



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 35  
Issue 4 December

Article 20

---

2008

*Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home.*

**Pamela Stone.**

Cara Ellis Pohle  
*University of Southern California*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pohle, Cara Ellis (2008) "*Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home.* Pamela Stone.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 4 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss4/20>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



also shows that they fail to explain the complexities of the Irish situation. Indeed, the Irish experience reveals that factors such as colonialism, agrarian interests and the influence of the Catholic Church contributed to the development of Irish social policy to an extent that existing explanations fail to appreciate. Of particular interest is the colonial legacy and especially the role of the Beveridge report in shaping the Irish social insurance system. Although this issue has previously been addressed by scholars working on social policy in the Global South, it is much neglected in mainstream social policy theorizing on the expansion of statutory social welfare in the Western nations.

The book offers a scholarly and detailed account of the emergence of social policy that will, of course, be helpful to anyone interested in the country's social welfare system. But it also contributes in an interesting way to the body of theory that has evolved over the years to explain the development of welfare states. Although it elucidates this body of theory, a wider question is whether it is in fact possible to reduce complex economic, political, cultural and social phenomena to relatively simple, theoretical interpretations. The author's conclusion that the Irish welfare state is idiosyncratic and does not fit standard explanations also raises the issue of whether the now widely used "welfare state" construct is helpful in categorizing countries with such different historical experiences and diverse patterns of provision. Many other interesting questions emerge from this informative study of the history of social insurance in Ireland, affirming yet again the value of comparative analysis in social policy. The book makes an important contribution to the field and should be widely consulted.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Pamela Stone, *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$45.00 hardcover, \$16.95 papercover.

Decades of research has examined the obstacles facing women in the workforce. Challenges such as entering the male-dominated professions and the glass ceiling encompass much of the early literature. Recent research has shifted from focusing

on how the workplace has failed women to how women work the second shift at home once the formal work day ends. The departure of women from the work force spawned the notion of an opting out revolution whereby workplace practices and policies cause women to return home to raise children, despite their desire to have both a career and a family.

Negating the idea that women opt out, Pamela Stone asks why mothers leave successful careers and she does so from the mother's perspective. Her qualitative study identifies three overarching themes causing women to leave highly successful careers: children, husbands and jobs. Based on a national sample of 54 predominately White, married women in their 30s and 40s, with previous careers in typically male-dominated or mixed-gender industries, Stone aims to illustrate that contrary to the notion of opting out, women return home as a last resort.

The book is divided into three sections. Section I describes how successful working women come to be full-time mothers. Family factors, including children and husbands, pull women home. The needs of children, desire to be an influential figure in the child's life, illness, husband's income, and the husband's agreement for the woman to stay home factor into the family side of the equation. Additionally, the workforce pushes women home. Inflexible work schedules, denial of part-time hours, and mommy-tracking all contribute to an unbalanced work-family dynamic.

Section II describes the gap that prevents women from being the ideal mother and the ideal worker, and how women adjust to losing their professional identity. Conflicted between the joy of being an integral part in their child's life, and the exchange of a professional identity for a more devalued one, stay-at-home moms struggle to satisfy the void previously held by a successful career. This conflict results in the professionalization of domesticity, whereby duties of motherhood take on a professional nature via women's use of professional skills in the home. However, more than half of the women interviewed intend to return to work in the future, but to a field offering more flexibility and intellectual fulfillment than a corporate environment.

Lastly, Section III recommends that organizations

incorporate part-time flexibility equitably and encourage its use by men, women, mothers and non-mothers alike, to reduce stigmatization. As women continue to receive higher educational degrees with the intent of pursuing successful professional careers, many institutions block their promotion into the upper echelons of the organization through organizational inflexibility. The author discusses cases of corporations that have adopted policies aimed at keeping mothers in the workforce and bringing them back to work after time at home.

Despite the highly unique, homogenous sample of women studied, the book speaks to the need to recognize that women do not always choose to leave their careers. This book challenges organizations to make changes in workforce policies to prevent the drain of female talent and to accommodate re-entry into the workplace for those women who hope to return to work after years at home. Without this, the maternal wall will continue to prevent successful women from succeeding in male-dominated occupations.

*Cara Ellis Pohle, University of Southern California*

Edward Ashbee, Helene Balsev Clausen and Carl Pedersen (Eds.), *The Politics, Economics, and Culture of Mexican-US Migration: Both Sides of the Border*. New York: Palgrave, 2007. \$79.95.

Despite widely held beliefs about the United States being a nation of immigrants that perennially welcomes those seeking opportunity and fulfillment from all parts of the world, immigration has long been a controversial issue. The waves of European immigrants who came to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were not universally welcomed; it was largely because nativist sentiments prevailed in the form of anti-immigration legislation in the 1920s that immigration slowed considerably and only revived with the loosening of restrictions during the Johnson presidency in the 1960s. Since then, the numbers of immigrants entering the United States has increased rapidly. A significant number are undocumented—as illegal immigrants are euphemistically known. Many come from Central and South American countries, and many are