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Cover: A controversial new study challenges increasing attempts to add species to the human evolutionary family. Instead, it concludes that only a few species populated humanity's "family stem." One of those species may have been *Australopithecus afarensis*, which lived more than 3 million years ago and is shown here in a display at the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Human Biology and Evolution in New York City. (Photo: American Museum of Natural History)

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**Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students.**

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## Letters

### Clearing up cancer risk

"Pill Ups Cancer Risk in Young Women" (SN: 6/10/95, p.356) reports that "women under 35 who had used the pill for 6 months or more had slightly less than twice the risk of developing breast cancer as nonusers." It later asserts that the risk for "all participants under 45" was "boosted... only slightly." For that to be true, the pill must actually protect the older users, offsetting the doubling of risk to younger users, unless the number of women in the sample under 35 was very small.

The last paragraph reports that "pill use at its current rate will add about 0.1 case of breast cancer per 10,000 women per year, her team reports. About 13 women per 100,000 age 20 to 34 develop the disease every year." In order to appreciate the impact of the first statement, I need to know the number of women who develop breast cancer at all ages, not just under 35, unless

the first sentence refers to women under 35. If it does, then adding 0.1 case per year to a rate of 1.3 cases per year per 10,000 women does not constitute a doubling of risk.

I do not fault scientific research that is inconclusive or that must be qualified in its conclusions. However, as a curious person who is a mathematician, English major, breast cancer survivor, and former user of oral contraceptives, I do fault reporting that piques my interest in a subject of special concern to me and then leaves me frustrated.

Angie Boyter  
Ellicott City, Md.

*The number of women in the sample under age 35 was small, and even fewer had used the pill for long enough or recently enough to face an increased risk of cancer.*

*The quote "pill use at its current rate will add about 0.1 case of breast cancer per 10,000 women per year" does refer to women under age 35. That figure represents the absolute*

*(rather than relative) risk for all women under 35 who took the pill in the past 5 years or for 10 or more years. Their risk is twice that of women who have never taken the pill.*

—T. Adler

### Other violinists bow to pressure

As a professional violinist, I read with great interest "Drawing a violin bow to new lows in music" (SN: 6/10/95, p.359). The technique described has been long available and occasionally notated, albeit rarely. One outstanding example is George Crumb's 1970 opus *Black Angels*.

In the score, the composer writes: "Pedal tones are produced by moving bow very slowly while exerting great pressure. Since various 'partials' are obtainable, the player should calculate carefully distance from bridge and bow pressure in order to produce the lower octave."

John Casten  
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