**In her new book, *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong*, Angela Saini argues that the "sexist baggage" within science has made us—mistakenly—believe women are weaker than men.**

In 2013, three scientists from McMaster University published an [article](http://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003092#authcontrib) in peer-reviewed journal *PLOS Computational Biology* called "Mate choice and the origin of menopause." In it, the trio of esteemed male scientists argued women had evolved to pass through menopause because no men of any age find older women attractive—not even older men—therefore there is no need for their continued fertility.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, science journalist Angela Saini read their research and was filled with a pure and clarifying rage. After observing similar pseudo-scientific sexist bullshit everywhere she turned, Saini [wrote](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Inferior-Science-Women-Research-Rewriting/dp/0008172021/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1474291828&sr=1-3-fkmr0&keywords=angela+saini+inferiror) *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong—and the New Research That's Rewriting the Story*.

Her central premise? That science is just as capable of reinforcing sexist gender stereotypes as any other discipline—and as a result, women have been consistently underestimated throughout human history. It's a footnoted "fuck you" to the McMaster trio that I, as an exceedingly petty individual, can only dream of.

Science, Saini argues, has achieved this weird status in our society as the sole repository of impartial, accurate truths. We, laypeople, cannot understand the mysteries of science—of men in white coats and those big spinny metal cylinders they use to separate matter in labs—so we just say things like, "what are you, a rocket scientist? Ha ha ha" when we want to convey that someone is important, intelligent, and in full apprehension of all the facts.

Unsurprisingly, it's usually scientists who self-perpetuate this myth of science as infallible. After all, it helps justify their untouchable status in society, a status as exalted as the one that Bill Cosby enjoyed until relatively recently. As a literature major at university, science students delighted in telling me that theirs was a superior academic currency—one that traded in objective truths, not human foibles and conjecture.

Handily, studying literature gave me a critical mind—able to dissect the fresh bullshit the McMaster trio were peddling, and unpick it analytically. Thanks, literature! And *Inferior* is a book that needed to be written; it's just remarkable that it took this long to arrive.

"Science has been historically sexist towards women, and this has affected what research tells us about women," Saini explains in a phone call with Broadly. "I wanted to understand patriarchy through the lens of science."

Historically, women have been consistently excluded from the scientific community—whether it's Marie Curie being rejected from the French Académie des Sciences in 1911, the year she won her second Nobel Prize, or the appalling shortage of women in the STEM sector. "It meant there was space for prejudice to creep in," Saini argues, citing figures like Darwin, who was as fixed in his misogyny as those fossils he loved to study so much (famously, arguing that women were [less evolved](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12680306) than men.)

Although Darwin is dead, his legacy remains: there's still scientific work being done today that reinforces misogynistic views.

"There's a lot of bad evolutionary psychology out there," Saini says, citing research that variously argues that men are better leaders because of their hunter-gatherer origins, or that women are naturally less promiscuous than men. In reality, the story we get from some evolutionary psychologists is false. Saini uses the example of early human communities in which men and women shared all the tasks equally, with women undertaking as much hunter-gathering as men.

Not all evolutionary psychology is bad, though. "Some courageous women, like [anthropologist and feminist] Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, have really bravely challenged the sexist baggage within the disciple," Saini says.

"When science should have been pushing women forward, it's actually been holding them back," Saini argues. "Science has this status in society as the provider of unbiased facts, and actually the way we need to think about it is as a process. Everyone needs to understand that science is not just a stream of correct facts all the time. Sometimes the process can veer quite badly off course. Experts are not gods."

Central to Saini's argument is that the strength—bodily and intellectually—of women has been consistently undervalued by scientists. "Women also have strength, and thinking about women as the weaker sex is wrong," she says. "Women are biologically better survivors from the moment they're born. They have stronger immune systems and are protected from certain genetic conditions that affect only men, explaining partly why women live so much longer."

Saini becomes passionate as she talks about how the idea of men as hunter-gatherers, undertaking the bulk of physical exertion, and women as domestic caregivers, is just that—an idea, a social construct we've imposed on ourselves. But the reality, both historically and in developing countries around the world, is very different.

"Women all over the world work as hard as men. Most women do really hard, back-breaking labor, every single day," Saini argues. "I'm from India, and when you travel back there you see women are doing the exact same amount of labor, if not more, that men are doing. That's a fact of history that goes back thousands of years ago, before patriarchy existed."

Ultimately, Saini's ambition is no less than a new scientific model, one that recognizes scientists are fallible and as subject to human prejudice as any other discipline. Things are already changing, sh says.

"There's a new story being written, and as women have entered sciences and our society has become a lot more enlightened, we're getting a very different portrait," she explains. "I want women to see that equality is not just a political ideal. We are just as biologically capable."

And the reason why women go through the menopause and continue to thrive, living longer lives than men? It's not because they're ugly and unattractive: it's because we need them.

"It's the grandmother hypothesis," Saini says warmly. "Older women are invaluable, not only in terms of helping with child-rearing, but their wisdom, the work they do in our communities. They are living proof of why we need women."

<https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/vbgkpx/inferior-angela-saini-book-interview>