





Inconceivable

The Brave New World of Making Babies

By Marielena Zuniga

Nancy* from Boston, Mass., desperately wanted to have a baby. Married when she was 29, she couldn't get pregnant easily and when she did, she couldn't carry the pregnancies to term. Like many couples, she and her husband heard countless doctors tell them there was no medical reason for their inability to conceive.

"I was very determined and pushed my doctor hard to get us advanced treatment as quickly as we could," she says. "So we did a couple of cycles of IUI (intrauterine insemination)** but it didn't take."

Nancy moved on to in vitro fertilization (IVF)*** and became pregnant twice, but miscarried both times. The rounds of various reproductive treatments over the years started taking an emotional toll.

"Women in our age group were having children and it was so hard for me to be around people having children," she shares. "I felt so defective and often felt like I had to pretend I didn't want a baby."

At age 45, Nancy became pregnant the "natural way" but at eight weeks, she miscarried again. "Getting pregnant was really the focus for me for a long time," she says, "being normal and having that experience and being like everybody else."

Brave new world

For infertile women like Nancy, baby-making can be a heart-breaking business. But today, science is delivering what nature cannot. A reproductive revolution has created a techno-maze of techniques and an unprecedented rush by would-be parents to take advantage of them.

It's called assisted reproductive technology (ART), and includes any procedure that brings egg and sperm together in some way other than by normal, natural means. In this brave new scientific world the methods for "becoming pregnant" are growing. Among them are IVF; fertility drugs; artificial insemination; surrogacy; and donor eggs or donor sperm. Today, families can be pieced together with borrowed sperm, borrowed eggs and borrowed wombs.

"Thirty years ago, IVF existed but it was very much science fiction, a rare, but expensive treatment," says Rebecca Kukla, Ph.D., professor of philosophy and obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Florida, Tampa, and a feminist bioethicist who engages with issues in health care and the biosciences from a feminist viewpoint. "You were thought of as taking extra steps outside the natural path. Now there are other fancy kinds of ARTs and IVF is more routine. It's no longer seen as a strange thing to pursue. It's starting to become one of the more 'normal' options."

These new technologies are stirring up not only conflicting feelings, but ethical questions: How many embryos should safely be transferred? Is PGD, or preimplantation genetic diagnosis (used to test for genetic mutations or risks), a

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Regulating fertility clinics

The ethical confusion surrounding assisted reproductive technology (ART) has led to a growing call for regulation in many countries. The United States is notorious for its inadequate laws and oversight of assisted reproduction, which has become a \$3 billion dollar a year business. The same applies in Japan, where ART has long been regulated only by the guidelines authored by the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology (JSOG).

In the United Kingdom, however, the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority (HFEA) licenses clinics and regulates research, limiting the number of embryos implanted and prohibits sex selection (PDG) for non-medical reasons.

“PDG is the single most controversial subject to ever face this field because you get right back to the eugenics issue,” says Art Caplan, referring to the idea of selective breeding. “The industry sees this not just as inevitable, but incredibly lucrative,” says the chair of the department of medical ethics at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Rebecca Kukla, professor of philosophy and obstetrics/gynecology at the University of South Florida, questions how the services of fertility clinics are marketed to women and how success rates are reported and made available. The feminist bioethicist would like to see regulation forcing fertility clinics to disclose different measures, and providing information to women and couples before they make decisions.

“Clinics are allowed to advertise and can package information about their success rates to prospective patients any way they want,” she says. “But no standardized regulation exists on what counts as ‘success.’ Does that mean a pregnancy happened? Does it result in a live birth and was the baby healthy, and does that baby have a prognosis for a healthy life?”

Kukla also takes issues with fertility clinics marketing their services to look more like cosmetic surgery than medical care. “That’s problematic when we’re talking about procedures that are invasive and creating human beings,” she says.— /

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slippery slope to gender selection and “designer babies?” What happens to the hundreds of thousands of frozen embryos in clinics? And how much manipulation of genetic material will society allow?

Scientific advances in the field have been happening so quickly that only recently have ethical questions crept into public consciousness. There is religious fear about “playing God,” the fear of eugenics (the study of hereditary improvement of the human race by controlled selective breeding), the fear of parents buying into the fantasy of the “perfect” baby, and producing designer babies.

“Technology is morally neutral and is neither right nor wrong in itself,” says Gloria Halverson, M.D., an ob-gyn focusing on reproductive technology and professor emeritus at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. “It’s what you do with it that can cause issues. So people must carefully consider the ethical implications within their context before they proceed with them.”

How many is too many?

The media-celebrated case of Nadya Suleman, the “Octomom” from California, evoked many ethical questions, including one of the most powerful today: How many embryos to implant? In this case, Suleman and her physician transferred six frozen embryos. Two of the embryos split, which resulted in Suleman giving birth to eight babies.

The American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) based in Alabama, a leading organization in the field of reproductive medicine, recommends that a woman under the age of 35 should attempt to transfer no more than two, and preferably only one, fertilized embryo at a time. Women over age 40 should attempt no more than five by way of IVF. Those limits have been chosen in order to avoid multiple births that would expose

both mother and babies to significant health risks.

How many embryos to transfer is a huge issue in the United States, which still has no regulation over fertility clinics (see sidebar). Countries such as France, Australia and Germany, however, have legislation that limits the number of embryos that can be transferred. New legislation in Belgium restricts women younger than 36 years of age to single-embryo transfer during their first treatment cycle.

In 1995, the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology (JSOG) released the recommendation that the number of embryos transferred should be no more than three in each cycle. But in Japan, as in other countries such as Egypt, no mechanisms exist to enforce those limits. Countries including Greece and Canada have neither guidelines nor legislation pertaining to the number of embryos that can be transferred. In England, where fertility clinics are highly regulated, only single-embryo transfer is allowed and Kukla believes this is the wave of the future.

“As we are getting better at it, which we are very quickly doing, that will become the standard of care,” she says. “More than two or three embryos



Photo Credit: Gettyimages.com

In January 2009, “Octomom” Nadya Suleman gave birth to octuplets controversially conceived through in vitro fertilization.

under any circumstances is clearly unethical and is really a heightened risk to everyone. We know that once we get above three, certainly four, the chance of ... extremely serious disabilities is high and almost certainly by implanting six or seven embryos, you're taking a known risk of children who will have serious health issues and developmental delays and so on."

You can't put children at risk, agrees Arthur Caplan, chair of the department of medical ethics at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, an advocate for more professional regulations in the fertility field.

"We tend to hear the voices of men and women who want to use the technology, but no one speaks for the children, for their protection and well-being," he says. "If you make octuplets, you've just made a medical and social disaster for the kids. Who speaks for them? The media love multiple births, but they're medical disasters for the kids because they're always premature and have disabilities and are high risk for the mothers. Plus, they stick a huge financial bill on society to pay for it all."

The high cost of fertility

While couples worldwide are finding hope through ART, these high-tech options aren't always successful. They involve repeated, hours-long visits to fertility clinics for endless tests and rounds of hormone injections. Many people exhaust their savings to pay for high-cost treatments. In Japan, fertility treatments over four years carry a price tag of almost \$50,000. Medical insurance in Japan covers some of the drug treatments, but all of the IVF expenses must be absorbed by the parents.

The Japanese, however, are not alone in footing high medical expenses for fertility treatments. In the U.S., one IVF cycle can cost upwards of \$12,000, and couples who have to pay out of pocket may not be able to afford to try again. In the United States, insurance coverage is individual and per state, and according to many, the

cost issue has also raised ethical questions. Some are concerned whether only the very wealthy or middle class can afford ART.

"The infertility field has evolved as a cash business in the U.S., with infertility specialists some of the highest paid doctors today," Caplan says. "Poor people have the right to make babies but it's not politically popular."

Despite these obstacles, couples continue to try various methods of assisted reproduction for its most valued result: a child. Globally, about a quarter of a million babies were born through ART in 2002, the last year for which a worldwide estimate exists.

In Japan, use of ART to overcome infertility is extraordinary. According to the latest government statistics, the nation's birth rate—currently 1.3 babies per woman—is down from highs of between 1.4 and 1.7 in the 1960s. So, not only do many infertile Japanese women long to have a baby, many feel pressured by society to produce an offspring.

With a population of 127 million, Japan has 474 medical institutions, including privately owned clinics offering fertility treatments. By contrast, the United States, with a population of 280 million, has 350 such clinics. Government statistics in Japan also reveal that every year about 12,000 babies—one in 100—are conceived through the aid of fertility technology. Doctors predict the ratio to rise to one in 50 within a few years.

Frozen embryos

For Nancy, who longed to be a mother, endless rounds of treatment led her and her husband to the question many couples ask: When is enough, enough? Ellen Glazer, LICSW, a clinical social worker and family building counselor in the Boston, Massachusetts, area, asks, "How do you decide when someone has gotten to the point, taking hormones, surgical procedures, etc., that these procedures are unlikely to help them?" she questions. "The physician's dictum is 'first do no harm' so this is a hard decision to make."

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Around the world, an estimated 515,000 women die each year due to pregnancy-related complications. Millions of other women sustain serious health problems due to pregnancy and childbirth. Whatever their method of conception, pregnant women around the world need safe and affordable access to maternal care. Clubs can help by:

- Easing the financial burden of prenatal care. Help low-income women apply for programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) in the U.S., or offer to pay for doctor's visits, prenatal vitamins and other important screening tests that can help detect a problem during pregnancy.

- Raising awareness about the risks pregnant women face and the importance of obtaining prenatal care. Disseminate information about maternal health in community places, such as malls, hospitals, police stations, etc.

- Advocating that local legislators address the maternal care needs of their communities. Encourage law-makers to increase support for community health centers to help ensure pregnant women have access to the care they need.

- Supporting organizations like Family Health International, which works worldwide to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity by developing strategies to improve maternal and neonatal care at all health-system levels. Visit <fhi.org> for more information about the organization and its programs to prevent maternal deaths.

- Sponsoring community baby showers. Clubs can support moms-to-be by hosting events in their honor and inviting local residents to donate clothing and supplies they'll need when their babies arrive. Club members can also use the time to connect with these women and offer guidance, assistance and advice.

- Participating in the Women's Opportunity Awards program, which helps mothers and their children improve their economic status.

Reproduction without borders

Welcome to the brave new world of reproductive tourism. Thanks to the Internet, well-heeled North American and European couples are connecting with fertility clinics in countries such as Thailand, the Czech Republic and Israel. Why? Because the cost of in vitro fertilization (IVF) is much less costly in many foreign countries, even after factoring in travel and hotel expenses.

The big players to date are India and Poland, but Latin American countries are also involved, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Argentinean fertility clinics, for example, are increasingly marketing themselves to international health care consumers, offering all-inclusive packages, with everything from airfare to language interpreters, and of course, fertility treatments.

While economics are a motivating factor for women from America and Europe, tough laws in other countries are driving the flip side of the fertility coin. Women from Canada and Australia and some parts of Europe—where payment of egg donors is forbidden—are coming to U.S. fertility clinics, where there is no regulation, to get pregnant with donated eggs implanted through IVF.

Another issue adding to the growing ethical mix? In many Western countries, despite high payment for egg donations (see main article), the available supply is often low and waiting lists are long. To keep up with the demand, fertility clinics in more affluent countries have started seeking egg donors in poorer nations. For many, this causes a multitude of moral and ethical issues, including the exploitation of women who are desperate for money and may be exposed to risks around egg retrieval.

In addition, reproductive outsourcing is becoming a new, rapidly expanding business in India. Clinics that provide surrogate mothers for foreigners have been flooded with requests from the U.S. and Europe. Commercial surrogacy, which is banned in some states and European countries, was legalized in India in 2002. This free-market approach to baby-making is troublesome to many because the women who serve as surrogates are usually poor and illiterate, signing contracts with a fingerprint.— /

“Just because a woman owns her frozen embryos, having them implanted when she’s in her 60s doesn’t mean it’s a good idea.”

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While undergoing her treatments, Nancy had nine frozen embryos. She used all but one. What happened to the that last embryo? It was of very poor quality so it went the way of “benign neglect,” she says.

For many couples, what to do with unneeded embryos can be a gut-wrenching decision. Embryos that are not transferred are put into frozen storage and what happens to them boils down to five choices: use them; donate them for research; donate them to another infertile person; freeze them indefinitely; or have them thawed, that is, quietly disposed of.

A recent survey of U.S. fertility centers pointed to nearly 400,000 frozen embryos. But the question of who legally owns the frozen embryos becomes sticky, especially if a couple divorces or one person dies.

Frozen embryos are, and ought to be, the property of the couples who created them, Kukla says. “It’s their genetic material, their gametes**** involved, and there’s a strong presumption that a couple should decide what happens to them,” she says.” But there are huge qualifications on that, she adds. The fact that a couple owns the embryos doesn’t mean they have a right to insist that doctors do things with those embryos that may be medically risky or ethically inadvisable.

“Just because a woman owns her frozen embryos, having them implanted when she’s in her 60s doesn’t mean it’s a good idea,” Kukla adds. “Doctors are also human beings with their own moral or professional stance and can decide whether something is too risky or ethically reasonable.”

What to do with frozen embryos is a “big emotional issue” for people, adds Glazer who opposes donation of embryos to other couples. “I feel

strongly that people who believe that embryos are like fetuses should be amply counseled in advance,” she says, “so they don’t find themselves with extra embryos that they will neither use, discard or donate to science.”

Egg freezing is an entirely different matter. Women’s eggs are very delicate and can be easily damaged when they are thawed. But a quick-freezing method recently devised by Japanese researchers holds promise over present techniques. According to researchers, this technology opens up new horizons, enabling women to have the option of having children at a later time by freezing eggs rather than embryos.

Third-party reproduction

As if the issue of frozen embryos wasn’t enough, more ethical questions arise with third-party reproduction. Who should be donors and how much should they be paid? Whose child is it, the donors of the genetic material or the parents raising the child? Many of the ethical dilemmas are complex with no easy answers.

The process of sperm donation is relatively easy for most men and therefore, payment has been minimal, in the hundreds of dollars. But for women, it is an intensive process requiring heavy-duty ovary-stimulating drugs and invasive procedures to retrieve the eggs. So payment for egg donors is usually in the thousands of dollars.

Strictly speaking, paying for donated eggs is illegal in the U.S., since it counts as buying a body part. But it is legal to compensate a donor for her time and effort, and this compensation can be very high. Some critics say, however, that it’s repugnant to pay a woman \$2,000 to \$4,000 for her eggs, a typical rate in both Canada and the United States. The ASRM says women should

be compensated no more than \$5,000, but many agencies pay more, and some donors have earned well over \$20,000.

What concerns Kukla is how women are compensated, in other words, are women paid different amounts for their eggs depending on their level of education, features, race and ethnic background? Today, a couple can go online and peruse egg-donor menus that will help select the profile of the child's genetic mother.

"When egg donation becomes commodified for these reasons, it becomes highly problematic," Kukla says. "This will drive up the cost of the eggs ... and [some believe] getting 'educated eggs' will produce a smart baby. That relies on the assumption that education is a matter of personal genetics, rather than a combination of genetics and environment."

The ethics and laws around donation, as well as around IVF, get thorny in many of the 60 countries that provide ART, Halverson says. "In Italy in 2004 they passed a law that you have to be a married, heterosexual couple to have IVF," she explains. "So they have banned it from single people and people who are homosexual. Sperm donation for IVF is not allowed in Germany, Italy, Tunisia and Turkey. Anonymous donation [of gametes] is allowed in Norway and the UK, but in England, the donors can't be paid."

Designerbabies

Desiring certain characteristics in a child opens another ethical can of worms. PGD, or preimplantation genetic diagnosis, is done to screen for lethal anomalies where a child may have multiple congenital defects. Ethical questions, however, have risen as to sex selection or choosing certain physical qualities. So, is PGD going to be used to create genetically perfect children or choose the sex of the child, Halverson questions?

PGD solely for sex selection is banned in many countries, with France, the United Kingdom, Japan, India and Australia being some of them. And although the ASRM has discouraged use of PGD solely for the use of sex selection, it is still not banned in the U.S. for that purpose.

Because the U.S. has no regulations, many people with wealth are coming in from countries where boys are desired, Halverson says. "And if you look at situations in China and India, where they drown girl babies or abort them, what does this say to you about the child's value?"

A whole group of additional ethical issues come up with surrogacy, when an infertile couple asks another woman to carry their child. There are two kinds of surrogacy. Gestational surrogacy is when a woman has usable eggs but cannot carry a pregnancy. So, the couple creates an embryo through IVF and has it transferred to another woman's uterus. Sometimes called "rent-a-womb," the baby is the genetic child of the parents and has no genetic relationship to the surrogate.

If a woman has no usable eggs, the surrogate can be inseminated with the husband's sperm. The child, then, is the genetic child of the surrogate and has no genetic relationship to the infertile woman. This is called true surrogacy.

"With gestational carriers, such as some of the movies stars in their 40s now having twins—are there medical reasons for doing this or is it for their convenience?" Halverson questions. "You're also paying the surrogate and so, are you putting that woman at risk? What if her prenatal care isn't adequate? What if she bonds with the child and wants to keep it? The baby can also become a consumer item. I remember a case in which the baby had birth defects; the couple would not take it and the surrogate didn't want it."

Adoption as a choice

As scientists continue to push the boundaries of assisted reproduction, offering new hope for childless couples, the ethical and moral questions continue to grow. For Nancy from Boston, years of her life were consumed in trying to become pregnant using assisted reproduction.

Eventually, she decided on adoption. As the wait for a referral to adopt from China grew longer and longer, Nancy and her husband moved toward domestic infant adoption and today are parents of three transracial children. While the sting of infertility never leaves, she admits, she no longer mourns never having given birth.

"I feel like I make sense now," she shares. "Not every woman desperately wants it [motherhood] ... and I can't tell you that any woman who doesn't want a child is incomplete. But for me, it was a huge, emotional hole in my life that I was pretty sure would leave me emotionally hobbled for the rest of my life. I revel in and celebrate getting to be a mom to these particularly spectacular kids."🌍

** Nancy's full name was not used at her request.*

***Intrauterine insemination (IUI) is the artificial insemination of sperm, which have been washed free of seminal fluid, into the uterine cavity.*

**** IVF is the creation of an embryo outside the human body, done by placing a man's sperm and a woman's egg in a petri dish, allowing fertilization and several days' growth to take place, and then transferring the embryo to the woman's uterus.*

***** Gamete is a gender-inspecific word that refers to both eggs and sperm.*

Marileena Zuniga is STA's staff writer. Winner of the 2009 CrOly Award, she is a long-time contributor to *Best for Women* magazine.

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In the next issue: Women and Art. Please email Editor Jessica Levinson <jessica@soroptinist.org> with relevant information.

membership



Are you a Soroptimist “in the know?” If not, it’s easy to become one!

What if you picked up the phone to dial a co-committee member and the number was disconnected? What if you tried to send your fellow club members an email about an important change to an upcoming meeting and half of them bounced back as undeliverable? What if you sent a birthday card to your club president and it was returned with a bright red “return to sender, address unknown” stamp?

At first you might think you had a “typo,” or maybe you have fair-weather relationships and this is a subtle hint from your Soroptimist friends! But, most likely that isn’t the case. There is a good chance your address books are out-of-date. People move, change home phones and cell phones, emails, jobs, etc. In today’s world of connectivity—there are many networks on which to share this change in status and information.

At Soroptimist headquarters, we are working hard to promote our programs and to keep members up-to-date with important information. In addition to our quarterly *Best for Women* magazine, we send out emails with exciting news such as President Cathy appearing on national television, convention information, new program resources, and how you can help immediately in the event of a natural disaster such as those in Haiti and Chile. That is why an accurate membership database is vital.

Member Profile

As a Soroptimist member, you can easily check and edit your profile* on the Soroptimist website. By following these simple steps, you can review and update your personal information in minutes:

- Visit <Soroptimist.org>
- Click on “Members Enter Here”
- Under the “Quick Links” heading, click “Update Member Profile.”

You can log in to the secure area of SIA’s website by entering your username and password. Your username is your six-digit member ID number (ask your club treasurer or see the label on the back of your magazine). The first time you log in, the password is your six-digit member number. For security purposes, we strongly urge members to change their initial password. Instructions for doing so are on the login page.

Please help to keep our rosters accurate by reviewing your profile. If you have any questions or problems, please email <siahq@soroptimist.org> for assistance.

(It is our policy not to release personal information about staff or members to non-Soroptimists. For our detailed privacy policy, please visit our website.)

Club Email Address

Another very important part of our communication strategy—both internally and externally—is our club email address system. SIA has provided all clubs with an email address ending with “@soroptimist.net.”

Not only does SIA headquarters send information to these addresses (see sidebar for some examples), but the public has access to the addresses via our website. There are several important reasons why people may contact your club email address:

- A potential member may be contacting your club about becoming a member.
- A local donor could be trying to reach out to commend your efforts and find out how he/she can help financially.
- An interested applicant for the Women’s Opportunity Award could be seeking assistance.
- The local media could be trying to contact a club for more details about a club event.

This is a convenient and anonymous way for the community at large to keep its finger on the Soroptimist pulse.

All clubs should designate someone to access this account on a regular basis. If you need help setting-up or accessing your account, see the membership section on the SIA website and look under Club Administration—Using the Soroptimist Club Email System. You can also contact <siahq@soroptimist.org>.

By taking some time to check your profile and using your club’s email address, you can ensure you are receiving the latest news and updates from SIA headquarters as well as information from your own community.

Only with your assistance can we increase the lines of communication between members, headquarters, and the general public so we can pursue our mission of improving the lives of women and girls. ☺

By Nicole Simmons, Membership Director
Email: nicole@soroptimist.org

What information is being sent to club email accounts?

The following are actual examples of the types of emails being sent to your club’s Soroptimist email account—is your club missing out on these important messages?

- **Club President’s Calendar**—a bimonthly listing of notable federation deadlines, including ballots, program, fundraising and magazine submission deadlines.
- **Club Mailings**—notifications of electronic club mailings previously sent in hard-copy format.
- **Membership Inquiries**—potential members who believe in our mission and are ready to take action by becoming a member.
- **General Inquiries**—Individuals looking for Women’s Opportunity, Violet Richardson and Ruby Awards; local organizations looking for project partners in their local areas; groups wanting a speaker from the Soroptimist club; individuals looking to speak at a Soroptimist meeting; Soroptimist members from other federations who want to visit an SIA club during their travels; individuals seeking grants or partnerships.



Soroptimist Model Program Kits: A Wealth of Information and Inspiration

Does your club need:

- An infusion of new project ideas?
- More background information on a particular issue affecting women and/or girls?
- Help planning, implementing and promoting projects?

If so, check out the Soroptimist model program kits, available in the program section of the members' area of the SIA website, <Soroptimist.org>.

The value and usefulness of the Soroptimist model program kits cannot be overstated. One hundred percent of surveyed club members who have used model program kits found them very useful or useful. For instance, **Bev Bucur**, past Midwestern Region governor and member of **SI/Illiana, Illinois, USA**, describes the kits as "extremely comprehensive and helpful." In her experience, the kits provide "everything clubs need to create a successful program that benefits women and girls."

Soroptimist model program kits are indeed designed to help clubs plan and implement projects that address specific issues facing women and girls, such as violence, health, trafficking and mentoring. The kits have been meticulously researched and written to provide clubs with a wealth of information and inspiration. Soroptimist model program kits are just what your club needs to launch your next project.

For example, SI/Illiana recently used the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Campaign model program kit to create a three-part project. The club conducted workshops for parents, created a resource booklet for teachers, and produced *The Yellow Dress*, a theatrical performance about teen dating violence for middle school students.

In addition to creating dynamic, hands-on projects, SI/Illiana has also used model program kits to discuss issues, such as domestic violence and trafficking, during interviews with media contacts. Bev also notes that the model program kits are of great benefit not only to clubs, but to partner organizations as well. SI/Illiana regularly shares the kits with the community organizations they work with when conducting joint partnership projects.

As a Soroptimist, you may find it challenging to balance your volunteer activities with busy work and/or family schedules. Although you are committed to improving the lives of women and girls in your community, you may not always have the time to research and develop new club projects. By using a Soroptimist Model Program Kit, the time needed to research, establish and maintain a club project will be greatly reduced. In addition, each comprehensive kit includes proven methods and resources for ensuring a successful project.

Each model program kit includes:

- An overview of the issue.
- Guidelines for preliminary planning, including information about community needs assessments.
- Specific project ideas.
- Information about fundraising.
- Public awareness resources, including sample news releases and editorials.
- Guidelines for conducting a post-project evaluation.
- Information about project reporting, including how to get published in *Best for Women*.
- Examples of other successful club projects.
- Resource lists.
- Project handouts.

Soroptimist model program kits have been created exclusively to support your club in achieving its mission to improve the lives of women and girls. We encourage you to discover the value and usefulness of the kits for yourself, for as Bev can attest: "All the model program kits are wonderful." 🌍

By Dawn Walsh, Program Manager
Email: dawn@soroptimist.org

Soroptimist Model Program Kits

The following eight model program kits can be downloaded from the program section of the members' area of the SIA website:

- Designing a Club Mentoring Program for Girls
- Domestic Violence Shelters: Beginning a Life without Violence
- Violence Against Women and Girls Action Projects
- Trafficking: Assisting Victims and Advocating for Change
- Women and Heart Health
- Early Detection of Breast Cancer
- Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Awareness Campaign
- Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Awareness Day

public awareness



What's on Your Mind? The Face of Social Media

The average age of a Soroptimist is 60 years old, which falls into the “baby boomer” category (those born between 1946 and 1964). The use of social networking among baby boomers has grown steadily since 2007 and continues to climb.

By now, you know that many social networking sites exist. One you probably hear about the most is Facebook. According to the report “Boomers and Social Media” by Lisa E. Phillips, Facebook is the most popular social networking site for baby boomers, as well as for Generation X’ers, which also include many Soroptimists.

Facebook is a site for sharing information. It is an online meeting place to connect with old friends; make new friends; keep in touch with family; and network with associates. You can also form/join groups with others who have similar interests. If you aren’t already doing any of that, what are you waiting for? Luckily, creating a Facebook account only takes about 10 minutes.

Facebook isn’t just for personal use. Organizations use it too. Soroptimist has a Facebook page and encourages clubs to create their own as well. According to eRocketfuel, a web design company that offers Internet marketing solutions, one million businesses use Facebook to optimize their brands.

When creating an account, Facebook recommends that organizations start a page, where people can become fans. A page allows an organization to push messages out to its fans, which enables fans to connect with the organization’s brand. When the organization posts messages, known as “updates,” they show up on its fans’ walls. The purpose of a page isn’t just to distribute information. Fans can add pictures, post messages and communicate with other fans. Become a fan of Soroptimist’s page to see how it works.

To create a fan page for your club, visit <facebook.com/pages/create.php>. The information you include here will allow your club to turn up in Facebook searches. Once the information is in, add the Soroptimist logo to serve as your club’s identifying image.

Someone in the club, preferably the public relations person, should serve as the administrator and be in charge of posting updates. Keep in mind that posting too much or too little can both have negative effects on fans. The information should be engaging and foster communication between the club and its fans, as well as between fans and other fans.

Club members should all join Facebook and become fans of the club’s Facebook page to help get the conversation rolling. Talk to each other and share photos and videos, but don’t forget that it is a Soroptimist page. Try to keep information related to the organization and mission. Non-members can see this page too. Save personal information for your personal Facebook account.

Also, reach out to and network with similar organizations, especially those you want to share information with. This will certainly open the door to more public awareness for the club, but it could also help generate donations and new members.

A benefit of clubs having a page is the event tab. Use this tab to spread the word about a club event, such as a meeting, fundraiser or project. Clubs can create an event listing, invite people to attend, and post information about the upcoming event. Invites can be open to anyone or made private. Invitees can RSVP through the event page as well.

One thing SIA found when using the event tab for its upcoming San Francisco convention is that fans couldn’t comment on each other’s posts. If you are having an event, such as a region conference, and want members to talk to one another and see who wants to carpool or share a room, clubs can set up a page just for that event. Check out SIA’s San Francisco convention page to see how it is done.

Once the club has a page, promote it. Put a link on the club website; have members include a link in their email signatures; and add the link to press releases and ads. If your club needs help setting up your Facebook page, please contact SIA’s communications department.

These are only some of the benefits of becoming involved with Facebook. Get in there to explore the other ways it can benefit your club. ☺

TELL US: Do you already use or plan to use social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter? Take SIA’s online poll at <Soroptimist.org/members.htm>.



Become a fan of SIA’s Facebook page to receive the most up-to-date information from headquarters, connect with other members, and share photos, videos and Soroptimist friendship!

By Kamali Brooks
Public Relations Manager
Email: kamali@soroptimist.org



The Many Faces of Philanthropy

Do you think you have what it takes to be a philanthropist? Most of us would give an emphatic “no” as the answer to this question. The stereotype of a philanthropist is a person with an excessive amount of money giving millions to humanitarian projects that make significant societal changes. Think Oprah, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

Philanthropy is defined as “an active effort to promote human welfare” and “funds for humanitarian purposes.” There is no mention of giving ability that defines philanthropy. We all have the potential to be philanthropists.

In the last 30 years, much research has been done on women’s philanthropy and the impact it has had, and continues to have, in changing our world. Sondra Shaw-Hardy and Martha A. Taylor—leaders and visionaries in the women’s philanthropy movement—developed the “Six C’s” that define a woman’s motivation to give. Women give to Create solutions to problems, Change the status quo, Connect with those they help, Commit to organizations whose vision they share, Collaborate with others for a greater effort, and Celebrate their accomplishments. Taylor and Hardy also identified the five-stage journey of a woman to become a philanthropist:

1. Motivation—find your passion
2. Knowledge—of your own finances and projects that support your passion
3. Action—involvement with the organization
4. Leadership—becoming a leader
5. Legacy—passing on your values to the next generation.

How many of you can identify with these five points in your Soroptimist commitment? Being a philanthropist is not about how much you give, but why you give and the collective power of those who support the mission. In just the last three years, SIA has raised \$4.2 million,

enabling us to change the lives of thousands of women and their families through federation programs that open the doors to education, encourage financial independence, and protect women from violence.

More than 6,000 members have generously given \$1,000 or more to fund SIA programs, and are proud to wear the Laurel Society pin. But not everyone can contribute at that level. The important thing is that your contribution is meaningful and affordable for you.

The current state of the economy has donors re-thinking—but not stopping—their charitable giving. For some members, a future gift such as a bequest and being a member of the Laurel Legacy is fitting for them. For others, small and consistent giving is more appropriate now. More than 70 Soroptimists have enrolled in the monthly giving program. The average contribution is \$70 per month. A dependable monthly gift of \$100, \$60 or even \$30 will multiply the impact of your support by providing reliable funding for SIA programs. For less than a cup of coffee a day, you can make a tremendous difference for a woman struggling to improve her life. Visit the donate page at <Soroptimist.org> to find the best way for you to satisfy your “Six C’s.”

We celebrate each and every donor, and each and every gift. Take credit for the changes you make happen for women everywhere because of your commitment to the Soroptimist mission. And be proud to call yourself a philanthropist. To learn more about women and charitable giving, listen to “The Purse and the Power—A Look at Women’s Philanthropy” on Soroptimist Blog Talk Radio at <blogtalkradio/Soroptimist>. 🎧

By Nancy Montvydas
Senior Director of Development
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Donor Spotlight: Birthday Honors

Helen Block has been a Soroptimist a long time—long enough that her now-adult children grew up with Soroptimist. She’s so proud of her commitment to improving the lives of women and girls that her vehicle license plate reads “BST4WMN.”

Helen is a member of SI/Manhattan Beach, California, as is her daughter, Karen Block. Helen believes clubs and members should reach out to women beyond their own communities and embrace the international interests Soroptimist supports.

When it was time to celebrate a milestone birthday, Helen casually mentioned to her family that she really would love to have a great big party and donations to be made to Soroptimist. Karen listened and Helen was honored at a party last December. Knowing how much Soroptimist means to Helen, her family and friends donated more than \$2,500 in her honor to support Soroptimist programs. The donations touched Helen beyond words. The gifts are recognition of how special she is and how important Soroptimist is to her.

We welcome Helen as an Envoy member of the Laurel Society, and are grateful to Helen, Karen and everyone who made this birthday special for her—and for the women we help.



Helen (left) with her daughter, Karen.



This is the second of two columns devoted to reporting the findings and recommendations of the 2009 membership/market research. Data was collected from 647 club presidents, 6,678 members and 358 potential members who visited the Live Your Dream website or completed an introduction form on the SIA website. In addition, the 2008-2009 Board of Directors conducted focus group sessions at region conferences that added depth and perspective to the recommendations made by the consultant, Phillip Downs of Kerr & Downs Research, who also conducted the research in 2003.

Based on the research findings (see part I of this column in the December/January/February 2010 issue of *Best for Women*), our consultant made the following 11 recommendations:

1. Extend the Renaissance Campaign.
2. Streamline structure, increase direct communication with clubs, reduce the burden on regions.
3. Strengthen cohesion between the federation and clubs.
4. Set specific goals and delineate responsibility between federation and clubs for fundraising, programs, public awareness, and membership.
5. Focus on signature project (Women's Opportunity Awards).
6. Increase the perceived and actual value received from SIA to clubs/members.
7. Build Soroptimist Affiliates.
8. Form experimental clubs.
9. Continue efforts to maintain consistent branding strategies.
10. Move toward total electronic communication.
11. Examine reasons for differences between responses from clubs in Japan and other clubs.

During the March 2010 SIA Board of Directors meeting, each recommendation was thoroughly discussed—taking into account the advantages, disadvantages and considerations/sensitivities of

each one. The Board's decision about accepting, modifying or rejecting each recommendation follows:

1. Extend the Renaissance Campaign—accepted

"Renaissance 2011—Strategies for Progress" will be launched in San Francisco. Building on the success of the Renaissance Campaign 2004-2010, the new campaign will continue to reflect the four strategic plan goals of program, membership, fundraising and public awareness. Just as the SIA strategic plan is reviewed annually, the campaign will reflect the club year (July 1, 2010–June 30, 2011) and give direction to clubs about their role in achieving federation goals. Clubs will be asked to report annually on specific activities via the annual Club Award report form.

2. Streamline structure, increase direct communication with clubs, reduce the burden on regions—modified

In order to ensure that club, region and federation resources (region and federation dues, contributions, and staff and volunteer time) are used cost effectively and to produce the desired outcomes, the SIA Board, in collaboration with the 2010-2012 region governors, will explore the region-federation partnership over the next biennium. The exploration will be undertaken with the goal of clarifying roles, responsibilities and development of tools to assist clubs (in

areas such as leadership development, program promotion, recruitment and retention, fundraising, and public awareness). The board reaffirmed the important role of the regions to ensure a common vision and direction.

3. Strengthen cohesion between the federation and clubs—accepted

SIA will continue to identify and offer new resources needed by clubs and to make every effort to balance the need to market the availability of such resources without appearing to be demanding too much from clubs. For instance, while every club is expected to participate in SIA's signature project, the Women's Opportunity Awards, clubs often feel they have to undertake every federation program offered. Conversely, clubs need to understand that SIA's brand depends on consistent focus and image at every level. When clubs choose to work on non-mission related projects, it makes it difficult for SIA to assist local clubs with public awareness, member recruitment/retention and fundraising from external sources such as corporations and non-members.

4. Set specific goals and delineate responsibility between federation and clubs for fundraising, program, public awareness, and membership—accepted

The strategic planning process at SI, the federation and region levels has been successful in allowing everyone to do

their part in order to achieve the common mission of improving the lives of women and girls. Clubs need to be aware of their primary role as the implementer of programs in local communities to enable SIA to have collective impact as an international organization.

5. Focus on signature project (Women's Opportunity Awards)—accepted

This was an easy recommendation to accept as every indicator of success—club participation, relevance to the needs of women today, and the life-changing experiences reported by the women who have benefited—continues to significantly increase. SIA's signature project is of great interest to the media, corporate sponsors and donors, and needed more than ever in these difficult economic times.

6. Increase the perceived and actual value received from SIA to clubs/members—accepted

It is recognized that increased services to clubs puts a drain on already stretched financial and human resources. Headquarters already provides quality resources and services that are appreciated and valued by those who use them, but not all clubs and members are aware of what they receive in the way of technical support, tools and assistance in exchange for their dues and contributions.

7. Build Soroptimist Affiliates—rejected

Based on research and experience over the past two years with no one accepting the Affiliate status, the Board rejected this recommendation in favor of strengthening the Soroptimist club experience, forming clubs that adhere to a new, modern model, and revitalizing the Live Your Dream campaign to engage non-members (who may or may not convert to club members and/or donors).

8. Form experimental clubs—modified

SIA will explore different models for Soroptimist clubs, researching the characteristics of successful clubs and sharing the techniques that engage members in an enjoyable and productive club experience. While it is unlikely that one model will be right for every community, it is clear that clubs need to be more flexible about time commitments, sensitive to financial demands and meeting attendance, and ensure that they are mission-focused and well run.

9. Continue efforts to maintain consistent branding strategies—accepted

With most clubs consistently using the federation logo and focusing on projects that improve the lives of women and girls,

SIA has increased public awareness and will continue efforts to further improve its presence. Some of SIA's efforts in this area will depend on whether Soroptimist International is able to unify all clubs with the same corporate identity. SIA also needs to further define the focus on improving the lives of women and girls.

10. Move toward total electronic communication—modified

Recognizing that a variety of delivery methods can improve communication, SIA will continue to make use of electronic communication to efficiently and inexpensively stay connected to clubs.

11. Examine reasons for differences between responses from clubs in Japan and other clubs—modified

SIA has long recognized and made accommodations for the different language and culture of clubs in Japan, and will continue to do so. In recent years, specific focus groups and different marketing techniques have been employed to further understand the differences. Within the bounds of available resources, SIA attempts to undertake projects and programs that are appropriate to ALL clubs within the international federation.

Taking the above recommendations into account, the Board of Directors is revising the federation's strategic plan by focusing on economic empowerment within the scope of improving the lives of women and girls. Economic empowerment refers to the ability of women to take control over their own lives, pursue their own goals and live according to their own values. The plan will continue with four familiar goals (program, membership, fundraising and public awareness), but will include one additional goal. The goal reads: Mission Support—SIA will enable its constituents to achieve the mission by providing volunteer support and a sound infrastructure. The addition of this goal to the SIA strategic plan will reflect the ongoing essential operations and activities of running the business—and providing leadership resources, tools and educational training to clubs, regions, federation and Soroptimist International.

These are exciting times for Soroptimist! It is a pleasure to work for an organization that takes seriously its responsibility to research, evaluate, adjust and learn from its disappointments as well as its successes. "Renaissance 2011—Strategies for Progress" should prove to be a successful and easy to understand embodiment of SIA's strategic plan. 🌐

For a complete list of sales items, pricing, and shipping information, or to make a purchase online using a credit card, visit the Soroptimist Store located in the members area of <Soroptimist.org>. If assistance is needed logging in, please contact <siahq@soroptimist.org> or call 215-893-9000.

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CLUBS!

The best way for headquarters and potential members to contact clubs is through the Soroptimist club email accounts. A designated member should be checking the club email account regularly (at least once per week) to keep up to date with the latest SIA news. For help with setting-up or accessing the account, see the members area on SIA's website <soroptimist.org/members/membership/membershiphome.html> or contact <siahq@soroptimist.org>.

BEST *for Women*

March/April/May 2010
Volume 83, Number 3

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Published by Soroptimist International of the Americas
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SUBSCRIPTIONS – All subscription orders for magazines, correspondence concerning subscriptions, changes of address and postmaster notices of undeliverable copies should be mailed to Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc.

POSTMASTER – Send address changes to: Best for Women, 1709 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-6103. Best for Women (ISSN 1553-5703) is published four times annually: September/October/November; December/January/February; March/April/May; and June/July/August, by Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc., a 501(c)(3) international volunteer organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls. Periodicals postage paid at Philadelphia, PA, and additional mailing offices.

Subscription rates: \$11.00 a year in the U.S. and Canada; \$15.00 a year for all others. Note: A yearly subscription to *Best for Women* is included in payment of annual membership dues.

Official publication of Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc. Copyright 2010, Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc. Printed by The Lane Press, South Burlington, VT 05403.

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