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Mothers' and Fathers' Well-Being in Parenting Across the Arch of Child Development

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Abstract

Limited research on parental well-being by child age suggests that parents are better off with very young children, despite intense time demands of caring for them. This study uses the American Time Use Survey Well-Being Module ($N = 18,124$) to assess how parents feel in activities with children of different ages. Results show that parents are worse off with adolescent children relative to young children. Parents report the lowest levels of happiness with adolescents relative to younger children, and mothers report more stress and less meaning with adolescents. Controlling for contextual features of parenting including activity type, solo parenting, and restorative time does not fully account for the adolescent disadvantage in fathers' happiness or mothers' stress. This study highlights adolescence as a particularly difficult stage for parental well-being, and it shows that mothers shoulder stress that fathers do not, even after accounting for differences in the context of their parenting activities.

Keywords

child development; parenting; well-being

The rise in intensive parenting is by now well documented in both quantitative and qualitative studies. For example, Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson (2004) showed that parents today spend more time with children than in the "family oriented" 1960s, and they documented a steady increase in the proportion of parents' time spent in developmental activities compared to routine care of children. Lareau's (2003) ethnographic and interview

accounts took us into the family lives of middle-school aged children, providing rich descriptions of upper- and middle-class parents' deep investment in cultivating their children's life skills to prepare them for successful futures. Research in developmental psychology has shown variation in parent-child relationships across the life course, in part contingent upon children's developmental needs (e.g., Bornstein, 2002). Consistent with this, Kalil and colleagues (2012) found a development gradient in how mothers spend time with children. This stream of research emphasizes potential gains to children from parenting strategies tailored to children's developmental stage. We know little, however, about how parents fare in their parenting as children develop.

Children's needs change as they age and present different parenting demands and rewards. Limited research on how parental well-being varies by child age suggests that those with very young versus older children report greater life satisfaction (Pollmann-Schult, 2014), higher self-esteem and self-efficacy (Nomaguchi, 2012), and less depression, anxiety, stress, and emptiness (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016). This is surprising because caring for young children brings intense demands but limited institutional support in the U.S. (Glass, Simon, & Andersson, 2016). It is consistent, however, with the individuation process that evolves over childhood, in which children detach from parents, potentially generating conflict and a sense of loss for parents (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Senior, 2014; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Reflecting these tensions, Stone (2007) found that mothers who opted out of the labor force disagreed about what child stage was the most demanding—infancy, middle childhood, or adolescence.

Background

Parent-Child Interactions Over Childhood

An established literature maps stages of child development and shows how parent-child interactions evolve with child age. It emphasizes a process of detachment with implications for parental well-being. The intense orientation of babies to their parents on whom they rely for life-sustaining care may be especially meaningful but also tiring (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Senior, 2014). The individuation process that begins in toddlerhood (Mahler et al., 1975) may be both rewarding and frustrating, as children want independence but still require hands-on care. During middle-childhood, children develop more sophisticated reasoning abilities and expand social contacts, demanding that parents develop more elaborate explanations and share influence with peers, teachers, and others (Collins, Masten, & Sussman-Stillman, 2002). Adolescence is characterized by a second individuation process, in which teens further separate from parents, experience pubertal development, shift relational orientation toward peers, and have more conflict with parents (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Together, the literature on parent-child relationships suggests that closeness is highest in infancy and early childhood, declines in middle childhood, and takes its biggest dip in adolescence (Bowlby, 1969; Collins et al., 2002).

Examining how parents' childcare activities respond to developmental changes through age 13, Kalil and colleagues (2012) found that mothers spend much more time in basic care (e.g., bathing and feeding) with infants and toddlers than with older children. Mothers also spend relatively more time playing with preschool-aged children than with older children.

When children reach school age, mothers spend an increasing share of their time in teaching and management activities, like helping with homework and shuttling kids to and from activities. Altinas (2016) found an increase since the 1990s in development-focused parenting activities.

Younger children require more time-intensive, hands-on attention than older children, and this may limit self-care and leisure, which in turn play into subjective well-being (Craig & Mullan, 2013). At the same time, sharing how very young children interact with the world can be rewarding and joyful, and the basic care required by them—feeding, bathing, soothing—may be less emotionally demanding than the cajoling and monitoring of adolescents, leaving parents feeling some measure of competence (e.g., Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Indeed, our prior work (Meier, Musick, Flood, & Dunifon, 2016; Musick, Meier, & Flood, 2016) shows that parents report high levels of happiness and meaning in basic childcare, and especially in play with their children, relative to housework and even leisure activities like TV. Further, many cognitive and behavioral conditions emerge as child development fans out, leaving the early stages of childhood relatively protected from some parenting challenges (Daniels & Mandell, 2013). Finally, the novelty of parenting is fresh when children are very young, and novelty is associated with higher well-being (Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005).

Parental Well-Being and Child Age

The few studies that examine parental well-being and child age generally find that parents fare better with young children. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Nomaguchi (2012) found that parents whose oldest child was under five years reported higher levels of parent-child relationship satisfaction, self-esteem and self-efficacy, and less depression than parents of school age or adolescent children. Pollmann-Schult (2014) used data from the German Socio-Economic Panel to show that life satisfaction was highest among parents of children under age two. Using data from more than 2000 well-educated mothers, Luthar and Ciciolla (2016) found that mothers of infants reported less anxiety, depression, stress, and emptiness, and more fulfillment than mothers of middle school-aged children. Roeters and Gracia (2016) used the 2010 American Time Use Survey Well-Being Module to examine parents' meaning and stress in direct childcare and management activities. They found that caring for infants was more meaningful and less stressful for mothers than caring for children ages 4–11, and caring for adolescents was more stressful. For fathers, caring for infants was *more* stressful than caring for children ages 4–11, and caring for adolescents was less meaningful.

Like much of the work on parental well-being, these studies have largely relied on global assessments of well-being that speak to the *status of being a parent* but tell us less about feelings when *doing parenting activities*, limiting our ability to understand how the day-to-day features of parenting shape well-being. A crop of recent studies based on assessments of parental well-being *in particular activities* have shown that parents generally enjoy time with their children, although in ways that differ by gender, partnership status, and employment (Connelly & Kimmel, 2015; Meier et al., 2016; Musick et al., 2016). Roeters and Gracia's (2016) study of child age similarly relies on reports of parents' well-being in activities,

although it looks only at stress and meaning and does not explore age-graded differences in mechanisms linking well-being and parenting. Further, it examines parenting in a narrow set of activities capturing only direct care, like feeding, bathing, playing, and teaching, but excludes much of the time parents spend with their children. We build on this line of research, conceiving of parenting in a broader range of activities as families progress through their daily routines, including any activity with children from reading together to grocery shopping, TV watching, or house cleaning. We look closely at how parents' time in a wide range of activities and well-being across multiple dimensions vary across the family life course.

Gendered Nature of Parent-Child Time

Prior work shows that mothers spend more time and do different activities with children than fathers (e.g. Sayer et al., 2004). Mothers might enjoy time with children less because they do different things and they feel more pressure, i.e., their activities with children are less culturally discretionary, they are more closely scrutinized, and they come with more requirements (Hays, 1996). Offer (2016) finds that mothers enjoy their leisure time with children less than fathers, speculating that mothers feel more pressure to fulfill their intensive mothering role. In our prior work (Musick et al., 2016), we find evidence consistent with these notions: Mothers spend a greater share of time with children in more tedious and less enjoyable activities, like housework, compared to the play and leisure more common in fathers' parenting time, which in turn contributes to less happiness and more fatigue in parenting.

We know of no work that documents gender differences in how parents spend time with children as they age and how they experience this time across the arch of child development. We do know, however, that the basic care required of younger children and the teaching and management of older children is disproportionately done by mothers, and that this is less enjoyable than play (Musick et al., 2016). This might show up in lower levels of subjective well-being among mothers relative to fathers in time with children at different points in their development. The few prior studies that examine parental well-being by child age provide little insight into gender differences. Nomaguchi (2012) found few meaningful gender differences in associations between child age and parental well-being, whereas Roeters and Gracia (2016) found more meaning and less stress with the youngest and oldest children for mothers relative to fathers. Prior research is thus limited and inconsistent on gender differences by child age.

Our Study

To summarize, prior literature suggests that children's developmental tasks present different demands and rewards for parents (Bornstein, 2002; Umberson, Pudrovskaya, & Reczek, 2010) and identifies a child age gradient in parenting activities of mothers (Kalil et al., 2012). Further, parental well-being varies by child age (Luthar & Cicolla, 2016; Nomaguchi, 2012; Pollmann-Schult, 2014) and across childcare activities (Roeters & Gracia, 2016). The present study builds on our recent work (Meier et al., 2016; Musick et al., 2016), leveraging the same data, measures, and rigorous design, to assess parental well-being in a broad range

of parenting activities by child age. We extend prior findings by specifying if and when in the arch of child development parenting is especially demanding or rewarding for mothers and fathers. We ask: 1) How do parents' feelings of happiness, sadness, stress, fatigue, and meaning in parenting differ by child age? 2) How do the nature and context of parenting vary by child age? 3) Do differences in parents' feelings by child age hold up to controls for the nature and context of parenting, like activity type, solo parenting, and restorative time?

Our approach contributes to the literature in several ways: First, we extend prior work by Kalil et al. (2012) and Altinas (2016) on age-graded differences in parents' childcare activities like bathing, feeding, and reading stories to a broader focus that includes other activities that parents do with children, like housework, shopping, and watching TV. These other activities constitute much of the time that parents and children spend together (Offer, 2014) and are potentially important to parent well-being. Further, and critically, this broader definition of parenting taps time with older children who no longer require "care" in the same way as younger children—allowing us to examine adolescence, a time of transition in the parent-child relationship.

Second, our focus on parents' well-being in activities with children provides a different perspective than prior research on general adjustment measures like anxiety, depression, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016; Nomaguchi, 2012; Pollmann-Schult, 2014). Global indicators are less sensitive than momentary assessments to the context of activities and more sensitive to aspirations and social desirability (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; see Musick et al., 2016 for a discussion of global versus momentary well-being). As noted, only Roeters and Gracia (2016) have used momentary measures to address parental well-being and child age, and they assess just two dimensions of well-being—meaning and stress (and limited to childcare). Psychological research has established the multi-dimensional nature of subjective well-being (e.g. Kapteyn et al., 2013), and thus our third contribution is exploring how differences in parental well-being by child age depend on the dimension assessed, including happiness, sadness, stress, fatigue, and meaning.

Fourth, much of the existing evidence on parental well-being and child age is derived from out-of-date data or select samples. Nomaguchi used data from the late 1980s, preceding much of the shift toward a more intensive parenting model. Pollmann-Schult used German data that began collection in 1994. Luthar and Ciciolla's (2016) data are from an internet study of highly educated U.S. mothers (46% had a graduate degree; an additional 37% had a college degree). Research on broadly representative samples is limited. Finally, questions remain about how the day-to-day features of parenting change and potentially account for differences in parental well-being as children age. We examine age-graded differences in mothers' and fathers' well-being accounting for a rich array of contextual features of parenting including activity type, solo parenting time, and parents' sleep and leisure which may explain these differences.

Method

Data

We pool cross-sectional samples from the Well-Being Module of the 2010, 2012, and 2013 ATUS (Hofferth, Flood, & Sobek, 2013). The ATUS is a time diary, telephone interview study of a nationally representative sample of Americans ages 15 and older drawn from households in the Current Population Survey (CPS). ATUS respondents retrospectively report on their activities over a 24-hour period from 4:00 a.m. of the day before the interview until 4:00 a.m. the day of the interview, indicating the type of activity, and where, when, and with whom it occurred. Data are collected every day of the week, including holidays. 50% of diaries are about weekend days (25% each), and 50% are about weekdays (10% each day).

All ATUS respondents were eligible for participation in the Well-Being Module, and there was minimal nonresponse on these questions (National Institute on Aging, Bureau of Labor Statistics & U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Participants reported how they felt in three randomly sampled activities of at least five minutes in duration (excluding sleeping, grooming, personal activities). Activity-level weights account for differences in the fraction of time in eligible activities and the probability of having an eligible activity selected (National Institute on Aging et al., 2014:5–6); they further account for the oversample of weekends and other aspects of the ATUS sample design. Weights are applied to all descriptive statistics.

Pooling the three administrations of the ATUS Well-Being Module (ATUS-WB) yields a sample of 34,565 men and women and 102,633 activities. Our analysis sample includes men and women with children under 18 in the home ($N = 12,163$) who reported well-being in at least one activity with a child ($N = 9,277$ parents; 5,814 mothers and 3,463 fathers). These restrictions yield a sample of 36,036 activities. Our multivariate analyses include only activities with a child (or children) present, for a final sample of 18,124 activities (11,762 for mothers and 6,362 for fathers).

Models

Following our prior work, we use random intercept models that account for the multilevel nature of our data, with activities nested within individuals (estimated using *xtreg, robust re* in Stata; see Musick et al., 2016 for more detail). All models are estimated separately for mothers and fathers to allow for gender differences in parenting time. For each of five measures of well-being, we estimate models first with child age indicators and controls, and then we estimate models that add contextual features of parenting: activity type, solo parenting, and the quality and quantity of sleep and leisure that may, themselves, vary by child age.

Measures

Subjective well-being—Our five measures of subjective well-being are based on the following questions about activities in the Well-Being Module: 1) How happy did you feel during this time? 2) How sad did you feel during this time? 3) How stressed did you feel during this time? 4) How tired did you feel during this time? 5) How meaningful did you

consider what you were doing? Response options ranged from 0 (e.g., *not at all happy*) to 6 (e.g., *very happy*). We used quantitative indicators for happiness, sadness, stress, fatigue and meaning, each ranging from zero to six with higher scores representing higher levels of the emotion (e.g. happiness or stress). In results not shown, we generated dichotomous indicators of unhappiness, sadness, stress, fatigue, and low meaning (with 1 corresponding to approximately the lowest 25th percentile on each dimension) and found the same pattern of results whether we treated our outcome variables as quantitative or dichotomous.

Parenting—We define parenting as being in an activity with a household child under 18, based on responses to the activity-level question “Who was with you?” (Bureau of Labor Statistics & U.S. Census Bureau, 2016:23). As noted previously, this definition captures a broader range of activities common among children of a wider age range than the more typical, narrower definition of child care.

Age of child—We measure the age of the child(ren) present in activities with categories corresponding roughly to the stages of infant/toddler (ages 0–2), pre-school (3–5), primary school (6–12), and high school (13–17). In two-thirds of activities in our sample, respondents are with only one child or children in only one age category; 33% of activities are with children of mixed ages. Our child age indicator is thus coded into four key categories to include only children ages 0–2; 3–5; 6–12, and 13–17. A fifth category, included in multivariate models, captures activities that are with children spanning these categories (i.e. children of mixed ages). (All models control for number of children present in the activity; see below for discussion of controls.)

Contextual features of parents’ time—We constructed measures of time use that we expect to vary across child age and to shape differences in parenting experiences, including activity type, solo parenting, and sleep and leisure. We summarize our measurement strategy here, but for a full description see our prior work (Meier et al., 2016; Musick et al., 2016). *Activity types* include market work (in the paid labor market), nonmarket work (like housework), leisure, and care work, and the latter three types are disaggregated into detailed categories (see Table 1 for descriptives).

Solo parenting indicates whether there were any other adults present in the parent’s activity with children (*I* = no other adults present). Another adult may be a co-parent, another family member, or a friend, thus capturing the experiences of single as well as partnered parents.

We include two indicators of sleep and five of leisure. *Total sleep* is a continuous variable that registers hours parents reported sleeping, and *disrupted sleep* is a dichotomous indicator of three or more sleep episodes. A set of four continuous variables sum to *total time in leisure*: 1) with children only, 2) with adults only, 3) with children and adults, and 4) alone. A fifth indicator measures *leisure interruptions* with a dummy variable for whether the diary day contained two or more leisure-to-childcare sequences (following Craig & Mullan, 2013).

Sociodemographic characteristics and activity controls—Parents’ characteristics include age, number of children (one, two, or more), age of youngest child (<6 years, 6–12

years, 13+ years), race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, other), whether a spouse/partner is in the household, family income (<\$25,000, \$25,000–99,000, \$100,000 or more, and missing), employment status (full time, part time, not working for pay), whether the respondent is a college graduate, and whether he or she is enrolled in school. We include two other individual-level measures: survey year (2010, 2012, 2013) and weekend day. At the activity-level, we include number of children present, time of day (4–9am, 9am–2pm, 2–5pm, 5–9pm, and 9pm–4am), activity duration, and activity location (in public, at home, and at work).

Results

Table 1 shows weighted descriptive statistics on key variables for mothers (left) and fathers (right). Panel A shows characteristics of parents' activities with children by age of children present. As noted, in multivariate models, we included a category for the presence of children in more than one age grouping, but we focus our discussion throughout on differences across categories that capture only one age grouping (0–2, 3–5, 6–12, 13–17), which represent the majority of parents' activities with children. The first set of rows shows means on subjective well-being: Mothers in activities with children 0 to 2 years were happier than those with teenagers but also more fatigued than those with 3 to 5 year olds. Mothers' sadness and meaning did not differ significantly in time with younger versus older children. We also see little variation in fathers' well-being across child age (right set of columns). Relative to mothers, fathers reported less stress with older children (6–12 and 13–17), less fatigue with children of nearly all ages ($p < 0.05$ for all but ages 3–5), and less meaning with school-aged children (6–12).

Differences in parental well-being by child age may be explained, in part, by differences in the context of parenting across the developmental arch of childhood. The next set of rows shows the distribution of parenting activities by type of activity and presence of other adults. Mothers' parenting activities shifted away from care work and toward leisure as children age. For example, whereas care work and leisure each comprised about 40% of mothers' activities with children ages 0 to 2, care work and leisure comprised 15% and 59%, respectively, of mothers' activities with adolescents. This shift was evident in fathers' time as well, although fathers tended to do less care work and have more leisure than mothers across child ages. Mothers' share of time in nonmarket works also shifted with child age, with nonmarket work comprising a greater share of mothers' activities with adolescents (24%) than infants (19%). Fathers' share of time in nonmarket work did not vary significantly by child age; it was lower than mothers' across all child ages (comprising 14% of all activities with children). Finally, solo parenting (without another adult present) varied with child age for both mothers and fathers, with mothers doing more solo parenting overall than fathers (49% vs. 32%, respectively), especially with infants (51% vs. 31%).

Panel B of Table 1 shows characteristics of mothers' and fathers' sleep and leisure. These are at the person level (vs. Panel A at the activity level) and describe characteristics of mothers and fathers by the ages of the children in the household. Mothers with children two and under got 30 more minutes of sleep a day than mothers of school-age children, but they also experienced more sleep interruptions (25% of mothers with children ages 0–2

experienced three or more sleep episodes compared to 11–15% of those with children 6 and older). Mothers with teenagers reported nearly 50 more minutes a day of leisure than mothers with children ages 0 to 2; they also got significantly more leisure time alone and were less likely to experience interrupted leisure than mothers with younger children. Fathers with infants reported the least sleep (statistically different only from children ages 6–12) and the most frequent sleep interruptions (statistically different only from children 3–5; between 6–12% of fathers across child ages experience three or more sleep episodes). Like mothers, fathers with teenagers reported more leisure time, more time in leisure alone, and fewer leisure interruptions than fathers with younger children. Fathers spent more of their time with children in all categories of leisure (see ‘Total’ columns).

Tables 2 (for mothers) and 3 (for fathers) present random intercept models of subjective well-being in parenting activities, showing just the indicators for age of child(ren) in the activity, first relative to children ages 0–2 and subsequently shifting the contrast category to examine differences among age groups. Model 1 further includes (but does not show) sociodemographic and activity controls. Model 2 adds indicators for parenting context—activity type, solo parenting, and sleep and leisure. Though we do not show these coefficients, we assess whether and how their inclusion changes our associations between child age and parental well-being. Readers can refer to Musick et al. (2016) for detail on how these contextual factors, themselves, are related to parental well-being. Full tables are available upon request.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that mothers reported lower levels of happiness in activities with adolescents, relative to infants (ages 0–2). Shifting the reference category indicates that mothers were less happy with adolescents *than all other age groups*. Accounting for differences in the contextual features of parenting (Model 2), the difference in happiness between mothers in activities with adolescents versus infants remained statistically significant, though somewhat reduced in magnitude. Mothers’ happiness with adolescents was no longer significantly different from her happiness with children ages 3 to 5 or 6 to 12 years. In supplementary analyses, we added contextual variables in three blocks—activity type only, solo parenting only, and sleep and leisure only—and found that activity type accounted for the reduced association between happiness and parenting adolescents versus children ages 3 to 5 and 6 to 12 (results available upon request). Mothers engaged in more basic childcare and play with children ages 3 to 12 than 13 to 17 (Table 1), and these activities ranked high in happiness, even relative to leisure activities, especially TV.

Mothers also reported more stress with older children; here, this included children 6 to 12 and 13 to 17 years old, relative to infants. These differences held up to controls for the contextual features of parenting (Model 2). Finally, in the right-most columns of Table 2, results show a meaning detriment to mothers with adolescents compared to both children 0 to 2 and 6 to 12 years old. This difference did not, however, remain when we accounted for the nature and context of parenting in Model 2. In supplementary analyses, we added contextual variables in three blocks and found that activity type accounted for the reduced association between meaning and parenting adolescents (results available upon request). As children age, mothers shifted their activities from basic childcare and play, which ranked high on meaning, to nonmarket work and leisure, which ranked lower (Table 1).

Table 3 shows differences in fathers' well-being by child age. Like mothers, fathers reported lower levels of happiness with adolescents relative to all other age groups. Including contextual features of parenting in Model 2 did little to dampen these associations. Whereas mothers also fared worse with adolescents in stress (Models 1 and 2) and meaning (Model 1 only), the adolescent disadvantage for fathers appeared only in happiness. We otherwise found little evidence of variation in fathers' well-being by child age.

Conclusion

This study highlights the joys and strains of parenting and how they map onto stages of child development. Given the small but fairly consistent literature on parental well-being and child age, we expected that activities with the youngest children would be associated with higher levels of well-being, at least on some dimensions. We also expected that the intense demands of pre-school-aged children would come through in our multidimensional approach, potentially in higher levels of stress and fatigue. We found that parents were not statistically significantly more stressed or fatigued with the youngest children. Where we found differences by child age in subjective well-being, parents with younger children were better off.

Our results are thus consistent with greater well-being among parents with young children, but they are more appropriately interpreted as a *disadvantage* to parenting adolescents. Both mothers and fathers report the lowest levels of happiness in activities with adolescents, and mothers further report greater stress and less meaning with children in this age group. For mothers, some of the happiness and meaning disadvantages are explained by the types of activities they do with teens compared to younger children, but higher levels of stress are not accounted for by activity type, solo parenting, or downtime. And for fathers, neither the nature nor context of parenting explain the happiness disadvantage with teens.

Our study goes beyond existing research on parental well-being across the arch of child development in several important ways. First, we extend the work of Kalil et al. (2012) and Altinas (2016) on age-graded differences in *childcare* activities to assess age-graded differences in *parenting* activities. Offer (2014) estimated that only about 25% of all time with children is in direct interaction that is routinely characterized as childcare in the literature. Furthermore, childcare activities are less common with older children. Therefore, studying only childcare misses much of what parents do with teens. For example, parent-child time together in the car is not considered direct care by most scholars, yet 70% of teens report talking to their parents about their lives when in the car (CASA, 2010). Our inclusive parenting measure captures a broader range of parenting activities.

Second, our measures of well-being offer advantages over many past studies because they are both multi-dimensional and tied directly to activities. Other studies have looked at a range of well-being indicators (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016; Nomaguchi, 2012), but their measures have been global in scope, leaving more room for respondents' lives beyond parenting to influence reports. Consistent with findings from global assessments of satisfaction and psychological well-being, we learn that parents are happier in activities with younger children. We also learn that mothers are more stressed in activities with school-aged

children (6–17 years)—a dimension untapped by global assessments that points to emotional demands of parenting school-age children. Like our work, Roeters and Gracia (2016) used activity-based assessments, but they looked only at meaning and stress in specific childcare activities; this may explain why they find greater stress among mothers of teens, whereas we find more stress also among mothers of 6 to 12-year-olds.

Finally, our study is based on recent, nationally representative data from the United States. The rise of intensive parenting (Hays, 1996) and concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) were arguably most dramatic in the 1990s, having by now settled into new normative patterns for parenting in the U.S. Many studies point to the value of such parenting styles for children (Kalil et al., 2012; Lareau, 2003; but see Milkie, Nomaguchi & Denny, 2015). Our study contributes to a nascent literature on how American parents fare in this new parenting context (Connelly & Kimmel, 2015; Meier et al., 2016; Musick et al., 2016; Offer, 2014; Roeters & Gracia, 2016), finding that parents feel some of the rewards and demands of parenting differently at different child ages. The happiness detriment parents experience with adolescents is apparent for both mothers and fathers, indicating a low point in the arch of child development for positive affect in parenting. Mothers', but not fathers', greater stress in parenting school-aged children points to gender unequal burdens of parenting at a stage when children begin to engage with social institutions that will weigh heavily in their future life trajectories (Collins et al., 2002). Mothers' overall higher levels of fatigue in parenting children of any age compared to fathers (Table 1) indicates room for improvement within families. It also indicates room for improvement at the societal level, where more institutional support for mothers, 60 percent of whom also work outside of the home (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), could substantially improve parental well-being (Glass et al., 2016; Stone, 2007). Future work should examine how the dual commitments of parenthood and labor force participation play into well-being in parenting uniquely across the arch of child development and additionally, if possible, across different work-family policy contexts.

Few prior studies make direct arguments regarding why mothers may feel higher levels of stress with school-age children. However, the school years require parents to negotiate influence with peers and teachers (Collins et al., 2002), and recent studies suggest heightened pressure to excel in school and extracurricular activities in order to compete in later academic and labor force pursuits (Levey-Friedman, 2013). For parents, especially mothers who take primary responsibility in managing their children's lives (Raley, Bianchi & Wang, 2012), this pressure may be especially acute starting in the school-age years. Future research should explore indicators of school or extracurricular engagement as possible mechanisms to explain mothers' elevated stress with school-age children.

In conclusion, literature on the load of parenting young children, disproportionately borne by mothers, is somewhat at odds with parents' positive reports of subjective well-being in time with young children. Our findings suggest that parents are least happy with teens, and mothers find less meaning with adolescents and report higher stress with school-age children. These findings suggest the importance of also considering the psychological literature on the rewards and demands of parenting that points to closeness and attachment as especially high when children are very young and especially low in adolescence. The evolving parent-child relationship across the arch of child development may also influence

the amount and type of activities parents and children do together. Indeed, parents with poorer relationships with their children may spend less time with them, and increasingly so as children age and time together becomes more discretionary. Our estimates of parental well-being in time with children thus potentially *understate* the well-being advantage with children early in the family life course. Future studies with data that account for both parent-child relationship quality and the amount and type of time parents and children spend together would be useful for teasing out their relative contributions to parental well-being across the arch of child development.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics by Child Age

Panel A: Activity- Level Characteristics	Mothers					Fathers				
	0-2 (A)	3-5 (B)	6-12 (C)	13-17 (D)	Total	0-2 (A)	3-5 (B)	6-12 (C)	13-17 (D)	Total
N(activities)	1,976	1,382	3,152	1,513	11,762	961	661	1,771	754	6,362
Happiness	4.85 ^D (0.06)	4.81 (0.07)	4.72 (0.06)	4.61 ^A (0.08)	4.77 (0.03)	4.85 (0.08)	4.79 (0.13)	4.79 (0.06)	4.72 (0.09)	4.80 (0.03)
Sadness	0.40 (0.08)	0.45 (0.06)	0.55 (0.06)	0.53 (0.05)	0.44 (0.03)	0.38 (0.08)	0.58 (0.26)	0.39 (0.07)	0.42 (0.07)	0.41 (0.04)
Stress	1.21 (0.09)	1.35 (0.10)	1.38 (0.07)	1.37 (0.09)	1.33 (0.03)	1.07 (0.09)	1.19 (0.19)	1.02 [*] (0.06)	1.03 [*] (0.10)	1.05 [*] (0.04)
Fatigue	2.79 ^B (0.09)	2.36 ^A (0.13)	2.61 (0.08)	2.57 (0.09)	2.58 (0.04)	2.25 [*] (0.13)	2.10 (0.14)	1.97 [*] (0.08)	2.08 [*] (0.12)	2.12 [*] (0.04)
Meaning	4.87 (0.07)	4.87 (0.08)	4.95 (0.05)	4.89 (0.09)	4.90 (0.03)	4.86 (0.11)	4.88 (0.09)	4.74 [*] (0.07)	4.74 (0.10)	4.80 [*] (0.04)
Distribution of activities										
Market work	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02
Care work	.39 ^{BCD}	.29 ^{AD}	.24 ^{AD}	.15 ^{ABC}	.27	.31 ^{CD*}	.34 ^{CD}	.22 ^{ABD}	.13 ^{ABC}	.24 [*]
Care of adults	.02	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01	.01	.01	.01
Basic childcare	.19 ^{BCD}	.10 ^{AD}	.08 ^{AD}	.03 ^{ABC}	.11	.15 ^{CD}	.14 ^D	.08 ^{AD}	.02 ^{ABC}	.09 [*]
Play	.13 ^{CD}	.09 ^{CD}	.02 ^{ABD}	.01 ^{ABC}	.06	.13 ^{CD}	.12 ^{CD}	.03 ^{AB}	.02 ^{AB}	.07
Teaching	.01 ^{BCD}	.03 ^{AC}	.06 ^{AB}	.05 ^A	.04	.00 ^{BCD*}	.04 ^{AD}	.06 ^A	.03 ^{AB}	.04
Management	.04 ^{CD}	.06	.07 ^A	.06 ^A	.06	.02 ^{CD*}	.03 [*]	.04 ^{A*}	.05 ^A	.03 [*]
Nonmarket work	.19 ^D	.24	.23	.24 ^A	.22	.14 [*]	.12 [*]	.16 [*]	.13 [*]	.14 [*]
Cooking	.05 ^D	.06	.06	.08 ^A	.07	.03 [*]	.03 [*]	.03 [*]	.03 [*]	.03 [*]
Cleaning	.06	.07	.06	.05	.06	.02 [*]	.02 [*]	.02 [*]	.02 [*]	.02 [*]
Shopping	.05	.08	.08	.08	.07	.06	.04 [*]	.07 ^D	.04 ^{C*}	.06
Other	.02	.02	.02	.03	.02	.03	.03	.04 [*]	.04	.03 [*]
Leisure	.40 ^{CD}	.45 ^D	.51 ^{AD}	.59 ^{ABC}	.49	.53 ^{CD*}	.53 ^D	.61 ^{AD*}	.73 ^{ABC*}	.60 [*]
TV	.14	.16	.17	.19	.16	.23 [*]	.22	.23	.28	.23 [*]
Relaxing	.13	.14	.14	.16	.14	.14 ^D	.15 ^D	.17	.23 ^{AB}	.17 [*]

Panel A: Activity-Level Characteristics		Mothers				Fathers					
		0-2 (A)	3-5 (B)	6-12 (C)	13-17 (D)	Total	0-2 (A)	3-5 (B)	6-12 (C)	13-17 (D)	Total
Religious/civic		.01 ^{BCD}	.03 ^A	.04 ^A	.06 ^A	.03	.01 ^C	.02	.05 ^{AD}	.02 ^{C*}	.04
Eating/drinking		.11 ^{CD}	.11 ^{CD}	.15 ^{AB}	.17 ^{AB}	.15	.15 ^D	.14 ^D	.15	.20 ^{AB}	.17 [*]
Solo parenting (prop.)		.51 ^D	.52 ^D	.54 ^{DE}	.43 ^{ABC}	.49	.31 ^{BC*}	.47 ^{AD}	.42 ^{AD*}	.31 ^{BC*}	.32 [*]
Panel B: Person-Level Characteristics											
N(individuals)		696	473	1,352	790	5,814	426	249	792	416	3,463
Total hours sleep		9.13 ^{CD} (0.11)	8.91 ^{CD} (0.12)	8.62 ^{AB} (0.06)	8.55 ^{AB} (0.10)	8.71 (0.03)	8.20 ^{C*} (0.14)	8.43 [*] (0.13)	8.59 ^A (0.09)	8.36 (0.12)	8.36 [*] (0.04)
3+sleep episodes, (prop)		.25 ^{BCD}	.14 ^A	.11 ^{AD}	.15 ^{AC}	.16	.12 ^{B*}	.06 ^{AC*}	.10 ^B	.09 [*]	.10 [*]
Total hours leisure		5.81 ^D (0.17)	5.78 ^D (0.20)	6.17 ^D (0.10)	6.62 ^{ABC} (0.14)	6.07 (0.05)	6.38 ^D (0.27)	6.28 ^D (0.26)	6.62 ^{D*} (0.16)	7.20 ^{ABC*} (0.21)	6.50 [*] (0.08)
With children only		1.27 (0.09)	1.40 ^D (0.13)	1.41 ^D (0.06)	1.09 ^{BC} (0.08)	1.35 (0.03)	0.58 ^{C*} (0.07)	0.78 [*] (0.09)	0.81 ^{A*} (0.06)	0.77 [*] (0.08)	0.75 [*] (0.03)
With adults only		1.14 ^D (0.08)	0.95 ^{CD} (0.08)	1.26 ^{BD} (0.06)	1.54 ^{ABC} (0.10)	1.26 (0.03)	1.68 [*] (0.20)	1.35 ^{D*} (0.13)	1.51 ^{D*} (0.08)	1.85 ^{BC} (0.14)	1.58 [*] (0.05)
With adults & children		2.54 ^{CD} (0.12)	2.30 (0.15)	2.12 ^A (0.08)	2.19 ^A (0.11)	2.26 (0.04)	3.17 [*] (0.19)	2.84 [*] (0.21)	2.79 [*] (0.12)	2.80 [*] (0.17)	2.86 [*] (0.06)
Alone		0.85 ^{BCD} (0.07)	1.13 ^{ACD} (0.10)	1.38 ^{ABD} (0.06)	1.80 ^{ABC} (0.10)	1.20 (0.03)	0.95 ^{CD} (0.10)	1.30 ^D (0.15)	1.50 ^A (0.08)	1.78 ^{AB} (0.13)	1.32 [*] (0.04)
2+ interrupted leisure episodes (prop.)		.43 ^{BCD}	.34 ^{ACD}	.24 ^{ABD}	.12 ^{ABC}	.31	.25 ^{CD*}	.22 ^{CD*}	.15 ^{ABD*}	.07 ^{ABC*}	.18 [*]

Notes: 2010, 2012, 2013 ATUS-WB sample. Men and women with children under 18 in the household who spent at least one well-being activity with own household children. At the activity-level, only activities with children present are included, and data are shown by the ages of the children present in the activity; we do not show the mixed age category in which children span age groupings (N=3,739 for mothers; N=2,215 for fathers). At the person-level, data are shown by the ages of the children in the household. Ns are unweighted; means/proportions are weighted. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Superscript letters denote significant differences ($p < .05$) between child age groups within gender; A=0-2; B=3-5; C=6-12; D=13-17.

* Fathers' characteristics are significantly different ($p < .05$) from mothers'.

Table 2
Random Intercept Models of Mothers' Subjective Well-being in Activities with Children (N = 11,762)

	Happiness		Sadness		Stress		Fatigue		Meaning	
	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2
Age of child in activity, reference 0–2										
3–5	–0.08 (0.06)	–0.04 (0.06)	0.00 (0.05)	–0.02 (0.05)	0.12 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	–0.15 (0.08)	–0.11 (0.08)	–0.11 (0.07)	–0.03 (0.07)
6–12	–0.12 (0.07)	–0.08 (0.07)	–0.06 (0.05)	–0.08 (0.05)	0.24 ^{**} (0.08)	0.21 [*] (0.08)	0.01 (0.09)	0.05 (0.09)	–0.04 (0.08)	0.01 (0.08)
13–17	–0.41 ^{**} (0.14)	–0.30 [*] (0.14)	–0.14 (0.10)	–0.18 (0.10)	0.39 ^{**} (0.14)	0.32 [*] (0.14)	0.04 (0.16)	0.09 (0.16)	–0.30 [*] (0.14)	–0.15 (0.14)
Age of child in activity, varying reference										
3–5 vs. 6–12	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.06	–0.12	–0.10	–0.16	–0.16	–0.07	–0.04
3–5 vs. 13–17	0.33 [*]	0.26	0.14	0.16	–0.27	–0.21	–0.19	–0.20	0.19	0.12
6–12 vs. 13–17	0.29 [*]	0.22	0.08	0.10	–0.15	–0.11	–0.03	–0.04	0.26 [*]	0.16

Notes: M1=Model 1; M2=Model 2; 2010, 2012, 2013 ATUS-WB sample. Women with children under 18 in the household who spent at least one well-being activity with own household children; activities with children present. We show contrasts for our indicator of the ages of the children present in the activity; we do not show the mixed age category in which children span age groupings. All models include individual-level controls for respondent's age, number of children, age of youngest child, race/ethnicity, presence of spouse or partner, family income, employment status, education, school enrollment, weekend day, and survey year. Models include activity-level controls for location, duration, time of day, and number of children present in the activity. Model 2 includes controls for activity type, solo parenting, sleep, and leisure. Standard errors in parentheses.

^{**}
 $p < .01$,

^{*}
 $p < .05$.

Table 3
Random Intercept Models of Fathers' Subjective Well-being in Activities with Children (N = 6,362)

	Happiness		Sadness		Stress		Fatigue		Meaning	
	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2
Age of child in activity, reference 0–2										
3–5	–0.11 (0.08)	–0.09 (0.08)	0.00 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	–0.08 (0.09)	–0.06 (0.09)	–0.15 (0.10)	–0.09 (0.10)	–0.07 (0.09)	–0.01 (0.09)
6–12	–0.09 (0.09)	–0.08 (0.09)	–0.08 (0.06)	–0.07 (0.06)	0.03 (0.10)	0.06 (0.10)	–0.00 (0.12)	0.05 (0.12)	–0.02 (0.11)	0.02 (0.11)
13–17	–0.61** (0.17)	–0.51** (0.17)	0.01 (0.16)	–0.01 (0.16)	0.10 (0.17)	0.08 (0.17)	–0.03 (0.19)	–0.01 (0.19)	–0.36 (0.19)	–0.22 (0.19)
Age of child in activity, varying reference										
3–5 vs. 6–12	–0.02	–0.01	0.08	0.07	–0.11	–0.12	–0.15	–0.14	–0.05	–0.03
3–5 vs. 13–17	0.50**	0.42*	–0.01	0.01	–0.18	–0.14	–0.12	–0.08	0.29	0.21
6–12 vs. 13–17	0.52**	0.43**	–0.09	–0.06	–0.07	–0.02	0.03	0.06	0.34	0.24

Notes: M1=Model 1; M2=Model 2; 2010, 2012, 2013 ATUS-WB sample. Men with children under 18 in the household who spent at least one well-being activity with own household children; activities with children present. We show contrasts for our indicator of the ages of the children present in the activity; we do not show the mixed age category in which children span age groupings. All models include individual-level controls for respondent's age, number of children, age of youngest child, race/ethnicity, presence of spouse or partner, family income, employment status, education, school enrollment, weekend day, and survey year. Models include activity-level controls for location, duration, time of day, and number of children present in the activity. Model 2 includes controls for activity type, solo parenting, sleep, and leisure. Standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < .01$,

* $p < .05$.