

My name is Elizabeth Wynn, I'm the Equality and Diversity manager at the Babraham Institute. And today I'm going to be giving a brief talk on benevolent sexism. I'm going to be covering what benevolent sexism is, why it's harmful, and offering a few tips on what you can do about it.

Benevolent sexism, the term, was coined by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske. They actually came up with a theory called Ambivalence Sexism, where they said that sexism was made up of two distinct but complementary parts: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism.

So let's cover what those two things are. Hostile sexism is what you might think of immediately when you think about sexism. It's overt, objectifying, insulting and or degrading. Examples of hostile sexism include: demeaning language, cat calling, discrimination or violence against women. So what we classically think of as sexism.

Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, is framed positively, but it can be condescending, patronizing and or reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Some examples of that, a reference letter or appraisal focusing on personality, not achievements. We know that this happens far more frequently for women than men.

Only caring about women when they are mothers, wives and daughters. This is something that men will say, they only realize the importance of feminism or the sort of existence of sexism when they had a daughter. It only seems relevant to them when they put it in terms of their mothers, wives and daughters.

Believing that women are more compassionate and nurturing by nature. Or believing that women need to be protected.

To give you more of an idea of what we mean by a benevolent sexism, here are some image examples. So this image on the left, an advert for a book about the victims of Jack the Ripper. "They were more than just headlines. They were mothers, daughters and wives." As opposed to people with their own lives. We are putting the focus on their

“Women do it better” with an image of an iron. So this seems to be complimentary, ‘women are good at this’, but by associating women with housework, with ironing in this case, it excuses men from doing it. And it makes these domestic chores, which take up a lot of time and effort, it makes them firmly women's business. After all, why should a man bother to do it? You're just better at it.

This image about types of soft skills to include on your resumé. I found this on a job advice website and the website wasn't aimed at women, it was a general job advice website. But they chose to illustrate this article on soft skills with images that all appear to be women, associating women with things like communication skills, positive attitude, teamwork. And again, these are all great skills. These are all important things, but they're important for everyone and the suggestion here by illustrating this with just women is that these are perhaps skills that women have more than men or that it's more important for women to highlight than men.

Finally, this sort of inspirational quote, “A real woman can do it all by herself, but a real man won't let her.” So removing agency from the woman, saying that it's a real man's responsibility to protect her and do things for her.

So those are examples of benevolent sexism. And I've already sort of highlighted the underlying message behind these images. Let's talk more about the harm that benevolent sexism can cause.

Exposure to benevolent sexism decreases women's work performance more than

not going to be recognized at your appraisal. It's not going to go on your CV, it's not going to help you get your next role. And if these types of activities, though, there may be small, they can add up. And if these types of activities are overwhelmingly left to women to do, then that can