

Women's VU

The monthly newsletter of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

May 2006, Volume 28, Issue 10

Debunking the Opt-Out Revolution: The Real Truth about Working Mothers

by Misa Culley, editor

For months now I've been gearing up to write this article: an intellectual response to the *New York Times* article by Louise Story, "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood," that appeared in September 2005. In researching the topic, I was shocked at the numerous opinions on the data out there in cyberspace. For those of you not familiar with this article, journalist Louise Story profiled several women from Yale on their career plans and motherhood. Riddled with anecdotes from each respondent, Story claims that of the 85 students who responded to her 138 e-mail surveys distributed, 60 percent of freshmen and senior females planned on cutting back on work or working part-time once they had children. (Why sophomores and juniors were not surveyed is never explained.) Citing other surveys conducted among Yale alumni, Story charges this data holds up for all women of childbearing age. This article builds on the media frenzy that enveloped Lisa Belkin's earlier *Times* article on the same topic (October 2003), both fanning the fire that surrounds the "mommy wars" and seeking only to build on media stereotypes of women. Any journalist will tell you that there are always two sides to a story and in this case, real data would help, too. While I cannot possibly cover all the data collected over the years on this topic in this short newsletter article (it would make for a lengthy thesis), it seems that a response from a real working mom is in order. I'm also here to tell you that the real issues behind this article are painful and discouraging for women to talk about, because it brings up so many other issues related to women's potential, happiness and well-being. But, first, let's start by analyzing the data.

Number crunching and the labor statistics

When online ezine *Slate's* Jack Shafer wrote his biting media criticism of Story's article, he unknowingly set off an avalanche of discussion of this topic, most of it on the Internet in the form of blogs. His main argument was that Story, a then-student journalist, used the terms "many" and "seems" far too many times for his comfort. He also ripped apart the basis of her theory stating that 138 e-mail surveys does not make credible data, especially when so much real data has been collected over the years by the U.S. Census Bureau.

In December 2005, Economist Heather Boushey of the Center for Economic and Policy Research wrote a briefing paper on this very subject. She states that the "economic data provides no evidence to support these anecdotal accounts." Boushey's analysis looked at the over-

all effect of children on women's labor force participation rate (LFPR) since 1984. Her main concern regarding this topic is that many journalists use the "raw" data, without adjusting for changes in the overall labor market, recession, demographic characteristics and the like, therefore, their conclusions tend to make it look like women are opting out of the workforce when in fact the LFPR has stayed fairly constant. She asserts that "immigration, changes in educational attainment among women, increased divorce rates, an aging labor force and increases in mothers' ages at first birth are all factors that may affect a woman's decision to work." She contends that "women's LFPRs have been pushed downwards by the prolonged period of slow labor market recovery." This slow labor market affects everyone though, not just women.

In actuality, the LFPR for American women over the age of 16 was 50 percent according to a 2005 Bureau of Labor Statistics report which combined full-time and part-time working women. The Department of Labor calculated the LFPR for college-educated women to be roughly 72 percent and those with less than a high school education at about 33 percent. Given these numbers, it's fair to conclude that "well-educated women are, in fact, more likely to work, and more likely to return to work after having children than their lesser educated peers," states Garance Frank-Ruta of *The American Prospect* magazine. (September, 2005)

Progress-Backlash Two Step

The Census Bureau did report, however, that 36 percent of women with college degrees who had given birth the previous year were staying home in 2002, up from 32 percent in 1995 and that the overall LFPR of married women with children under the age of six slipped from 63.7 percent in 1998 to 62.5 percent in 2001. According to journalist Cathy Young, contributing editor of *Reason* magazine, this small change hardly amounts to a "revolution." Young claims that, "the

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For more info, please see our website: www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter

Happy Mother's Day!

MIHOW Receives KUDOS!

NASHVILLE, TN - The Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker (MIHOW) Program of the Vanderbilt Center for Health Services was recognized during World Health Week on April 7 in Washington, DC. The New River Health Association's MIHOW program in Oak Hill, West Virginia, was chosen by the Pan American Health Organization as one of three teams of health care workers in the United States that best exemplify this year's theme, "Everyday Heroes."

The MIHOW program, which operates 20 sites in five Southeastern states--West Virginia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee--provides services and support for mothers, infants and children at risk for health and development problems associated with poverty and isolation. MIHOW has served more than 12,000 low-income families since it started in 1982.

April 7 is World Health Day, as designated by the World Health Organization. The celebration of this event, hosted by the Pan American World Health Organization, was held at the George Washington University Health Center. Speakers, panel discussions and workshops focused on the role of human resources, such as the MIHOW team, in exploring strategies for providing access to quality health care. Vanderbilt's MIHOW staff from the New River Health Association site were presented with a plaque at the opening ceremonies.

Vanderbilt Center for Health Services Director Barbara Clinton said of New River's MIHOW program, "This is a health association that does honor families." MIHOW Director Minda Lazarov added that Vanderbilt has looked to New River to "help us develop standards of practice. This is not one of the best (programs); it is the best." Contributions can be sent to: Vanderbilt University, The MIHOW program Gift Records VU Station #357727 Nashville Tn 37235-7727

The MCWC extends its congratulations to the staff of MIHOW!

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Deadline for newsletter: Submissions are due on the 1st of the month preceding publication.

Senior Katie Protos Awarded the Muliebrity Prize

We at the Women's Center are pleased to announce that senior Katie Protos has been awarded the coveted Muliebrity Prize. The Prize is given annually to recognize achievements by and in support of women at Vanderbilt University. It also honors an undergraduate student who demonstrates leadership in activities that contribute to the achievements, interests, and goals of women and girls, or that promote equity. Katie exemplifies all of these qualities.



Katie is completing her Bachelor of Arts degree this spring with a double major in Women's and Gender Studies, (with Honors), and Communications. She presented her honors thesis, *The Rhetoric of the Movements Associated with Violence Against Women*, at the 2005 Southeastern Women's Studies Association conference.

In her professional life, she has worked with the YWCA Domestic Violence Program, as an advocate for women and children and providing crisis counseling and support. She has worked as an assistant with Gender Matters programming at the Women's Center, taking over many of the duties of the director who left for another position in the middle of this semester.

Katie is a volunteer extraordinaire. She has been involved with Project Safe since January of 2004. She has been a member of the Peer Educators of Project Safe, was the secretary for a year and co-coordinator for a year. She has assisted with Hand in Hand training, led the facilitation skills training, and served on the steering committee for Take Back the Night, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Stalking Awareness Month, and Sexual Assault Awareness Month Activities. She was the stage manager for the 2005 V-Day campus production of the *Vagina Monologues* and the director for its 2006 production.

She has been involved with The Vanderbilt Feminists since March of 2004. She was co-communications chair for a year and co-president for a year. She was the director for the Mock Rape Trial one year and advisor the next and very involved in feminist activism throughout.

Katie has been involved with IMAGE since March of 2003. She has been publicity chair for National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, secretary of the organization, and president. She created an educational retreat manual and engaged in numerous body-positive educational and activist events.

In the words of her nominator, "Katie stays dedicated to the cause, never forgetting about women, children, the underprivileged, the oppressed. I believe that such a presence at Vanderbilt University deserves to be recognized, awarded, and applauded." Those of us at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center wholeheartedly agree.



Debunking the Opt-Out Revolution

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numbers don't tell the whole story either." Work can take many forms—part-time, self-employment, entrepreneurship—in fact, it's probably wise to note that most economists do not factor part-time work or self-employment into the statistics. Most economists do, however, refer to this "dip" in LFPR during child-bearing years as the "M" curve, meaning that some mothers do, in fact, leave the workforce for a short time after the birth of a child, but note that many return to the labor force. As Judy Stadtman Tucker, editor of *Mothers Movement Online*, points out, "In reality, the probability a mother will participate in the paid labor force increases with her level of education—over 78 percent of mothers with a graduate or professional degree are in the paid workforce, and they are three times more likely to work full-time as to work part-time."

The quality of that paid labor force, however, is another story. With rising unemployment, more and more companies are downsizing their family-friendly programs, scaling back options for telecommuting and job-sharing as the need to retain employees recedes. Valued workers are asked to work longer hours, any day of the week, without regard to how the job might interfere with personal responsibilities outside the job. Joan Williams writes about this phenomenon in her book *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It*, stating that for mothers, conforming to this kind of work schedule is nearly impossible while cultural standards still expect the mother to do 90 percent of the homemaking and childrearing. Williams states that mothers on the professional career track "face three unattractive choices. They remain in a good job that keeps them away from home 10 to 12 hours a day, or they take a part-time [job] with depressed wages, few benefits and no advancement. Or they quit."

The Choices

OK, so we see that highly educated women DO in fact return to the workforce, but only a small fraction ever make it to the upper ranks of management. Why? Part of the reason, some argue, is the general discrimination some women feel is inherent in the workforce; others argue it might be the societal and cultural attitudes that make work and motherhood seem incompatible.

To highlight these inequities in the upper ranks of management, last year Vanderbilt University's own Women's Social Policy and Research Center (W-SPARC), in collaboration with Nashville CABLE, recently released *Missing Persons: Women in Corporate Director and Executive Positions in Tennessee*. Among the findings: *Of the 105 companies in this study, 55, or 52.4 percent, had no women on their boards; While women make up more than 46 percent of Tennessee's labor force, they fill only 7.3 percent of corporate board seats; Women of color hold only six corporate board seats in Tennessee, or less than one percent; and fifty-four percent of the companies in this study had no female executives.*

Martha Burk, Director of the National Council of Women's Organizations and author of *Cult of Power*, argues that the "major issue for women in corporate culture is that they do not have power. The culture of the workplace dictates that the serious worker is not meant to leave after 8 hours and sometimes [is] required to work 80 hours a week." Her research concludes that neither women nor men

wish to work that many hours. She believes that corporate culture needs to change as well as taking steps to close the wage gap. She concludes, "When a work environment is inhospitable to women, it should be taken as a failure of leadership."

While it may seem that in recent times, some high-powered women have stepped off the fasttrack, citing family reasons, it brings to mind that the real change needs to happen in society at large. When will our response to care-taking responsibilities ever become more than a personal, individual issue? When will we embrace the true idea of "it takes a village" when it comes to care-taking not only for our children, but for our elders, our parents, other family members?

"Upper class women who leave jobs to raise kids are not automatically exempt from uncertainty. Spouses die, become disabled, or sometimes simply leave. Women who exit paying careers are choosing a state of dependency that can end at any time by an act of nature or a court decree—and the terms of settlement are not always advantageous." –Bee Lavender, editor, *Hip Mama* website

Part-timers

The second choice for working mothers might be to choose the part-time route, but that, too, has its problems and inequities. When one chooses to work part-time, one must think of the tradeoffs. *Mothers & More* author, Kristin Maschka, found herself "lucky" to find part-time work in her field after the birth of her child, but at what cost? She reports, "In 2000, data from the National Compensation Survey showed that economy wide, part-timers earn an average \$8.89 per hour versus \$15.77 for full-timers—44% less." She unearthed some disturbing data that has made her think twice about part-time work: "Only 17% of part-time workers receive health insurance benefits, while 59% receive health insurance through their spouses, often paying for the extra coverage. Only 21% of part-time workers are included in their employer's pension plan." To add insult to injury, only 25 states in the U.S. offer unemployment insurance to part-timers who have been laid off or fired. As a working mother who also happens to work part-time, I also had a rude awakening: I recently found out from our financial advisor that I didn't even make enough money to qualify for disability insurance, so here's hoping that writing and editing won't result in any bodily injury anytime soon! As for author Joan Williams, she believes, "Until mothers believe it's not fair, they'll never convince courts, or employers or policy makers that it's not fair."

So, is quitting really the only choice? Will the women who "choose" to opt-out really find happiness?

The Feminine Mystique, Round Two

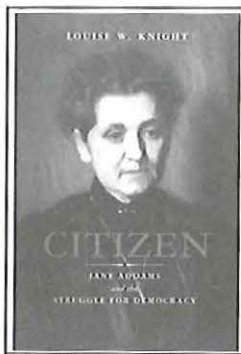
When Betty Friedan wrote her "stirring" account of life in suburbia, she hoped it would be a call to arms and it was. From the 1970s through the 1990s, women made great advances in the workplace. But what of the new generation of women who are now claiming that they will opt out of the workforce when they have children?

The disturbing part of the *Times* article is that there's an inherent underlying feeling that these women believe they will marry well. They have decided to "put all their eggs in one basket." But in reality, motherhood is not all Gymboree classes, book clubs and Starbucks gatherings. As Elizabeth Bauchner states in her *Ithaca Journal* article (November 2003), "At worst, the article focuses only on a small number of women who can afford to leave the workplace without making financial sacrifices because they are married to men earning six figures." She goes on to say, "So the elite have choices. What's so revolutionary about that?" Mothering is hard

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A Look at a Noble Citizen and a Writer's Inner Life

In the Library



At the time of her death in 1935 Jane Addams was one of the most admired women in this country. Four years earlier she had been the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) by Louise W. Knight traces the story of Jane's life up until 1899, by which time she had accomplished a great deal for the poor and for immigrants, and Chicago's Hull House was providing

many needed services. Knight explains that "*Citizen* is intended to show how Jane Addams was born to one life and chose another and how she was transformed by that choice. Her self-expectations were strongly shaped by her femaleness and her upper-middle-class consciousness and status, yet she found a way to break with resulting social pressures even as she partly conformed to them."

Addams was the youngest surviving child born into a prosperous family in 1860 in Cedarville, IL. When she was two her mother died in childbirth and she was raised by an older sister and later a stepmother. She was very close to her father, John Huy Addams, whose attitudes and ideas were very influential in shaping her life. John, who had fairly progressive ideas about women, served as a state senator for sixteen years. From an early age Jane loved reading and learning. As a young woman she hoped to earn a degree from Smith College, in an era when higher education for women was uncommon. Her father was opposed to her attending Smith and instead she graduated from Rockford Seminary, which at that time did not grant bachelor's degrees. For a short time Jane attended medical school in Philadelphia but had to drop out. She had hoped to become a doctor and to serve the poor.

As a young adult much of her time was spent at home with her stepmother and stepbrother. She was torn between her beliefs that as a woman her family should come first and her ambitions to accomplish something and to help the poor, which would mean moving away. Like many women of her class she was fortunate enough to spend an extended period traveling in Europe, from 1883-85. Her constant reading kept exposing her to new ideas, especially about poverty and the position of women. In 1887 she read an article about Toynbee Hall, a settlement house in London, and soon formed a vague idea about establishing one herself. Another European trip and a visit to Toynbee Hall cemented her plans.

In 1889 Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, whom she had met at Rockford, founded Hull House, the first settlement house in Chicago. It was located in a poor neighborhood which had many European immigrants. Major problems there included unemployment, poor housing, overcrowding, uncollected garbage and illness. Originally Addams was motivated by sympathy for the poor and the desire to improve their minds but her opinions and attitudes evolved over time. She came to recognize

injustice in many forms and to fight against it.

Knight details how Hull House grew to become the country's largest settlement house, where many diverse services were provided. Jane's accomplishments and fame also grew. She developed into a social reformer, feminist, lecturer, and pacifist, becoming influential at first in labor disputes and local politics and eventually in national affairs.



Barbara Clarke
Women's Center
Librarian



Julia Briggs' comprehensive work, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Harcourt, 2005) is partly a biography and partly literary criticism, with the writer assuming that readers have some knowledge of Woolf and her works. Taking Virginia's main novels one at a time, with a separate chapter devoted to each, Briggs discusses each work, the critical reaction to its publication, and how it reflects current events, as well as particular situations or incidents in the

author's life. Briggs, a professor of English literature at England's De Montfort University, contends that many previous works on Woolf "concentrate too narrowly on her social life, and so underestimate the centrality of her art – the main source of her interest for us."

The first chapter commences not with details about Woolf's childhood, but rather with the writing of her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Virginia had worked on this project for eight years and it appeared in 1915, when she was aged 33. While a reading of Briggs' volume will give the reader a picture of the significant events of the subject's life, the facts are not presented in chronological order as they are in most biographies.

Woolf's many book reviews, written for literary publications between 1905 and 1937, appeared anonymously, in order to disguise the gender of the reviewer. Woolf and her husband, Leonard, purchased a printing press in 1917 and began producing books under the imprint of Hogarth Press, which was named after their home. From then onward they published Virginia's works, as well as those by other noted writers. Instead of including photographs of the subject, each chapter of Briggs' volume features illustrations either of the title pages of the Hogarth Press editions or of pages from Woolf's manuscripts.

Virginia, who had suffered from mental problems on and off for years, committed suicide in March 1941, four months before the publication of her last book, *Between the Acts*. Briggs shows how Woolf was an early feminist and pacifist, who questioned patriarchy and gender roles from an early age. Until she was rediscovered in recent decades by feminist scholars, Woolf's books generally sold slowly after the initial interest had worn off.

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May 2006 Calendar



Unless otherwise indicated, all groups and events are open to the public and are held at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center at 316 West Side Row on Vanderbilt University's campus.

REGULAR GROUPS/ MEETINGS

Sistahs Reading Sistahs

Wednesday, May 3, from 12:30pm-1:30pm (Meets the 1st Wednesday)

What: A book group for everyone interested in reading African-American women authors. This month the group will be reading Yvonne S. Thornton's *The Ditchdiggers Daughters*.

Who: This group is free and open to everyone! For more info, please contact regina.snell@vanderbilt.edu

read *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* by Mary Roach. For more information, contact Jane Du Bose at jdubose@bellsouth.net or Carmen Gherman at cggherman@yahoo.com.

Vanderbilt Feminists (Vandy Fems)

A student group concerned about women's issues on campus, and promoting equality between genders. **Will resume meeting in the fall.** Open to all students of any gender. Contact sarah.c.dean@vanderbilt.edu or taylor.l.davis@vanderbilt.edu.

Peer Educators of Project Safe

Peer Educators are students trained to facilitate workshops that promote discussion and encourage understanding of violence against women. **Will resume meeting in the fall.** For more information, contact ac.sevilla@vanderbilt.edu or reagan.m.bush@vanderbilt.edu

Men Promoting a Solution

A group of men dedicated to creating awareness about violent crimes against women and eliminating those crimes through social change. On break for the summer but **will resume meeting in the fall.** For more information, contact Tim Lonergan (t.c.lonergan@vanderbilt.edu)

Support Group

What/Who: A support group for women who are survivors of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. This group meets weekly at a confidential time and location; all information shared is kept confidential. For more information, please contact kacy.silverstein@vanderbilt.edu or 322-1333.

Creative Life Planning Group

Tuesdays, May 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30, 11:30am - 1:00 pm (Meets every Tuesday).

What/Who: A group for all dedicated to living life intentionally and creatively. Free and open to everyone and is usually attended by women between 40 and 90 years of age. For more information, call 322-4843.

Creative Writing Group

Tuesday, May 9, at 5:30pm-7pm (meets the 2nd Tuesday).

What: The Creative Writing Group is open to new members! We look forward to hearing your piece. No writing experience necessary. You can bring a piece or create one at the group.

Who: This group is free and open to everyone. It is led by Anna Sir who will be doing some writing instruction as well as facilitation of the group. For more information, or to RSVP to the group, contact annasir@bellsouth.net

Vandy Moms

Thursday, May 11 and 25, 11:30am- 12:30pm (Meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays)

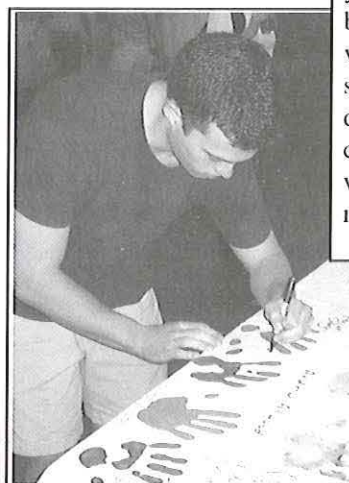
What/Who: Moms of any age! Women who juggle! Superheroes! Open to all mothers, partnered or single. This is a support network that provides advocacy for moms in the Vanderbilt and larger communities. It also provides programming to inform, empower and enrich. The May 11 meeting will be a discussion on the Arab/Israeli conflict led by Bill Longwell, Professor of History at Vanderbilt University. To RSVP, contact misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu or call 343-4367.

Book Group

Monday, May 8, 5:15pm-6:15pm (meets the second Monday)

What/Who: The book group is open to new members at all times and is for anyone who loves to read. The book group will

A Vanderbilt student signs this year's *These Hands Don't Hurt* banner. Project Safe offers many volunteer opportunities for students who want to make a difference on campus and in the community. Please contact vicky.basra@vanderbilt.edu for more information.



Tips for Financial Independence for Women

by Winnie Forrester, Financial Advisor, Wachovia Securities

"From 14 to 40 she needs good looks; from 40 to 60 she needs personality; and I'm here to tell you after 60, she needs cash." —Mary Kay Ash, Founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics

I've been a long-time advocate of financial education for women. Being financially independent for a woman today means freedom. When you're young, it's difficult to think about being 60 or even 40. When you can barely make ends meet, it's hard to put aside money to save, but it's what you do today that makes your future financial situation successful.

Planning ahead is really about women taking charge of their lives and deciding what they want—for their children, their community, and their own financial future. We all know the statistics. Women live longer than men, take more time off for child-rearing, and make less money than men. This makes it even more important to start your financial planning NOW.

Pay yourself first. Build a reserve for emergencies. A rule of thumb is to put away a minimum of three months after-tax income in a safe, money market account.

Live on less than you earn. Create a budget. Then, invest before you pay any of your bills, contributing as much as possible to your 401(k) and IRA.

Pay off your high-interest credit cards. Keep one credit card in your name only to establish your creditworthiness, and in case of an emergency. Pay the balance off each month.

Be smart about your retirement savings. Always take advantage of any employer match to your 401(k) by at least contributing the minimum required to receive it. Twenty-six percent of eligible participants fail to join a 401(k) program, and of those who do, many invest badly, by either putting nearly all their saving into equities or the opposite, all cash. A scary 17% of all such plans are invested solely in the shares of the saver's employer, thus doubling the risk if the company fails. (*Economist* 3/27/04) Sixty-eight percent of those who leave their jobs cash out their 401(k) plans instead of rolling that money over to an IRA or company-sponsored retirement plan. (*Newsweek* 8/21/00) Your retirement money is sacred. It should never be touched before you retire. View it as money that is simply not available to you.

Life insurance Do you have it to protect your family in case you or your husband dies? Forty-eight percent of working wives provide half of family income. You should have enough life insurance to pay off the mortgage, pay for your children's college, and a lump sum that will provide enough annual income to replace your income or your spouse's income if you die. If you are divorced and receiving child support payments, you should make sure you have life insurance on your ex-spouse.

Check the beneficiary designations on all life insurance, accidental death and dismemberment policies. To protect your dependents, it is wise to draft a will and keep it up-to-date.

Know where your assets are. Update your listing and prepare a financial statement for yourself at the end of every year. Take the time to review your investments to see if any re-balancing is needed. Ask for professional advice if you need it.

Make money management part of your normal routine.

Take classes, read books. Stay informed and proactive. Read and review your statements monthly, and once a year review your overall plan to make sure it's still working for you.

Finally, share this message with someone you care about—a friend, mother, daughter, or sister—so they can take action to feel comfortable about their financial lives, too.

For more information, please call Winnie Forrester at 615-372-1140. Wachovia Securities does not render legal, accounting or tax advice. Please consult your CPA or attorney on such matters. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of Wachovia Securities or its affiliates.

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Debunking the Opt-Out Revolution

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work and for many of us, it doesn't resemble days of shopping and expensive preschools. Bauchner is disturbed by how often the media portrays stay-at-home moms as "an elite bunch" when "in reality, most stay-at-home moms have husbands earning less than the median income of \$54,000."

Bee Lavender, editor of *Hip Mama*, a blogsite on motherhood, says of her own choice to work at home: "We do not buy on credit, we do not drive new cars, we do not send our kids to private school." Her current work situation puts her in touch with many mothers who are working in whatever circumstances they can. "The vast majority of families I know live in poverty or in a tenuous version of working poverty, with consumer accoutrements disguising the fact that a missed paycheck may in fact send them stumbling toward economic ruin." Lavender goes on to say that all parents want to raise good kids and to use the word "revolution" is "particularly repugnant" to her considering welfare reform and funding cuts from social programming work to further the economic divide between the rich and the poor. Most of us live somewhere in the economic middle. Bee Lavender also adds, "Upper class women who leave jobs to raise kids are not automatically exempt from uncertainty. Spouses die, become disabled, or sometimes simply leave. Women who exit paying careers are choosing a state of dependency that can end at any time by an act of nature or a court decree—and the terms of settlement are not always advantageous."

It Pays to be Family-Friendly

So now that you've heard about your choices, let me leave you with one last work-related quote that will hopefully strike at the hearts of all you future financial wizards:

In 2004 the women's advocacy organization, Catalyst, cited from its research that "*companies with a higher representation of women in senior positions financially out-performed those with proportionally fewer women at the top.*"

What it comes down to is that most people, men and women, want to work in their chosen field and to do life-affirming work, whether they have children or not. Working women matter, mothers or not.

Lavender leaves us with this thought: "Historically the most truly revolutionary social reforms are derived from a combination of upper class benevolence, lower class agitation, and a healthy dose of middle class pragmatism. We should stop arguing and start planning. Our kids deserve better choices than what we were offered."

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The Fuss Over iPods: How to keep your music and your hearing, too

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month

by Kate Carney

Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center

Over the last few weeks, numerous articles and press releases have been issued warning the public about the danger to hearing from iPods and MP3 players. For many people, this was another in a long line of ignorable health alerts—not life threatening—yet easy to dismiss.

However, since hearing loss can have a significant impact on *quality* of life, it's a good idea to take a second look at this growing problem.

Fortunately, Vanderbilt is home to the country's leading graduate and research program in hearing sciences, so it was fairly easy to check out the facts and learn more about what will and won't hurt your hearing.

The auditory system is relatively complicated, involving a series of anatomic widgets that work in sequence to pass sound energy from the outside of your head to the inside. Like a line of dominoes falling, sound gets funneled into your ear canal, smacks into your ear drum, and starts vibrations in three tiny bones—which in turn send microscopic shock waves through the fluid in the inner ear. The inner ear, the cochlea, is lined with thousands of tiny hair cells which pick up these vibrations at specific frequencies and transmit signals directly to the auditory nerve, where the brain takes over and tells you what you're hearing.

A problem anywhere along this chain—fluid in the middle ear, for instance, which can prevent the ear drum from vibrating—can cause diminished hearing. The most common breakdown in the system for adults, however, is injured and dead hair cells which can no longer transmit information to the auditory nerve. Hair cells can become damaged for any number of reasons, including high fevers and certain drugs, but the single leading cause is LOUD sound.

Human ears evolved over eons to enable us to hear very quiet noises. Given our place in the food chain, it was important to survival be able to hear both predators and prey. Loud noises simply weren't much of an environmental factor until the industrial revolution, and we haven't yet had time to evolve many protective mechanisms for our hearing.

When the hair cells in the cochlea encounter intense sound waves—a lawnmower or a blender or a motorcycle—they literally lie flat from the overwhelming sound energy. If you have ever left a loud concert or football game to discover your ears feel stuffy or muffled, you are experiencing what audiologists call a "temporary threshold shift." This means that a few thousand of your cochlear hair cells are lying down from the shock. After a number of similar episodes, some of them are going to stay down forever.

Damage to the cochlea is cumulative and, at this point in medical knowledge, irreversible. Go to one loud concert and your ears will probably recover fully. Go to one loud concert every week for a year and the muffled sound may become permanent. Ultimately the problem with iPods and MP3 players is that it's possible to turn them up to concert levels of 120 decibels. At 120 decibels, damage to your cochlea can start occurring in less than an hour; so, you can expose yourself to several concerts worth of hearing damage in just one day of high volume iPod use. Unfortunately, the use of ear buds makes matters worse because there's nowhere for the sound to go but directly down your ear canal—kind of the auditory equivalent of checking your pupils with a laser pointer.

If you decide to play it safe and protect your hearing, you don't have to give up music altogether. Just keep the volume down to a level where other people can't hear it leaking out around the ear buds and where you can continue to hear voices and environmental sounds around you. You can also take frequent breaks to give your ears a rest and let them recover. Finally, consider upgrading from ear buds to ear phones so that you're not firing sound at your ear drums at point-blank range.

What can you expect if you decide to live life on the edge and play your iPod at a higher volume? Well, different people develop hearing loss at different rates, but some of the first symptoms you may experience will be muffled sound, ringing in your ears or difficulty understanding speech. Noise-induced hearing loss typically affects soft, higher frequency sounds first, so you may no longer be able to hear a watch ticking. Then, as your hearing loss progresses into the 40-50 decibel range, "r", "th", "s" and "sh" will disappear off your radar. You'll be able to hear people talking, but since a large portion of the sounds will be missing, you won't be able to understand what they're saying—which can be pretty annoying, to say the least. If you were wondering why some of your older relatives are so grumpy, that's probably part of the reason.

What about hearing aids and cochlear implants? Can you live your musical life to the fullest and then when you wear your own hearing out, let technology take over? The answer is, yes and no. Yes, both of these technologies are getting better and better. But no, they still don't reproduce normal hearing. Hearing aids can amplify what you've got left, but they can't add hearing that's gone for good. Cochlear implants can take the place of a completely dead cochlea, but can sound electronic and artificial. Ironically, implants that can make music enjoyable are still in the developmental stages, so if you lose your hearing listening to music, you may never get that music back.

Just like deciding what SPF sunscreen to use or whether your aorta can afford for you to eat one more Big Mac, protecting your hearing is one of those things you do *now* to hang on to your quality of life *later*. Significant hearing loss can occur over a very short period of time at any age, so it's not uncommon for a hearing problem to become noticeable by the age of forty—or even thirty. Consider doing your older self a favor and turn the music down now, so you can still enjoy it in 20 years.

For more information on hearing loss, hearing protection, and hearing aids, go to www.audiology.org. Apple has a good article on safe iPod use at www.apple.com/sound

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month. The Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences reminds you to wear ear plugs or other ear protection while using lawnmowers or other power tools this summer.

Kate Carney, M.A., is Public Relations Coordinator for the Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center. She received her bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Earlham College and her master's in International Communication from American University. She has been part of the Bill Wilkerson Center team for almost 20 years.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

NASHVILLE NOW (NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN) meets the 4th Monday of the month, May 22 at the Nashville Peace and Justice Center behind Scarritt Bennett at 7pm. This meeting is open to members, friends and those seeking more information. For more information, contact CynthiaNashNOW@aol.com or 269-7141.

NASHVILLE CABLE will present nationally-known speaker and author, *Audra M. Bohannon*, on the topic of "The Power of Inclusion: Recognizing the Potential in Every Employee," addressing the topic of diversity, at CABLE's May 10th luncheon and Silent Auction, from 11:00am - 1pm, Nashville Downtown Hilton Hotel. The cost for the luncheon and lecture is \$50/person.

Drawing on her expertise in human resources, training and diversity management, Ms. Bohannon will challenge the belief that only some employees have the potential to be top contributors and will make a case for a new inclusive model of human resource development. With an increasingly diverse workplace and the demands of a global economy, it is imperative that business professionals and civic leaders understand and embrace the new paradigm of inclusion. Effective management of a diverse workforce has bottom-line implications for your life and business.

Proceeds from this fundraising event will be allocated to support CABLE's diverse programming. Reservations can be made by calling the CABLE office at 255-1951 or online at www.nashvillecable.org.

THE VANDERBILT CENTER FOR SCIENCE OUTREACH is currently accepting applications for the **Girls and Science (GAS) camp** and the **Boys Exploring Science and Technology (BEST) camp**. The camps are one-week long day camps for middle school students with a strong interest in science. Camps are held from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the bioscience laboratories on the Vanderbilt campus (except for the first week of GAS camp at Dyer Observatory). Campers will have opportunities to perform fun hands-on science activities and observe interesting demonstrations. These programs are designed to encourage students' interest in science and science-related activities.

Dates for GAS (girls):

Session I at Dyer Observatory (current 8th graders): June 19-23
Session II (current 8th graders): July 10-14 Session III (current 7th graders): July 17-21 Session IV (current 7th graders): July 24-28

Dates for BEST (boys):

Session I: June 19-23, 2006
Session II: June 26-30, 2006

Ages: Current 7th grade boys and current 7th and 8th grade girls (as of 2005-6 school year)

Cost: \$125 (Scholarships are available for financial need)

Registration Deadline: June 2, 2006

Applications are processed on a first come, first served basis and may be obtained on the Center for Science Outreach website www.vanderbilt.edu/cso



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