

tively positive' (subjective to the person being sexist). So, a man who believes and says that women must be protected by men thinks that he's being a nice guy who simply wants what's safe for the gender at disadvantage. More often than not, people won't see the damage that it causes to the broader theme of gender equality. The idea that women need protection, reinforces the notion of women being weaker and that they can't fend for themselves. While there's no denying that protection is needed against predators, active measures taken to protect women and not to stop the predators in question is another issue that often stems from such ideas. Moreover, the image of men being something that we need to be wary of, as if they're not intelligent creatures capable of exercising control is another problem.

Women having a subordinate or a submissive role is deemed as 'good' by the society. To exemplify, women who are motherly and 'soft' are pedestaled over women who are more assertive. One reason why women don't get angry is, to a certain extent, that they're conditioned to believe that these remarks come from a place of concern and love. The greatest example of this is victim blaming, or telling women to dress and behave a certain way and believing that they get harassed or raped because they don't follow the social rules. It never looks like someone screaming at a victim that they're at fault.

It's more about aunties telling us to dress more conservatively to avoid getting looks.

Some researchers also argue that in environments that have rampant sexism, benevolent sexism can be used as a protective mechanism by women as it allows them to see their society as a more acceptable place. It's far easier to justify, especially with the seemingly positive idealisation of women and personal benefits they may receive. This is also why women in patriarchies are seen endorsing such a system despite it leading to their own subjugation.

This type of sexism doesn't exist in a vacuum, it forms through the intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships of men and women. The best way to explain this is using stereotypes, and this is also the biggest consequence of benevolent sexism. Men fail to recognise their remarks as oppressive because they're fixated on being the providers and protectors, and so they end up subconsciously considering women to be incompetent outside of her domestic duties or too emotional to handle complex matters. On the other hand, women don't see this kind of behaviour as patronising, but as caring and protective. An interaction exists that requires men to take care of women and women to depend on the male counterparts in their lives. This pattern is evident everywhere from society vilifying women who choose their career over kids to teenage relationships where the guy always has to pay the bills.

Let's now talk about the effects of benevolent sexism on women, and on social dynamics. Given its nature, it's harder to filter out and correct; but more importantly, due to the subjective kindness of this system, the objective harms are ignored.

Research shows that women feel more incompetent and doubt their own abilities after being exposed to benevolent sexism in workplaces. While domestic roles and being a mother is very important, it allows the idea that women are subservient to men to exist. As a result, ideas like women can't survive without the financial help of a man, or that the primary role of a woman is to mother children, continue to thrive.

Furthermore, damaging stereotypes remain for young girls to follow. And the ultimate injury from benevolent sexism are to women who choose to denounce those social roles. Men are thought of as ambitious, independent, and highly competent, resulting in more accountability for what they say and higher positions in jobs offered to them. Women on the other hand are given more communal features like being nurturing and considerate, traits for being a 'proper' mother and wife but traits that aren't for young girls with big dreams. Understanding and correcting oneself in terms of passive sexism is significantly hard. But if we educate ourselves on the insidious effects that we (both men and women) endorse, then I do believe that we can lead to a system free of any type of gender discrimination.