

Re: Harvard Pres: Women Lack Ability In Math, Sciences

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.geo.geology/2005-01/1628.html>

From: George (george_at_wtfiswrongwithyou.com)

Date: 01/20/05

Date: Thu, 20 Jan 2005 05:47:36 GMT

"Jayne Kulikauskas" <momkulio@yahoo.ca> wrote in message
news:358j13F4jhos7U1@individual.net...

> [newsgroups changed from soc.culture.jewish to soc.men, soc.women and
> sci.geo.geology]

>

> Apparently George wants to post his response to me in a group that I have
> informed him that I do not read. Since this topic has nothing to do with
> s.c.j I have dropped it. I included s.g.g because I wanted to insure that
> Jo would see it. I'm sorry if it is inappropriate for that group.

I posted it here because I wanted other scientists to have their say, should they decide to do so. If that is a problem for you, that's your problem, not mine. And top posting is rude, but then you knew that already.

> "George" <george@wtfiswrongwithyou.com> wrote in message
> news:4FxD.15126\$EG1.2077@attbi_s53...

>>

>> "Jayne Kulikauskas" <momkulio@yahoo.ca> wrote in message
>> news:357ibpF4jdqciU1@individual.net...

>>>

>>> "George" <george@wtfiswrongwithyou.com> wrote in message
>>> news:dunHd.11491\$P04.6995@attbi_s03...

>>>>

>>>> "Jayne Kulikauskas" <momkulio@yahoo.ca> wrote in message
>>>> news:355v2vF4jre7mU1@individual.net...

>>>>>

>>>>> "George" <george@wtfiswrongwithyou.com> wrote in message
>>>>>

>>>>> []

>>>>>> Wow, I don't know where that came from. Perpetual victim?

>>>>>> Let me remind you that I'm a man who is

>>>>>> on the side of women's rights, and don't consider

>>>>>> you personally to be a "perpetual victim".

>>>>>>

>>>>>> Your posts are all about how women are victims. You can't even stay

> on
>> >> > *topic because you are dragging in one irrelevant story of
> victimization*
>> >> > *after another. I don't want rights based on pity.*
>> >>
>> >> *Oh please. Spare me the sob story.*
>> >
>> > *That's what I am trying to tell you. Spare me the sob story. Nancy
> Hopkins*
>> > *walked out of perfectly appropriate and scientifically sound talk, made
>> > various denigrating remarks to the media about the speaker and you call
> her*
>> > *a victim. Your reason for this boils down to saying that women are
> always*
>> > *the victims. Spare me this absurd and untrue sob story.*
>>
>> *Sorry. I beg to differ. Your reasoning boils down to accepting that
> women have*
>> *to be treated as if they are somehow inferior.*
>
> *My reasoning is that science is about the pursuit of the truth. When there
> is an observation that can be explained by innate sex differences then one
> explores that possibility. One does not throw it out without considering it
> simply because one doesn't like the idea.*

It has nothing to do with liking or disliking the idea. It is simply irrelevant to the fact that women have a right to learn science if they choose to do so. They also have a right to learn it in an environment that is best suited to their learning needs. Additionally, the concept that women are not as good as men in math and science (despite what current test reports are showing) has nothing to do with the reality that many women are in fact, doing science and math, and doing it well, and that more could enter these fields were it not for the discouraging manner in which it is taught to them. People like you would like nothing more than to find that there is some physical difference between the sexes that causes this disparity in order to justify limiting opportunities for women and controlling the education process for your own purposes. Who cares whether men can do it better? That doesn't mean that women can't do it. They ARE doing it. I find it quite amazing that this attitude comes from a woman.

>> *Who said anything about quotas? Oh right, you and Ian (I think it was
> him)*
>> *did. I never brought it up.*
>
> *In practice, the movement to give women equal opportunity has often involved
> quotas.*

And I've presented my views on that matter. And I must say that quotas have nothing to do with whether or not women have the innate ability to do science and math, or whether sociocultural biases impede their ability to learn these subjects or perform the work once they are in the work force. Obviously these

biases do exist, despite your repeated efforts at denial.

>> > <http://www.menweb.org/batresrh.htm>

>>

>> *Oh gee, that certainly is an objective web site, now isn't it? I am*

> *starting to*

>> *doubt whether you are truly a woman, and not some old geezer posting from*

>> *soc.men.*

>

> *So you do realize that I am posting from soc.men. Why have you been posting*

> *your responses to me to other groups?*

I know exactly from what group you are posting. Because I want other scientists to read your comments, and to have the opportunity to comment on them. If that frightens you, oh well.

>> > *Note the article about the Statistics Canada data which shows "44% of DV*

>> > *victims are men. In current relationships men as more likely to be*

> *victims*

>> > *of domestic violence."*

>>

>> *Who ever said Canadians were anything other than whimps? I certainly*

> *didn't. I*

>> *guess those Canadian women must be real bullies, eh? Must come from all*

> *that*

>> *igloo living, and chewing on walrus fat. lol*

>

> *This is an excellent example of an ad hominem. Note how George does not*

> *address the point that men are equally victims of domestic violence but*

> *attempts to divert the discussion by mocking my country.*

Hey, you changed the subject by turning it around and making it a issue about men when it isn't. So one good turn deserves another, dude, er, girl, whatever. I'm still not convinced that you are, in fact, a woman. But that's ok. Don't bother sending a postcard.

>> > *Your completely mistaken ideas on this subject are common and largely*

> *due to*

>> > *the bias in media reporting on such things. To better understand why*

> *you*

>> > *are so wrong, look at this article on how the media misrepresents gender*

>> > *issues.*

>>

>> *No I'm not. You are a complete fraud on this issue.*

>

> *It is considered good form to indicate when one removes a section from a*

> *quote. You removed a link to a site and passage from it. This is not a*

> *good way to refute it.*

I didn't bother refuting it because it is irrelevant to the topic of discussion. And you should mind your manners and learn to snip unnecessary items from your

posts so that this doesn't turn into a 1200 line rantfest.

> > *But don't take my word for it. Here are the word of someone who knows*
> *what the*
>> *hell she is talking about, because she both is a scientist and a teacher,*
> *and a*
>> *very well respected member of the scientific community. She has been*
> *monitoring*
>> *these posts in another newsgroup, and decided to put in her two cents*
> *worth:*
>>
>> *"As a woman apparently lacking the genetic abilities under discussion, I*
>> *would advise the men in this discussion to take the time to find out*
>> *what Mr. Harvard President Sir actually said, (at least as reported in*
>> *the news media):*
>>
>> *Please read:*
>> <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/19/education/19harvard.html>
>> *No transcript of his exact words are available.*
>
> *I thought this account seemed like an even-handed one:*
> <http://www.marinij.com/Stories/0,1413,234~24410~2659688,00.html>
>
> <begin quote>*He discussed several factors that could help explain the*
> *underrepresentation of women. The first factor, he said, according to*
> *several participants, was that top positions on university math and*
> *engineering faculties require extraordinary commitments of time and energy,*
> *with many professors working 80-hour weeks in the same punishing schedules*
> *pursued by top lawyers, bankers and executives. Few married women with*
> *children are willing to accept such sacrifices, he said.*
>
> *Hopkins said yesterday, "I didn't disagree, but didn't like the way he*
> *presented that point, because I like to work 80 hours a week, and I know a*
> *lot of women who work that hard."*
>
> *In citing a second factor, Summers cited research showing that more high*
> *school boys than girls tend to score at very high and very low levels on*
> *standardized math tests, and that it was important to consider the*
> *possibility that such differences may stem from biological differences*
> *between the sexes.<eq>*
>
>> *He is quoted for three ways which women may be unfit for these*
> *professions:*
>
> *He described 3 possible factors that could account for women's*
> *underrepresentation in these professions. He never said anything about*
> *women being unfit.*
>
>> *1) Reluctance of married women with children to work long (some articles*
>> *say 80-hour) workweeks in pursuit of their vocation;*
>>

>> 2) *That innate sex-related/genetic differences make women less capable of math or science; or*

>>

>> 3) *That they are still discriminated against because of their gender.*

>>

>>

>> *To refute these remarks:*

>>

>> 1) *Is undoubtably true of both women and men with families, who value their spouses, children and own productive lives both at and away from their vocation. Both math and science can be harsh masters and mistresses. While hard work is necessary for success in any endeavor, this stereotype of the brilliant mathematician/scientist with no time for anything but work is false--One need go no further than Einstein and his violin, or Richard Feynmann and his theater and drums to note that a) home life suffers grievously in the case of many so called 'brilliant' people; b) recreation is necessary to all humans to keep from going crazy. No one can be a genius 24/7 for 70 years on end and c) if there are children, someone must mind them, whether parent or nanny, or the kids turn out badly.*

>>

>> 2) *This is an easy remark to make, but a hard one to substantiate. Also, math and science, though both use numbers, are not equal. My best friend in grade school excelled in math, but had no use for science. I excelled in science, but math has always been a harder row to hoe. It's not 'socialization pressure', nor genetics which cause women to back off from math or science--it's the textbooks, the pedagogy, and the teachers along the way.*

>

> *Could you give some references to support this claim please? (Preferably web-based since I don't want to drive to the university library in all this snow.)*

>

>> *George's comment - (I later pointed out to her that the textbooks, pedagogy, and the teachers are all part of the socialization pressure, to which she agreed).*

>>

>> *Children of either gender will be drawn to study what interests them. You can make a million gender-neutral textbooks about girls building rocketships and calculating trajectories, or figuring baseball statistics, and you're just not gonna 'win the audience' except of a very few. Face it, most math texts don't explain "why" something is, or how it go to be that way--they just throw a lot of squiggles at you and say, if you do thus and so to the squiggles, you win. Math and science texts (especially physics) are full of discrete examples whose contexts boys are already familiar with--throwing balls, building things from wood, making electrical circuits and so forth.*

>

> *And why aren't girls familiar with these contexts? Because they are usually not interested in these things. Doesn't this suggest some innate*

> *differences to you.*

No, I don't think it does. It suggests that they are raised differently than boys. Do you think that boys have an innate ability to work on circuit boards that women don't have? Circuit boards have only been around since 1936.

>> *Math books are written by
>> men (for the most part) for boys, using examples out of their own
>> boyhood. These fellows' idea of humanizing a text is throwing in clipart
>> of old famous white dead mathematicians in wigs. I can recall several
>> word problems in probability I couldn't do-- I could do the math all
>> right, but didn't understand how one played some game (I think it was
>> figuring canasta hands) and without known the distribution of the hands,
>> I was clueless. But hey, I'm a woman. I *asked* somebody to help me! */;-)
>
> *This has not been my personal experience of math texts.**

But then, as you've stated in an earlier post, you haven't looked at textbooks for, what was it, 20 years?

> *Do you have some
> references that indicate your experience is the norm?*

She teaches.

>> *I'd love to see a generation of boys raised on math books with examples
>> of calculating how to make a creme rinse from its basic components, how,
>> given X amount of prepared food, to redivide it evenly when unexpected
>> dinner guests arrive, or how to even out 'playtime' with an even set of
>> dolls, and an odd set of girls.
>
> *Apparently you think that they would do badly. Why would you love to see
> boys doing badly? I would love to see education that allows both sexes to
> do their best.**

It is likely that adolescent boys would be embarrassed by it. Peer pressure is a powerful thing. The point she is making is that girls have to deal with these kinds of male-dominated issues all the time, yet boys are required to experience it. The classroom really is set up for boy, not girls.

>> *How about the spatial calculus involved
>> when figuring out how much material in 30 inch wide yards has to be
>> purchased to most efficiently yield the irregular pieces needed to sew a
>> Halloween costume. Hey, it's math, right? There are plenty of 'spatially
>> literate' men who haven't a clue how to take a Dutch cut out of a sheet
>> of rectangular paper, much less to cut and sew a shirt while wasting
>> only minimal cloth.
>
> *Neither do I have a clue about this. I do not think that I ever encountered
> a math problem as much outside my experience as your sewing examples.**

And that is her point. It isn't taught this way. But it is certainly taught with a male orientation, which is no doubt frustrating for many young girls and women.

>> *Part of the answer to 'girls don't understand math and science' is yes they do, but the questions they find interesting are different, and often defined by men as uninteresting. Girls and women are not stupid—they're less likely than men to get fixated, and beat their heads to a bloody pulp on a lost cause. They just go around the problem, which often means abandoning both math and science.*

>

> *Western education systems has been greatly influenced by women in general and feminists in particular for the past couple decades. I find it implausible that men are defining the questions in math and science.*

Your ability to perceive it to be the case is not necessary for it to be true.

>> *3) The glass ceiling still exists, for one reason: Ambitious men are defined as go-getters and successes. Ambitious women who do not become pseudo-men are defined by society as bitches (or worse). If one wants to be a whirlwind of successful genius, people's feelings are deemed irrelevant—it's a pursuit of a dream or an idea to the kill. That is seen as acceptable in men, but not in women. One need go no further than a person whom even Mr. Summers would call a female genius—Marie Sklodowska Curie—who was nearly denied her second Nobel in 1911 because of a morals charge. (Marie Curie—A Life, by Susan Quinn) Imagine a widowed male genius being in the same predicament because of an affair. Preposterous!*

>

> *Not in 1911. People took sexual morals, even men's, pretty seriously back then.*

No, in 1911, such a prestigious man in the same position as M. Curie would have been allowed to sweep it under the rug. In other words, it would not have been made an issue. It would have simply gone away. Even in JFK's presidency, the extent of his womanizing wasn't known until many years after he was assassinated.

>> *Yes, there are women who love math, and love science and excel at both (or if they don't excel, they can quite capably do what has to be done to get to the point they need to be.) Or maybe they just redefine the problem, and discover new things instead.*

>>

>> *In any event, Mr Harvard President Sir has apparently decided to eat his words, buttered and with honey on them, via his retraction:*

>>

>> <http://www.president.harvard.edu/speeches/2005/womeninscience.html>

>

> *This is clearly not a retraction. It is a statement that his comments were misunderstood. He says in this statement exactly what he was saying all along.*

Note that he says in his statement that he was making informal remarks, while you've stated that he was presenting hard evidence to support the contention that women have physical differences that prevent them from doing science and math as well as men. And he clearly did make an apology (such as it was), which is tantamount to a retraction.

>> *Now--whose made the more logical argument here...the several handfuls of
>> male (and one female) posters gesticulating at each other, or me, who is
> of the
>> gender incapable of math, science, or analysis?
>>
>> I rest my case.
>> Jo"
>
> Your argument is a refutation of Lawrence Summers' alleged claim that women
> are unfit for math and science professions. However, he did not claim that.*

Still in denial, I see. His words: That innate sex-related/genetic differences make women less capable of math or science".

> *You apparently created a misrepresentation of his view in order to refute
> it. In other words, you have committed the straw man fallacy. Since your
> entire argument is a logical fallacy, it is not logical at all.*

Wow, why am I not surprised that after all these posts, all of these arguments, rebutal and counter rebutal, that you still prefer to believe that Summers didn't say what he clearly did say?

> *I would also like to note that it seems inaccurate to characterize my posts
> on this subject as "gesticulating at each other".*

Well, some would call it flatulating at one another. Others would use harsher words. She used gesticulating because that is her view of the thread. If you differ, that's your right. It's called freedom of speech.

>>>
>>> *I did a Masters degree part-time during the 90s so I am quite familiar
> with
>>> conditions in academia. I am involved at my church and in environmental
>>> activism. My best friend is a woman who got her engineering degree from
> MIT
>>> and has worked in that field for the last 25 years. As well as what I
> have
>>> personally observed and heard about, I have read many books and articles
> on
>>> this subject, so I have some idea of how my experiences of gender issues
> fit
>>> into general social trends.
>>
>> *What was it you accused me of a few threads back? Confirmation bias? So
> it's**

- >> *ok for you to do it, but if I do the same (use my experience as example),*
- >> *somehow it becomes irrelevant, right? Yeah, I see how your logic works.*
- >
- > *You have taken this comment out of context. This was my response to your*
- > *taunt along the lines of "Don't get out much, do you?" I was not offering*
- > *my experience as evidence (unlike your frequent use of anecdotal evidence)*
- > *but responding to your allegation that my opinions are of little value*
- > *because I have little real world experience.*

But you have offered your experience on more than one occasion, just as you have, above. You have done nothing different than what I did. I merely elaborated more.

- > *Many people, including myself, consider taking comments out of context to*
- > *change their meaning to be a form of intellectual dishonesty.*

I've taken nothing out of context.

- > *I also think*
- > *it was dishonourable to misrepresent my views in a venue where I was*
- > *unlikely to see it. Your behaviour has been such that I do not respect you*
- > *enough to further engage in discussion with you.*

Oh quit your whining. I told you that I had done so, and had good reason to do it. Are you now afraid of what other scientists are going to say about your comments? If so, then perhaps you should have thought of that before you posted them on five other newsgroups.