

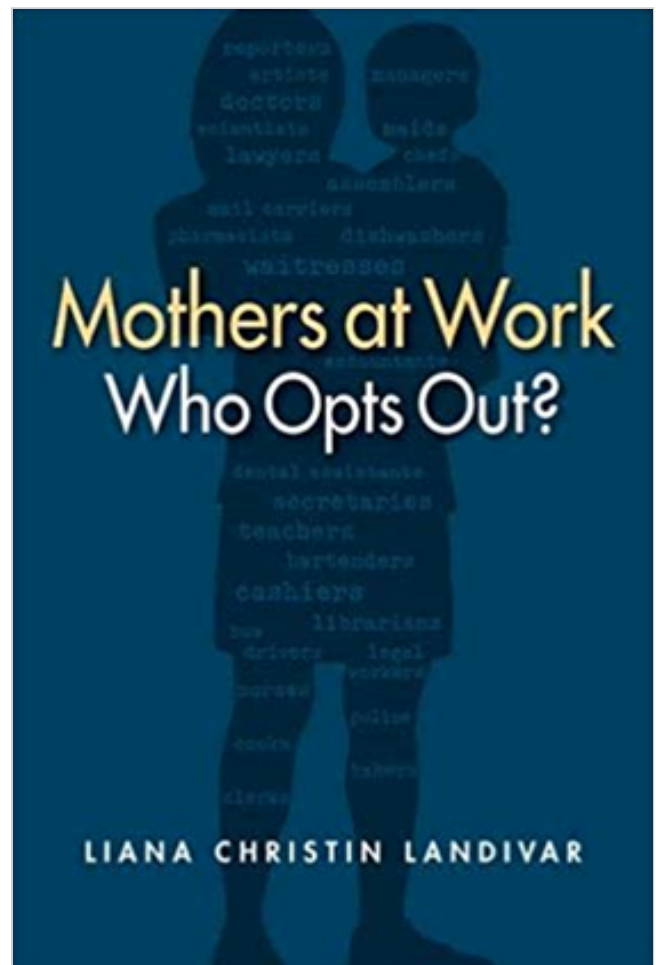
Opting out of isolated studies on mothers in the labor force

Mothers at Work: Who Opts Out? By Liana Christin Landivar. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2017, 239 pp., \$72.50 hardcover.

Published in 2017, *Mothers at Work: Who Opts Out?* sets out to answer which women exit the labor force after the birth of a child and what socioeconomic and demographic characteristics make their labor market experiences different. The author, Liana Christin Landivar, focuses on the role of occupation, ethnicity, race, and age (of children and mothers) in women's labor force participation.

Landivar offers three key findings. First, she finds that women with young children are more likely to remain employed if they work in managerial or professional occupations with higher pay. Second, all mothers scale back their workweek by a few hours, but they still work full time. Third, older mothers in managerial and professional occupations have the strongest financial incentives to remain employed. These mothers have more schedule flexibility and workplace benefits and are least likely to leave the labor force.

Previous research on women opting out of the labor force has focused on affluent, educated, mostly White, married women, often sidelining the ethnic, racial, and occupational differences among them. In her book, Landivar addresses this gap. With respect to occupational trends, she looks at mothers and nonmothers in the same occupation (to ensure no false trend emerges), finding that jobs in construction and natural resources have the largest percentage of mothers out of the labor force. In contrast, mothers in managerial and professional occupations have the smallest percentage. Landivar also finds that, among cashiers and food preparation workers, employment rates differ significantly between mothers and nonmothers, and that, among



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healthcare workers and scientists, labor force exit rates are very low. All of these findings reveal previously undiscovered trends.

The author also looks at labor force participation by race and ethnicity. She finds that, in most occupations, White women are more likely to opt out of the labor force. Hispanic and Black women are more likely to be employed in service and production occupations, which offer fewer workplace benefits and less schedule flexibility. Even after controlling for their higher rates of employment in nonmanagerial jobs and their lower levels of family income, Landivar finds that Black and Hispanic women are less likely to exit the labor force.

Schedule flexibility and the ability to reduce work hours also affect mothers' labor force participation. These benefits help explain different employment patterns and worklife strategies across occupations. Mothers in managerial and professional occupations are more likely to reduce their work hours after having children. These mothers have greater schedule flexibility, which provides them with greater freedom to accommodate work and family. Landivar also finds that mothers switch occupations after childbirth, scaling back their work hours by entering a different occupation. Some women reduce their workweek, from 38 to 35 hours.

White mothers scale back their work hours the most. Black, Asian, and Hispanic mothers all report working longer hours, with Black mothers working an hour longer per week, followed by Hispanic mothers (half an hour longer) and Asian mothers (12 minutes longer). The overrepresentation of Asian and White mothers in managerial and professional occupations explains some of the racial/ethnic disparities in scaling back hours. White workers are more likely to have schedule flexibility because of their occupation.

Landivar also examines how the ages of mothers and children affect employment and hours worked. She finds that, in most occupations, older mothers are more likely to be employed and to work longer hours than younger mothers. Compared with nonmothers in their age group, older mothers scale back their workweek by a greater number of hours. Older mothers also have higher employment rates, regardless of their children's ages or their occupational group, and are the most likely to scale back their work hours. In addition, flexible schedules and benefits appear to reduce labor force exit across age groups. Schedule flexibility allows women to remain at work and work longer hours, enabling them to shift hours according to work and family needs. Unpredictable schedules and a lack of sick leave make parenting very challenging.

The author also explores whether the earnings gap between mothers and nonmothers varies by occupation and timing of children. She looks at whether currently employed mothers earn less than nonmothers and, if so, whether the earnings gap is similar across occupations. It turns out that the pay gap between mothers and nonmothers is larger than that between men and women. Mothers also are less likely to be referred for hire, less likely to be promoted, and more likely to be held to higher performance standards. Mothers who work full time earn more than nonmothers, controlling for their demographic and employment characteristics.

Overall, Landivar's research shows that mothers' opting out of the labor force or scaling back work hours differs significantly by occupation and by race and ethnicity. This insight indicates that many previous studies on the subject are not generalizable to the majority of women in the United States. Instead, these studies often focus on "elite" groups and propose policy solutions that do not benefit many working mothers. By offering a more nuanced look at the female labor force, taking into account its occupational and demographic characteristics, Landivar's book could inform a more inclusive and equitable policymaking.