

To the Editor:

Re *Harvard Chief Defends His Talk on Women* (January 18, A16):

President Summers succeeds in his goal of being provocative, but mostly by ignoring social science theory and research. His point about science being 24/7 and women's failure to work long hours is easily disputed. In Europe and elsewhere, scientists do not work 80-hour weeks, and are no less productive than U.S. scientists. Among women scientists, mothers are no less productive than women without children. By framing the issue as one of women's ability and willingness to work hard, he insults women and treats society's problem of caring for children as a women's problem.

Regarding genetics and group differences, Summers misrepresents the data in ways that are as mischievous as they are common. If there are intrinsic sex differences in scientific abilities, they are tiny, limited, and of little practical significance. The expression of such differences varies over time and place, and argues for environmental influences.

His final point about the lack of discrimination is deeply problematic. Overt discrimination against women has declined, but has not disappeared any more than racial discrimination has been eliminated. Science and academia today are rife with subtle forms of bias, which accumulate over time to discourage and disadvantage women. Sadly, Summers illustrates what women are up against in science and elsewhere in professional life.

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