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Doing it All? Mothers' College Enrollment, Time Use, and Affective Well-being

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Abstract

The rising share of women in college with dependent children and growing emphasis on two-generation policies for reducing socioeconomic inequality have galvanized research aimed at determining whether mothers' increased education can improve their and their children's well-being. Yet as part of this effort, scholars have overlooked signs that mothers' college enrollment may not be unequivocally good for families. This research brief aims to bring greater attention to this "side of the story." To do so, we analyze time diary (2003–2015) and well-being data (2010, 2011, 2013) from the American Time Use Survey. We find that mothers in college experience a time squeeze that limits their time in caregiving, self-care, and work, on one hand, and school-related activities on the other. This time squeeze may explain why mothers enrolled in college (compared to mothers who were not in school) also reported less happiness and more fatigue during activities with their children.

Keywords

development or outcomes; education; multiple roles; social trends; time use

Among U.S. college students today, one in four is a parent, with the vast majority (76%) of student-parents being women (Gault et al., 2014). These facts suggest a remarkable change in the characteristics of today's college students from previous decades, when women who pursued higher education did so before having children, and those who had children were unlikely to return to school (Marini, 1984). This trend in mothers' college enrollment has also been viewed by scholars as a potential policy lever for reducing historically high levels of socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. for the next generation. In short, scholars argue that policies that promote lower educated mothers' continued pursuit of higher education will not only benefit a generally less advantaged population of women; they will also improve the

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mobility prospects of their children (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Kaushal, 2014). The promise of this “two-generation” policy approach has been well-supported empirically. A vast literature finds that children of higher educated parents are more likely to achieve higher levels of education and economic prosperity than are children with parents with less education (Black & Deveraux, 2010; Hout, 2012). A small but growing body of studies also finds that increases in lower educated mothers’ education are associated with improvements in mothers’ parenting (Crosnoe & Kalil, 2010; Domina & Roska, 2012) and the academic outcomes of their children (Gennettian, Magnuson, & Morris, 2008; Harding, 2015; Magnuson, 2007; Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean, & Huston, 2009).

Despite strong evidence in favor of policies that aim to increase the education of women without college degrees, however, we believe there remains an issue that has been overlooked by researchers: the possibility that mothers’ pursuit of a college degree may not have unequivocally positive effects on families. Mothers in college may also experience a greater time squeeze—in other words, greater struggles to put in enough work hours to support their families, to care for their children, and create time for leisure (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004)—in ways that undercut the financial, psychosocial, and health benefits that higher education is supposed to promote in mothers, and the social and cognitive development of their children. To our knowledge, researchers have not yet directly examined this possibility, although there are certainly signs that point to it. For example, researchers have found that children whose mothers returned to school experienced an increase in behavioral problems (Harding, 2015); the cognitive gains made by children whose mothers increased their education quickly faded-out (Gennettian et al., 2008); and that more than half of mothers that recently enrolled in college failed to complete their degree (Miller et al., 2011)—a figure that exceeds estimates for college students without children by 40%. Qualitative research has also revealed how many mothers who dropped out of college actually found themselves in worse financial positions than when they first enrolled (Seefeldt, 2016). Thus, the goal of this brief is to draw attention to the need for research that elucidates the various challenges experienced by families with mothers enrolled in college and to galvanize this effort by pursuing two study aims.

The first aim is to examine whether student mothers experience an exacerbated “time squeeze” in which, on one hand, mothers in college have less time to devote to paid labor, self-care, and caring for their children; activities that promote mothers mental and physical health, their children’s social and cognitive development, and the overall economic security and wellbeing of their family (Fiorini & Keane, 2012; Harding, Morris, & Hughes, 2015; Jopp & Herzog, 2016; McLeod & Owens, 2004; Osterbacka, Merz, & Zick, 2010; Ross & Mirowsky, 2010). On the other hand, given the time demands of caretaking and paid work (which the majority student mothers do; Miller, Gault, & Thorman, 2011), student mothers may have less time to invest in their schooling. We investigate these possibilities by describing the amount of time that mothers enrolled in college devote to different forms of caregiving (e.g., basic care, developmental care), two principle categories of self-care (e.g., sleep, leisure), and human capital accumulation (e.g., work, school) compared to similarly educated mothers who are not in school, and to other adult women college students without children. The second aim is to explore the possible consequences of this time squeeze and associated role strain for student mothers’ affective well-being (i.e., intensity of positive and

negative feelings) during their daily activities by examining whether they experience more negative feelings (e.g., fatigue) and less positive ones (e.g., happiness) compared to similar mothers who were not in school.

Taken together, these study results would reveal that mothers in school not only spend less time in the activities linked to their and their children's well-being; but that the quality of the time in these activities is lower as well. These findings, in turn, provide insights into *why* many student mothers may not complete their degrees or their children experience increased behavioral problems, indicated by prior research; provide the basis for future investigations that incorporate measures of mothers' and children's outcomes; and highlight the importance of greater inquiry into the experiences of mothers in college, which, given the failings of two-generation programs of the past (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Kaushal, 2014), is an essential step in crafting effective-two generation programs for the future.

Methods

Data and samples

To pursue these aims, this project makes novel use of data from the American Time Use Survey (2003–2015). The ATUS is a large-scale, population-based survey sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that records respondents' time use over a 24-hour period. The ATUS captures an unparalleled range of activities, as well as information on various demographic factors (e.g., marital status, ages of children, income). Although the ATUS has been used extensively to study how mothers balance the competing demands of work and caregiving, this project, to our knowledge, is the first to use the ATUS to consider the time demands of schooling for mothers enrolled in college.

We also make use of an innovative module that ATUS added to the 2010, 2012, and 2013 surveys: the Subjective Well-Being Module (ATUS, 2014), in which respondents were asked at the end of the interview to assess the extent to which they felt different feelings (e.g., happy, sad) during three activities randomly selected from their time diary. Activities shorter than 5 minutes, grooming, personal activities, and sleeping were not eligible. In contrast to global assessments used in most other studies, these measures reflected both positive and negative feelings and were measured in reference to a specific activity (Kahneman et al., 2004).

This study draws on three different subsamples. The first two samples were formed by pooling data across all 13 surveys (2003–2015). The first of these samples, which we call the mothers sample, was formed by restricting the sample to only include women aged 18–45 who had less than a college level of education (including Bachelor's and Associate's degrees) and an adoptive or biological child living in the household under age 13. Given our approach to dealing with missing data (explained below), approximately 8% of these mothers were dropped due to item missingness on family income (986 excluded) and metropolitan residence (106 excluded). This final analytical sample included 13,121 mothers, among whom 1,278 (8.8%) were enrolled in college at the time of the survey. We focus on mothers with children under age 13 to capture the stage in mother's lives when

their children have more caregiving needs (Nomaguchi, 2009). The second, which we call the student sample, was restricted to only include mothers aged 25-45 who had less than a college level of education and a coresidential child under age 13, and other women enrolled in college with less than a college level of education who were aged 25-45 who did not have children. We made this latter age restriction using conventional cut-offs (see National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.) to limit our sample to non-traditional adult students who are likely to be more similar to student mothers than traditional college students. Dropping respondents in this sample with missing data on family income (8.1%; $n = 66$) and metropolitan area (0.9%; $n = 7$) resulted in a final student sample of $n = 746$, out of which 417 were mothers. Mothers who reported being enrolled in high school were dropped from both samples ($n = 90$). The third sample, the well-being mothers sample, consisted of mothers who participated in the Well-Being Module (surveyed 2010 2012, or 2013). This sample included 2,536 mothers, out of which 247 were enrolled in college. These mothers reported on how they felt in a total of 7,553 activities; 738 of these reports came from mothers enrolled in college.

Measures

Independent variables—Two survey questions were used to determine whether women were *enrolled in college*. Respondents were first asked if they were enrolled in “high school, college, or university.” Respondents responded either “yes” or “no.” Those who responded “yes” were then asked: “Would that be high school, college, or university?” Women who responded that they were enrolled, and that the institution was a college or university, were categorized as students (coded as “1”). Non-students (coded as “0”) were those who reported not being enrolled in any education. To capture *parental status*, female respondents were classified as mothers (coded as “1”) if they reported having at least one biological or adoptive child aged 12 or younger who was living in the household. Nonparents (coded as “0”) had no dependent children.

Time—We examined seven categories of time—measured in minutes over the 24-hour time diary period—which broadly reflected three domains. The first was *time with children*, which was captured three different ways: First, *any time with child* captured any time during the day—regardless of the activity—in which the mother was with her child. Second, *child-focused time* included only time when the child was present and was the explicit focus of the activity; for example, bathing children or doing homework. Third, *developmentally-rich time* narrowed in on a set of activities shown to be most strongly tied to children’s positive development, including reading to children, conducting arts and crafts with them, and talking with and listening to children (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005).

The second domain of time was *in self-care activities*, which we captured using two variables: 1) time spent sleeping, and 2) time in leisure activities (e.g., socializing, relaxing, watching television, and arts and entertainment). We also combined time in sleep and leisure to create an overall measure of time in self-care. The third domain was captured by two measures of time in work-related activities and time in education-related activities, which more broadly reflected *time in human capital accumulation*. Again, we created a combined

time measure in work and education to better reflect the total time in this domain. More information about the specific activities reflected in each of these measures is available upon request, although they generally followed the major tier codes created by BLS staff.

Affective Well-being—For each of the three randomly selected activities, respondents were asked to assess how happy, sad, stressed, and tired they felt in that activity on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 6 (very much). The order of questions was randomized for each respondent. These dimensions of well-being were derived from the Princeton Affect and Time Use Study (Krueger et al., 2009) and designed to map onto Russell's (2003) circumplex model of core affect. Although we only include one measure of positive affect (i.e., happiness) compared to several measure of negative affect (e.g., fatigue), it is worth noting that measures of positive emotions have been shown to be highly correlated, while negative ones have not (Kapteyn et al., 2015). For this study, we captured mothers' affective well-being in two activities: *activities with children* and *other activities*. Activities with children refers to all activities in which the mother reported that her child age 12 or younger was in her care during the activity. *Other activities* refers to all other activities in which the mother was not with her children. Reports of other activities commonly reflected activities like paid work, schooling, and leisure. Although it would have been preferable to differentiate time in other activities, we do not have a sufficient number of reports for student mothers to do so. We do, however, have a sufficient number of reports to look more closely at activities with children, which we do.

Individual-level covariates—All models included covariates that captured: respondents' employment status (dummy coded *full-time employed*, *part-time employed*, *unemployed*, or *not working*), highest level of educational attainment (dummy coded *less than a high school degree*, *high school degree*, or *some college*), union status (dummy coded *married*, *single*, or *cohabiting*), family income (continuous, based on 16 levels created by BLS), race/ethnicity (dummy coded *European American*, *African American*, *Hispanic*, *Asian*, or *Other*), nativity (*foreign-born* or not), chronological age (measured continuously), whether they lived in a metropolitan area (1 = *yes*), and geographic region (dummy coded *Northeast*, *Midwest*, *South*, or *West*), as well as time diary information, including whether the diary was recorded on a holiday (1 = *yes*), summer month (1 = *yes*), weekend (1 = *yes*), and the year of the interview (dummy coded). In the analyses using the mother sample, we also accounted for the number (dummy coded as *one child*, *two children*, and *three or more children*) and ages of mothers' coresidential children (captured by three distinct binary variables indicating whether the mother had a child aged between 0-2 years, 3-5 years, and 6-18 years, where a value of "1" indicated that the mother had a child in that age group). In the analyses using the student sample, we also included a covariate to indicate whether students were enrolled part or full-time. We also used this measure in preliminary analyses based on the mother sample to check whether patterns of results were similar for mothers enrolled part time versus full time, which they were.

Activity-level covariates—For the analyses based on the well-being mothers sample, in addition to the factors above, we accounted for activity-level characteristics that may affect feelings about the activity, including: the duration of the activity (measured in minutes per

day, because, for example, reading for ten minutes to a child may feel different than reading for 50 minutes) and where the activity took place (0 = *somewhere else*, 1 = *at the respondent's home*; e.g., because eating at home feels different from eating at a restaurant).

Analysis Plan

The analysis for Aim 1 included two sets of multivariate models. Both models used ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to predict time, net of the individual-level covariates and time diary factors, but drew on different samples. The first set of models drew on the mother sample. For these models, we compared the time that student mothers spent in caregiving, sleeping, leisure, work, and education-related activities (using a different model to predict time in each activity) compared to mothers who were not enrolled in college. The second set of models drew on the student sample. For these models, our focus was on comparing mothers' time in the human capital-related activities of work and schooling and self-care to that of women college students, who were also non-traditional students, but did not have dependent children.

For the second aim, we drew on the well-being mothers sample and OLS regression to predict mothers' reports of how happy, sad, tired, and stressed they felt in two activities: time with children and time in other activities. For these models, we pooled across all reports of each measure of affective well-being (e.g. all three reports of happiness, all three reports of fatigue) to predict an average estimate of how respondents felt in either of these two activities. In doing so, we incorporated random effects, which accommodated the hierarchical structure of the Well-Being survey (i.e., the fact that women had multiple reports of their well-being in either activities with children or other activities) while adjusting for autocorrelation, non-independence, and unobserved heterogeneity in mothers' reports of their well-being, as well as the activity-level (e.g., duration, location) confounds (Allison, 2009; Laird & Ware, 1982). When predicting well-being in activities that involved children, we drew on 3,813 activity records (339 records for mothers enrolled in college), which were drawn from 1,928 mothers (of whom 178 were enrolled in college). When predicting well-being in other activities, we drew on 2,179 activity records (241 records for student mothers), from 1,244 mothers (127 student mothers).

All models were estimated in Stata v.14. Models based on the time use data used the survey weight, reflecting the 2006 population. Models based on the well-being mothers sample used the activity weight to adjust for the unequal probability that different activities were selected for the Well-Being Module (ATUS, 2014). Because of the limited amount of missing data (e.g., 7% on income, 1% on metro in the mother sample; 1% on income in the mother well-being sample), consistent with other studies using ATUS and evidence missingness on income violates the missing at random (MAR) assumption of multiple imputation (Abraham, Maitland, & Bianchi, 2006), we used list-wise deletion to account for missing data. Estimates of the mother and student samples using multiple imputation, however, produced nearly identical results.

Findings

Description of Mothers Enrolled in College

Overall, 9% of mothers in the mother sample were enrolled in college.¹ Not surprisingly, the majority of student mothers reported they had completed some college (63.6%), compared to just over one quarter of mothers not enrolled in college. Only a handful of student mothers reported they did not complete a high school level of education (4.2%). This increased to 23.9% among mothers who were not enrolled in college. Conversely, student mothers had lower rates of full-time employment compared to mothers not in college (27.3 vs. 37.7%), but higher rates of part-time employment (23.5 vs. 18.8%). Rates of labor force participation of student mothers overall appears to be lower in the ATUS sample than in other samples (see Miller et al., 2011).

Among other sociodemographic factors, compared to mothers not in college, student mothers were younger (29 vs. 32 years), had fewer children (43% had only one child vs. 32%), were more likely to have an infant (43.9 vs. 37.6%), less likely to be married (47.9 vs. 62.8%), were more likely to be single (43.8 vs. 29.6%), and had lower family incomes (8.7 vs. 8.9). Finally, nearly a quarter of student mothers were African American, compared to only 14.1% of mothers who were not in college. Hispanic-White mothers, on the other hand, made up only 18.9% of mothers enrolled in college compared to 30.4% of mothers who were not enrolled.

Multivariate Results Predicting Mothers' Time-Use and Well-being

Time Use—To address the first aim, we used OLS regression to reestimate differences in mothers' time use by college enrollment status within the mother sample, controlling for measures of mothers' background characteristics and time diary factors. We then examined time use among the student sample, comparing the amount of time in self-care and human capital activities among student mothers to other adult learners (i.e., age 25 or older) who did not have children. The results of these two sets of analyses appear in Table 2.

The multivariate results of the mother sample appear in the first panel of Table 2. Student mothers spent an hour less with their children than mothers who were not in college, as well as less time in child-focused activities (23 minutes less per day). This latter difference, however, did not extend to developmentally-rich time, which did not significantly vary by mothers' college enrollment status. Among self-care activities, student mothers experienced significantly less sleep (23 minutes) and leisure time (53 minutes), totaling 76 less minutes of self-care time than mothers who were not in college. At the same time, student mothers devoted significantly more time to work- and education-related activities (229 vs. 161 minutes). This difference was driven by student mothers' time in education-related activities, which averaged 119 minutes per day for student mothers. Time spent in education-related activities likely explains why student mothers spent 52 fewer minutes in paid labor each day

¹This figure is lower than many estimates of the percentage of mothers without college degrees who increased their education (e.g., Harding, 2015 ; Magnuson, 2007; Pressler, Raver, & Masucci, 2017) because such estimates included mothers who earned a high school degree or GED. There are far fewer mothers who return to school after having children, however, who pursue a college degree than who pursue a high school level of education (Augustine, 2016).

than mothers who were not in school. This overall pattern was also observed when we distinguished between full- and part-time students, although the size of the differences in time spent in caregiving, self-care, and human capital activities compared to mothers not in college were smaller for mothers enrolled part-time.

The second panel on Table 2 presents the results of the analyses exploring student mothers' time compared to adult women college students without dependent children. Student mothers devoted statistically similar amounts of time to work-related activities, but they spent significantly less time in educational (102 vs. 147 minutes) and leisure activities (178 vs. 233 minutes). There were no statistically significant differences in time in sleep.

Mothers' Well-being—Addressing the second study aim, random effect models estimated four dimensions of well-being among the well-being mothers sample (results in Table 3). Student mothers reported significantly less happiness ($B = -.29$, $SE = .13$) and more fatigue ($B = .36$, $SE = .14$) in activities with their children compared to nonstudent mothers, translating to 19% and 18% of a standard deviation difference, respectively. Examining child-focused time specifically, however, student mothers did not differ significantly from nonstudent mothers in their reports of well-being. At the same time, meals with children present were associated with significantly more stress for student mothers than nonstudent mothers. During activities when children were not present, student mothers also reported significantly more fatigue than nonstudent mothers ($B = -.38$, $SE = .18$; 19% standard deviation difference). Reports of feeling sad or stressed were not significantly different by student status, regardless of whether a child was present.

Robustness Analyses

Although we included statistical controls to account for observable differences between student mothers and mothers who are not in school, as well as female students without dependent children, student mothers differ from these groups in significant ways. For example, 63% of mothers who were not in school are married, compared to 48% of student mothers. Given these differences, we pursued a series of models based on propensity score matching techniques to create comparison groups that more closely resembled the student mothers to test the robustness of the patterns we observed. The first approach involved nearest neighbor matching with replacement (*teffects psmatch2* in Stata), estimating the average treatment effect (ATE) based on the full set of covariates used in the models. The second approach involved nearest neighbor matching without replacement (*psmatch2* in Stata), which provides an estimate of the treatment effect on the treated (ATT). Both approaches improved the balance of observable covariates between groups. The latter approach is generally considered less optimal than the first (Drukker, 2016), but it allowed us to generate a matched sample. Reestimating models based on this matched sample was the third approach and the only strategy that allowed us to adjust for the hierarchical structure of the wellbeing data or specify random effects. Overall, the results of each of these approaches proved to be consistent with the results presented in Tables 2 and 3. The results from these models and more detail on our modeling strategy are available upon request.

In addition to testing the robustness of our results to various propensity score techniques, we reestimated our models using bootstrapping: a resampling method that allowed us to calculate more accurate p-values and provide stronger controls against Type I error (Westfall & Young, 1993). Doing so helped address the potential issue of ‘multiple comparisons’ (i.e., the estimation of multiple dependent variables, which may be correlated) in this study. Results based on these models were also similar to those presented in the tables (results also available upon request).

Discussion

Over the past few decades, there has been a dramatic change in the life course trajectories of contemporary women, in which many women are now returning to the educational system to pursue post-secondary degrees after having children (Gault et al., 2014). This trend has inspired substantial scholarly interest in determining whether and how increases in the education of less educated mothers improves the well-being of their families (Crosnoe & Kalil, 2010; Harding, 2015; Magnuson, 2007), and enthusiasm for the potential for policies that aim to promote the continuation of the trend as a means of reducing inequality in the U.S. for both the parent and child generation (Kausal, 2015). At the same time, scholars have not given much consideration to the results of studies which suggest that mothers’ pursuit of higher education may not be unequivocally positive for families, or to basic theories on time use and role strain which highlight such possibilities. As such, the aim of this brief was to draw attention to the need for research that helps policy makers to better understand the challenges experienced by mothers in college—a vital step in crafting social policies that consider not only their potential, but the factors that stand to lessen their efficacy—and to begin this effort. In doing so, we also make novel use of two contemporary source of data, the ATUS time diary data and Well-Being Modules, which to our knowledge, have not been used to study the lives of student mothers.

The results of our study highlighted two challenges faced by mothers pursuing a college degree. First, mothers enrolled in college experienced an exacerbated time squeeze, in which they experienced less time on all fronts compared to mothers not in school. They had less time with their children, including time focused on them, in sleep and leisure, and in paid labor, yet they also spent less time in education-related activities (and leisure) than other adult women in college who did not have children. Given that mothers worked, on average, the same number of hours in paid labor as women in college without children, this time deficit appears to be linked to the need to devote more time to care for their children. These results point to the possibilities that mothers may not benefit as much from schooling as their peers without children because they have less time to invest in it, which means that some of the well-documented advantages of higher levels of parental education are likely not passed on to their children as well; that children of mothers enrolled in college may receive fewer time investments and less monitoring; and that families may suffer greater strains as a result of mothers’ time squeeze. These ideas received support from our second set of findings, in which we found that student mothers were more tired in both activities in which their children were present and those activities without their children (e.g., paid work, schooling) and that they were less happy during activities spent with their children than

mothers who were not in school. These results point to the possibility that student mothers' lower levels of well-being may also interfere with their schooling and parenting.

Taken more broadly, contrary to conventional thinking, the results of our study suggest that mothers in school may have fewer of the resources—greater parental investment, more financial resources (at least in the short-term, as student mothers work fewer hours), and better mental health—that higher education is argued to promote (Hout, 2012). Of course, we do not actually know what the true implications of these two factors—less time, and time that is lower in subjective well-being—are for these outcomes (e.g., mother's mental health, parenting), or for other aspects of mothers' lives, such as their success in school, productivity in paid labor, or the outcomes of their children. To this latter point, we find that despite spending less time with their children, student mothers still spent the same amount of time in developmentally rich activities, like reading with children, as mothers not in college. It is possible that mothers' schooling may have negative implications for children's behavioral outcomes, as found by Harding (2015), but not their academic ones. These findings provide an empirical and theoretical foundation for these types of investigations, while also having descriptive significance of their own.

Nevertheless, this research was also limited in other ways. First, we were limited to the use of cross-sectional data, which meant we could not actually observe changes in mothers' time or well-being upon enrolling in school, rule out the possibility that selection was driving the patterns we observed, or make causal claims about the impact of college enrollment on mothers. Given how prior research suggests that mothers who enroll in college are positively selected—for example, they have higher test scores, their parents have higher levels of education, and they have better financial and social support than mothers who do not return to school (Augustine, 2016; Brooks-Gunn, Guang, & Furstenberg, 1993)—we do not believe that the results of this study were purely driven by unmeasured variation. At the same time, in order to support any causal claim, future research must also attend more carefully to questions around what is the most appropriate counterfactual (e.g., mothers not in school; mothers in school with greater support) and how school enrollment may affect the lives of different mothers in different ways.

Next, lack of longitudinal data also meant we cannot say whether these challenges have enduring effects, or whether they are short-term strains. Thus, we cannot say whether these short-term strains ultimately helped mothers achieve their longer-term goals of improving their families' well-being, although there is new evidence to suggest it may not—at least assessed in terms of improvements in the quality of the home environment or children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Augustine & Negraia, 2018). Thus, we believe the time squeeze associated with mothers' school enrollment may have more profound implications than are currently understood.

Next, the small number of student mothers selected for the Well-being Module was sufficient for our purposes, but a larger sample would be preferable for various reasons, among them: allowing us to look more carefully at how student mothers' well-being varied across different contexts, such as in paid labor. We also did not examine the factors that may buffer student mothers against an increased time squeeze or role strain, which are important

to identify so as to craft policies and programs that support student mothers. Nor did we examine how these processes varied across contexts; for example, in married versus single-parent families or for mothers who were not in the labor market compared to those who are. Our goal was more modest: to provide a baseline picture of student mothers' time use and affective well-being. In auxiliary analyses in which we predicted mothers' time use separately for working mothers and mothers who were not working, we did find similar patterns as those reported for the full mother sample. Future research and new data collections are needed to tackle many of these issues.

In sum, in an era in which an increasing number of mothers are returning to college, and the benefits of a college education have never been higher, it is important that researchers study the experiences of mothers in school so that we can design programs and policies that ensure that mothers can ascertain these benefits, and pass them on to their children. The goal of this research brief was to highlight this issue by focusing on mothers' time use and the implications of her use of time for her well-being. In doing so, we also aimed to spur on a new research effort that works to better understand the implications of this increasingly salient life course context—mothers' enrollment in college—for the well-being of U.S. families.

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Table 1

Description of Sample Characteristics and Dependent Variables by Mothers' College Enrollment Status based on the Mother Sample

	Student	Non-student	Full sample	
	Mean / % (SD)	Mean / % (SD)	Mean / % (SD)	Unweighted <i>n</i>
Respondent characteristics				
<i>Education</i>				
Less than HS/GED	4.22	23.92 *	22.19	2,428
HS/GED	32.22	49.00 *	47.53	5,906
Some college experience	63.56	27.09 *	30.28	4,787
<i>Employment status</i>				
Full time	27.29	37.71 *	36.80	5,233
Part time	23.46	18.83 *	19.23	2,552
Unemployed	12.17	9.34 *	9.59	1,145
Not working	37.08	34.11 *	34.37	4,190
Age	28.91 (6.48)	32.05 * (6.80)	31.78 (6.83)	13,121
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>				
European American	53.50	48.87 *	49.27	7,305
African American	22.89	14.06 *	14.83	1,812
Hispanic-White	18.93	30.43 *	29.42	3,208
Asian	1.65	2.36	2.30	267
Other race/ethnicity	3.03	4.28	4.17	529
Foreign born	14.25	28.09 *	26.88	2,984
<i>Family characteristics</i>				
Family income (1-16 scale)	8.73 (4.02)	8.92 * (4.03)	8.90 (4.03)	13,121
<i>Family structure</i>				
Married	47.93	62.81 *	61.51	7,651
Cohabiting	8.30	7.54	7.61	771
Single	43.77	29.64 *	30.88	4,699
<i>Number of children</i>				
1 child	42.67	31.35 *	32.34	4,143
2 children	34.60	38.67 *	38.32	5,251
3 or more children	22.72	29.98 *	29.34	3,727
Child aged between 0-2 years	43.89	37.61 *	38.16	4,463
Child aged between 3-5 years	36.38	37.77	37.65	4,946
Child aged between 6-18 years	56.37	67.43 *	66.46	9,283
Metropolitan residence	83.05	81.83	81.93	10,584

	Student	Non-student	Full sample	
	Mean / % (SD)	Mean / % (SD)	Mean / % (SD)	Unweighted <i>n</i>
<i>Region</i>				
Northeast	12.35	14.00 *	13.86	1,897
Midwest	23.56	21.80	21.95	3,100
South	41.72	38.96	39.20	4,919
West	22.37	25.25	25.00	3,205
<i>N</i>	1,278	11,843	---	13,121
Proportion of sample	8.76	91.24	100.00	---

Notes: Means and percentages are based on weighted estimates.

* Chi² and t-tests indicating statistically different differences from student mothers at least at $p < .05$. Estimates based on sample with complete data (i.e., those cases without missing on income and or metropolitan region).

Table 2
Predicted Minutes in Activities For Women in Mother Sample ($n = 13,121$) and Women in College Student Sample ($n = 746$)

	Time with Children			Time in Self-Care Activities			Time in Capital Accumulation		
	Any time with child	Child-focused time	Develop-mental time	Sleep	Leisure	Combined	Work	Education	Combined
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
<i>Mothers</i>									
Enrolled in college	384.83 [*] (9.25)	82.76 [*] (3.90)	14.42 (1.25)	512.96 [*] (4.64)	164.83 [*] (5.74)	677.79 [*] (7.09)	108.41 [*] (7.54)	118.61 [*] (7.01)	228.91 [*] (8.55)
Not enrolled	441.71 [*] (2.55)	105.45 [*] (1.25)	15.57 (0.38)	535.95 [*] (1.55)	218.30 [*] (1.79)	754.25 [*] (2.22)	160.06 [*] (2.60)	1.52 [*] (0.22)	161.48 [*] (2.60)
<i>College students</i>									
Parent	---	---	---	520.48 (7.61)	177.72 [*] (9.15)	698.20 [*] (10.85)	122.34 (9.86)	101.86 [*] (9.25)	255.60 [*] (12.86)
Non-parent	---	---	---	537.69 (8.42)	233.08 [*] (10.87)	770.77 [*] (13.69)	153.52 (11.18)	147.15 [*] (14.07)	319.79 [*] (15.31)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients for controls not shown. All models controlled for employment status, highest level of education, union status, family income, race/ethnic background, nativity, age, metro, region, holiday, summer, weekend, and year. Models based on the mother sample also controlled for the number of coresident children, whether the mother had a child age 0–2 living in the household, whether she had a child age 3–5 living in the household, and whether she had a child aged 6–18 living in the household. Models based on the student sample controlled for part-time versus full-time enrollment.

^{*} Statistically different at least $p < .05$.

Table 3
Affective Well-being of Student Mothers Compared to Non-Student Mothers during Activities with Children and Other Activities

	B (SE) Affective Well-being							
	Happy		Sad		Stressed		Tired	
	With Children	Other	With Children	Other	With Children	Other	With Children	Other
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	
<i>Enrollment status</i>								
Student	-0.29* (0.13)	-0.18 (0.15)	0.03 (0.10)	0.20 (0.15)	0.01 (0.13)	0.10 (0.18)	0.36** (0.14)	0.38* (0.18)
<i>Selected controls</i>								
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02+ (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Marital status (reference = married)								
Single	-0.16* (0.08)	-0.32** (0.11)	0.28*** (0.08)	0.22* (0.11)	0.33*** (0.10)	0.30* (0.14)	0.13 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.14)
Cohabiting	-0.16 (0.15)	-0.14 (0.20)	0.27* (0.13)	0.19 (0.21)	0.30+ (0.17)	0.52* (0.23)	0.05 (0.18)	0.05 (0.23)
Household Income	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.04* (0.02)
Number of children (reference = 1 child)								
2 children	-0.15+ (0.09)	-0.34** (0.12)	0.12 (0.08)	0.18 (0.11)	0.26* (0.10)	0.35** (0.14)	0.01 (0.12)	0.18 (0.15)
3 or more children	-0.09 (0.11)	-0.28+ (0.15)	0.01 (0.10)	0.04 (0.13)	0.41** (0.13)	0.34+ (0.17)	0.03 (0.15)	0.36+ (0.19)
Child age 0-2	-0.00 (0.08)	0.19 (0.14)	0.10 (0.08)	0.01 (0.12)	0.12 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.16)	0.16 (0.11)	0.09 (0.17)
Child age 3-5	0.06 (0.08)	0.05 (0.11)	-0.17** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.15+ (0.09)	-0.12 (0.13)	-0.26** (0.10)	0.20 (0.14)
Child age 6-18	-0.16 (0.11)	0.33* (0.17)	-0.01 (0.10)	-0.28+ (0.15)	-0.04 (0.13)	-0.59** (0.19)	-0.10 (0.14)	-0.35+ (0.20)
Location not home	-0.25*** (0.05)	-0.11 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.07)	0.12+ (0.06)	-0.27** (0.09)	0.36*** (0.07)	0.45*** (0.09)
n Acts	3,760	2,138	3,757	2,140	3,759	2,141	3,757	2,140
n Individuals	1,902	1,222	1,901	1,222	1,900	1,223	1,901	1,223

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Notes: Coefficients for selected controls shown. All models controlled for employment status, highest level of education, union status, family income, race/ethnic background, nativity, age, metro, region, holiday, summer, weekend, year, the number of coresident children, whether the mother had a child age 0-2 living in the household, whether she had a child age 3-5 living in the household, whether she had a child aged 6-18 living in the household, duration of the activity, and where the activity took place. Statistically significant at

*** p<0.001,
** p<0.01,
* p<0.05,
+ p<0.10.