WHERE ARE THE YOUNG MEN?

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Summary

Women outnumbered men in U.S. colleges and universities for the first time in 1979, and the gap has been growing ever since (U.S. Department of Education, 2024; Marcus, 2024). In this report, we review enrollment and employment trends among young adults, investigate factors that might be responsible for differences in college enrollment between men and women, and conclude with a deeper dive into how young adults spend their time.

Key findings include:

- Age 18-24 women were 10.5 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in college than their male peers in 2023. This gender gap was about 2 points wider than it was in the mid-2010s.
- The short answer to the question, "Where are the young men?" is that they are largely in the workforce, if not in college. The gender gap in college enrollment was almost exactly matched by an 11.0 percentage-point employment gap favoring men, which has also been growing in recent years.
- About 13 percent of both men and women in the 18-24 age group were not in higher education or employment. Young adults in this population were very likely to live with their parents—especially young men—and they had little to no business or investment income.
- Several individual, academic, political, and economic factors were associated with college attendance for both men and women, but few help to explain why women were more likely to enroll in college than men. Exceptions are cohort-level academic proficiency rates in 8th grade, which explain 16.6 percent of the gender difference in college enrollment as 18-24 year-olds.
- Although young men were more likely to be in the workforce than in college, they were working fewer hours in 2021-24 than they were in the mid-2010s.
- Both young men and young women were allocating more time to leisure in recent years, and especially to recreational computing. Young men appear to have increased time with video games at the expense of time at work, whereas young women were substituting leisure for home production and care for children.

Trends in College Enrollment and Employment

We begin by reviewing recent trends and patterns in college enrollment and employment for the U.S. population, relying on public-use versions of the 2006 – 2023 American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2024), administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. Each year, the American Community Survey (ACS) surveys 3.5 million households in order to build a 1 percent representative sample of the country, and of each state. ACS data include a wealth of information describing individual schooling, work, income, demographics, living arrangements, and much more.

We limit the 2006 – 2023 ACS data to non-institutionalized individuals between the ages of 18 and 55 who have graduated high school but have not attained a college degree. Figures to follow summarize education and workforce outcomes separately for men and women, and for two broad age groups: 18-24 and 25-55.

College Enrollment

Figure 1A illustrates the percent of individuals attending college by year, gender, and broad age group. Across all gender and age groups, enrollment grew with the 2007-2009 Great Recession and over the first two years of the economic recovery. Enrollment tapered through the 2010s before declining more sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

Looking within a given year, the most prominent difference in college enrollment is between younger and older adults. Age 18-24 individuals were 10 times as likely to be in college in 2023 than age 25-55 individuals (43-53 percent compared with 4-5 percent).

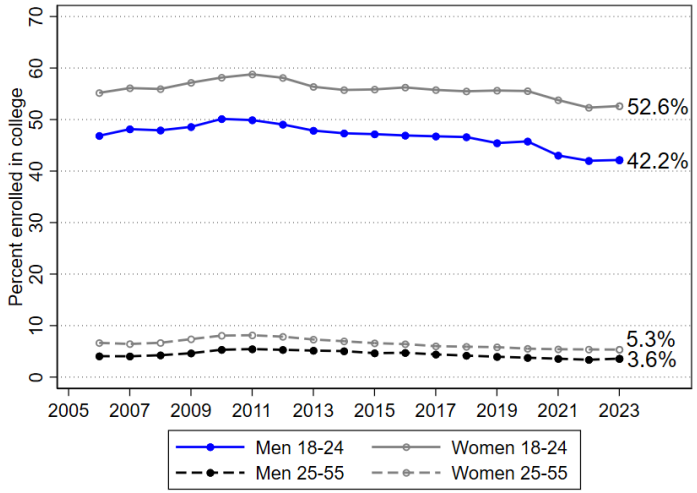
For both younger and older age groups, Figure 1A also shows that women were more likely to be in college. **Figure 1B** plots the gender gap for each age group over time—that is, the difference between women and men in terms of their likelihood of attending college during a given year. In 2023, the difference was 10.5 percentage points for young adults, compared with 1.8 percentage points for older adults.

A final pattern to note from Figure 1 is that the gender gap in young adults' college attendance has been growing over the last several years, from 8 percentage points in the mid-2010s to 10.5 percentage points in 2023.

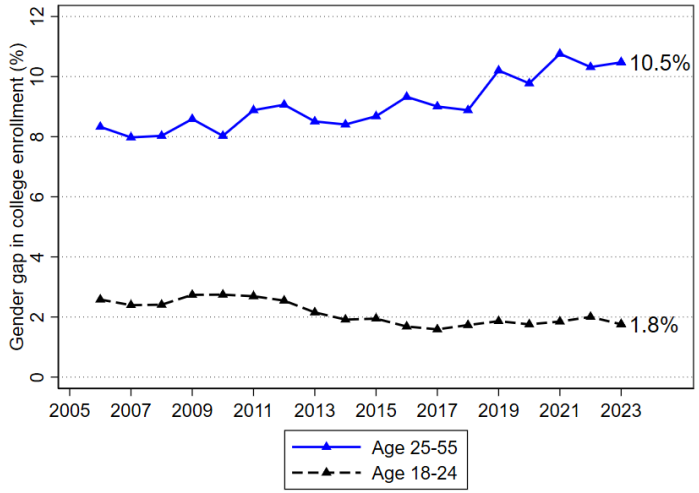
[1] See Barr and Turner (2013, 2015) for more discussion of the boom in college going during the Great Recession. See National Student Clearinghouse (2024) for a detailed breakdown of enrollment trends during and shortly after the onset of the pandemic. Carruthers (2025) attributes part of both patterns to fluctuations in labor market opportunities for young adults without a college education.

Figure 1. Young men are less likely to enroll in college than young women, and the gap is widening

A. Percent in college, by gender and age group



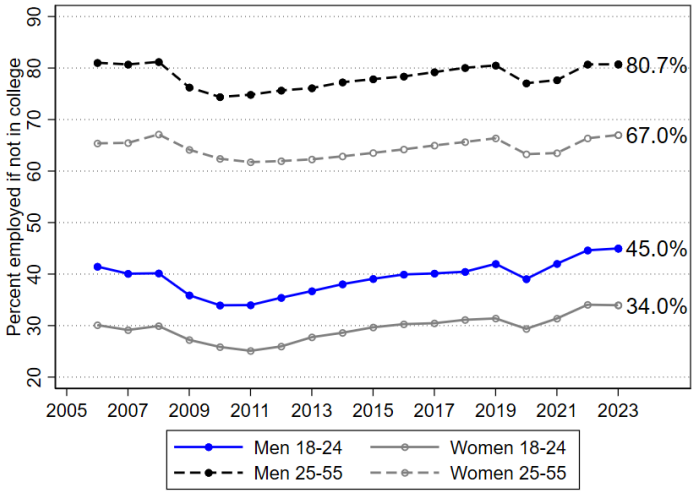
B. Gender gap in college enrollment, by age group



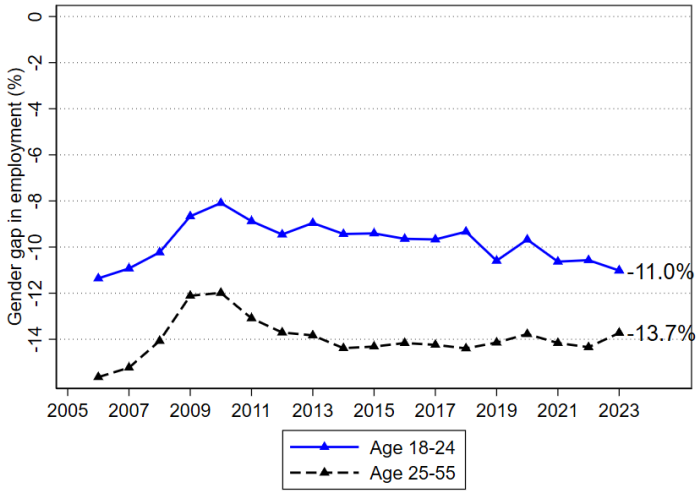
Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Community Survey. Panel A depicts the percent of non-institutionalized U.S. high school graduates without college degrees who are attending college, by gender and age group. Panel B depicts the gender gap in college enrollment, by age group. All computations use ACS person weights.

Figure 2. Just under half of young men are employed and not attending college.

A. Percent employed and not in college, by gender and age group



B. Gender gap in employment without college, by age group



Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Community Survey. Panel A depicts the percent of U.S. high school graduates without college degrees who are employed and not attending college. Panel B depicts the gender gap in employment for non-college adults, by age group. All computations use ACS person weights.

Employment

If not in college, where are the young men? The short answer, as shown in **Figure 2A-B**, is that most of them are in the workforce. Figure 2A depicts the percent of ACS respondents who were employed and not in college when they were surveyed, once again by year, gender, and broad age group. We find that 45.0 percent of young men were working and not in college during 2023. This figure is slightly greater than 42.2 percent of young men in college (Figure 1A), meaning that in 2023, age 18-24 men were more likely to be in the workforce than in college. They were also more likely to be employed than women who were not in college: 45.0 versus 34.0 percent. This 11-percentage point gender gap in employment almost one-for-one reverses the gender gap in college enrollment and has similarly grown by about 2 percentage points since the mid-2010s (Figure 2B).

The employment gap for age 25-55 adults also favored men, to a slightly larger degree than for younger adults. About 4 out of 5 men in the 25-55 age group were employed and not enrolled in higher education, compared with about 2 out of every 3 age 25-55 women.

NEET (Not in Employment or Education)

Figure 3 illustrates the likelihood that an ACS respondent was not in college or in employment, by year, gender, and broad age group. This status, often referred to as "not in employment, education, or training" (NEET), covers the individuals who are not depicted in Figures 1 or 2. Here, we define NEET status to include those who were unemployed but looking for work, as well as those who were out of the labor force.

All four gender and age groups were notably more likely to be NEET during the Great Recession, and most had not returned to pre-recession levels before the *next* recession started in 2020. COVID-era 2020 and 2021 saw higher NEET rates across the board, followed by declining NEET and higher rates of employment (Figure 2).

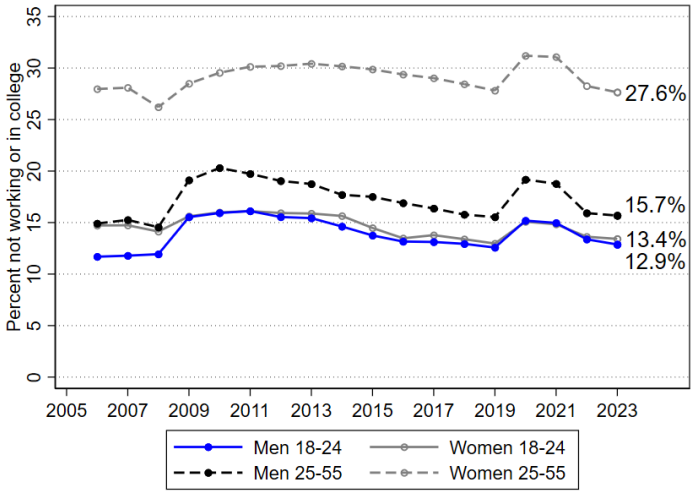
Women in the 25-55 age group were most likely to be NEET, at 27.6 percent in 2023. This is consistent with more home production and care responsibilities among women in this age range, which we will see again in time use statistics shown in Section 3. Young men and women were NEET at about the same rate (13 percent), which is similar to what others have reported from a different Census survey, the smaller but more frequent Current Population Survey (Rodgers et al., 2024; Hawrami & Reeves, 2025).

A frequent question concerning young adults who are not in employment or education is: "How do they sustain themselves?" **Figure 4** gives a partial answer, showing that most age 18-24 NEETs lived with their parents. This described 58.0 percent of young NEET women in 2023 and 76.0 percent of young NEET men. A large part of the gender difference is again likely due to greater caretaking responsibilities among young women. Age 16-24 women who were NEET were much more likely than NEET men to have children (Hawrami & Reeves, 2025).

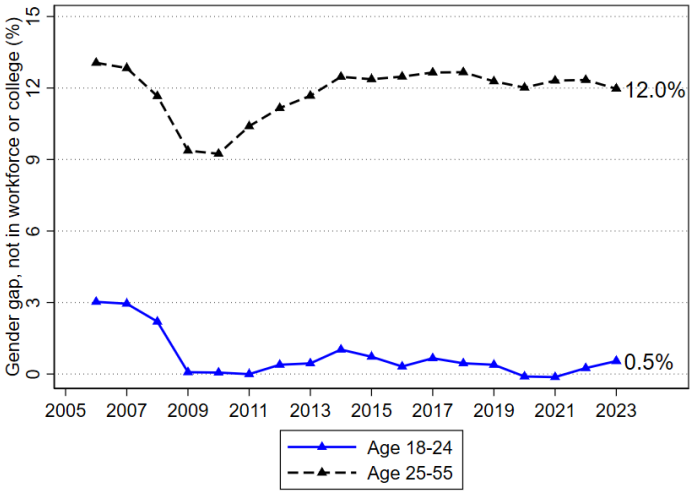
A related question about young NEETs is on other potential sources of income, for example, from business and investment ventures. **Figure 5** shows that NEETs' non-wage or passive income was not typically enough to live on. Young men and women reported just $100 in average annual self-employment income in 2023 (referencing 2022, the previous calendar year) and $100 – 300 in investment income.

Figure 3. About the same rate of young men and young women are NEET: Not in higher education or employment (13%).

A. Percent not in college or employment, by gender and age group



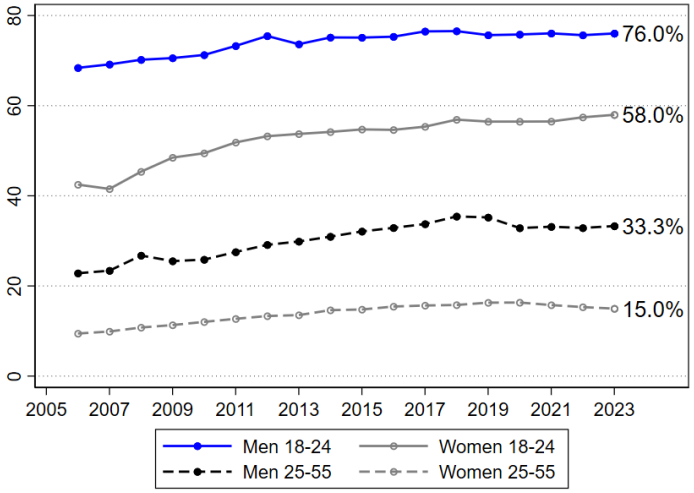
B. Gender gap in NEET status (in percentage points), by age group



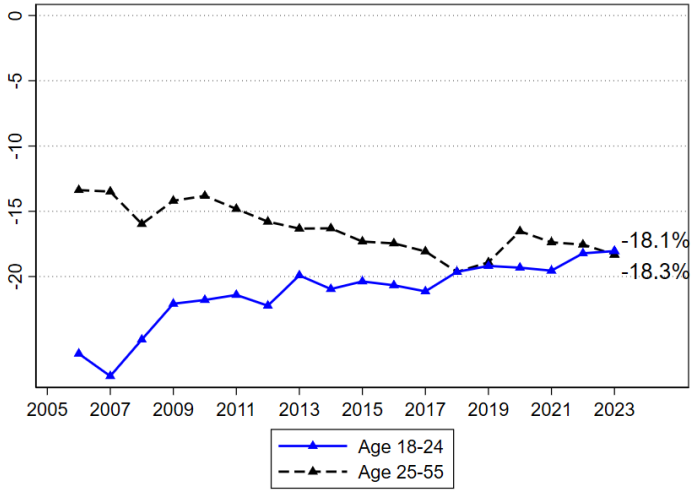
Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Community Survey. Panel A depicts the percent of U.S. high school graduates who are not in higher education or employment (NEET). Panel B depicts the gender gap in NEET status, by age group. All computations use ACS person weights.

Figure 4. About three-quarters of NEET young men live with their parents. Across age and gender groups, NEET individuals are increasingly likely to live with parents.

A. Percentage of NEET who live with parents, by gender and age group



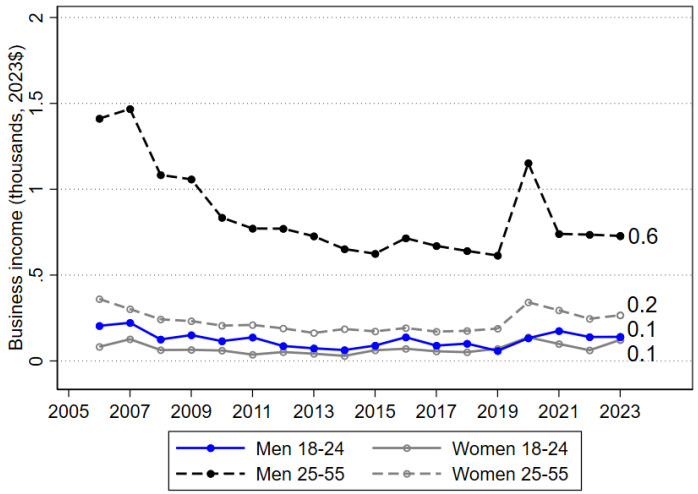
B. Gender gap in living with parents if NEET, by age group



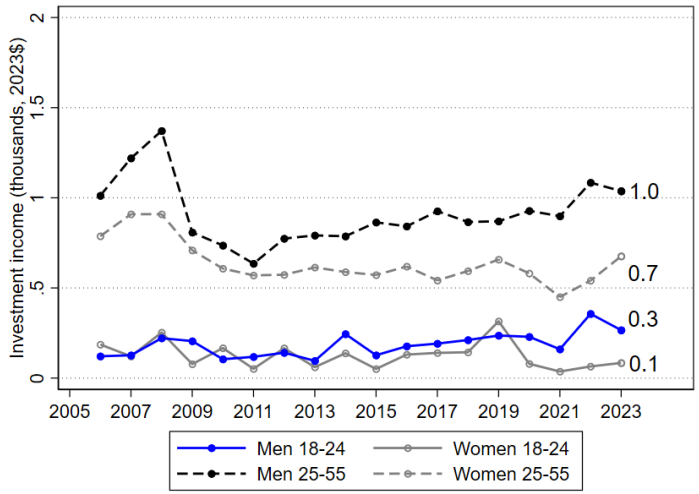
Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Community Survey. Panel A depicts the percent of NEET U.S. high school graduates who are living with their parents. Panel B depicts the gender gap in living with parents if NEET, by age group. All computations use ACS person weights.

Figure 5. NEET men and women have very little income from business ventures or investments.

A. Business income if NEET, by gender and age group



B. Investment income if NEET, by gender and age group



Notes: Authors' computations using the American Community Survey. Panel B depicts business income, in thousands, if not in higher education or employment (NEET), by gender and age group. Panel B depicts investment income. All income figures are inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars. Averages are computed using ACS person weights.

What Explains the Gender Gap in College Enrollment?

Having shown that young women are much more likely to enroll in college than young men, we now move on to investigate the individual, academic, political, and economic factors that might relate to the college gender gap. Up front, we emphasize that results are descriptive and not designed to pinpoint the root cause of female overrepresentation in higher education. The value in this correlational exercise is from identifying candidate explanations that either corroborate prior research using the latest available data, or motivate future research on under-explored possibilities.

As in Section 1, we rely on 2006 – 2023 ACS data. We focus on the age 18-24 population of non-institutionalized young men and women who have a high school diploma but no college degree. This is the same subset of the ACS data whose college enrollment, employment, and NEET status are depicted in Figures 1-3.

We develop a regression model that predicts the likelihood that an individual in this sample is enrolled in college. The outcome variable is a simple binary indicator for any college enrollment.

Control variables include the following:

- Gender: An indicator equal to 1 for men.
- Disability: Indicators for individual difficulty in five areas: Cognitive, ambulatory, independent living, caring for oneself, and sensory (hearing/vision).
- Political environment: The state Republican vote share in the most recent presidential election.
- Youth academic ability: For each age 18-24 cohort, we identify average rates of math and reading proficiency for their gender and in their state of residence when they would have been in 8th grade, 4-10 years before appearing in the ACS. Proficiency rates are from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).[2]
- State early career occupational profile: The percent of age 25-35 workers in an ACS respondents' state who are in male-dominated, college-dominated jobs; in male-dominated, high school-dominated jobs; or in female-dominated, high school-dominated jobs. Omitted for collinearity is the female-dominated, college-dominated job share.
- State early career economic conditions: The age 25-35 unemployment rate in an ACS respondents' state, as well as three measures of income for 25-35 year-olds: median wage and salary income, average business income, and average investment income.

Research consistently finds a lower likelihood of college enrollment for individuals with identified disabilities (Haber et al., 2016). We control for a rough proxy of the state political environment in light of survey evidence that Republicans tend to have a more pessimistic view of higher education (Jones, 2025). Academic ability in 8th grade should strongly relate to high school aptitude, preparation for college, and the likelihood of admission. In addition, Conger (2015) finds that women having better high school grades explains part of the gender gap in college enrollment.

We control for the early career occupational profile, unemployment rate, and typical income in all respondents' states to help represent the draw of the area labor market as a substitute for college.

[2] Results are similar if we restrict the ACS sample to those who live in the state where they were born, increasing the likelihood that NAEP data describe their own 8th grade cohort.

These economic controls are motivated by Figure 2 evidence that young men tend to be in the workforce if not college, and survey evidence that males are more likely to believe that a college education is not necessary for the job they want (Parker, 2021). Our focus on *early career* economic conditions is motivated by research suggesting that post-secondary enrollment and persistence are particularly responsive to youth labor market fluctuations (Clark, 2011; Carruthers, 2025). All regressions additionally control for individual race and ethnicity indicators as well as state and year fixed effects, and we allow standard errors to be clustered within states.

Table A1 in the appendix reports coefficient estimates, standard errors, and statistical significance for many of the variables listed above, from separate regressions predicting college enrollment for women and men. Several variables stand out as meaningful predictors of college enrollment. Disabled individuals were generally less likely to attend college. An increase in the Republican vote share was associated with a small decline in young adult college enrollment, by 0.14 percentage points per 1-point increase in Republican votes. Improvements in 8th-grade reading were associated with more college enrollment several years later. Changes in state occupational profiles and economic conditions were not associated with statistically significant changes in college enrollment.

While many of the variables in our model are strongly associated with individual college enrollment, our interest lies in whether any of these factors help to explain why women are more likely to go to college than men. If that is true for a particular factor—8th-grade reading proficiency, for example—then we should find that the regression-adjusted gender gap shrinks when we add 8th-grade reading proficiency to the model. We formalize this logic by applying Gelbach's (2016) decomposition technique to the gender gap in college enrollment.

Table 1. Decomposition of the 2006 - 2023 gender gap in college enrollment

	(1) Simple model	(2) Full model
Gender gap in college enrollment (women - men, percentage points)	-9.62***	-7.93***
	(0.29)	(0.89)
Decomposition Results: Portion of the gender gap explained by:		
Disability status		1.0%
State political environment		insignificant
Cohort 8th grade math and reading scores		16.6%
State occupational profile of young adults		insignificant
State unemployment and income of young adults		insignificant
Unexplained remainder		82.4%

Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Community Survey. The first row of results lists the estimated gender gap in college enrollment for non-institutionalized 18-24 year-olds high school graduates without college degrees, in percentage points. Subsequent rows describe the portion of the column (1) gender gap explained by additional control variables, following Gelbach (2016). Both simple and full models control for race and Hispanic ethnicity indicators, as well as state and year fixed effects. Standard errors, in parentheses, are clustered within states.

+ statistically significant at 10%, ** at 5%, *** at 1%

Table 1 summarizes the results. The regression coefficient we estimate for the "male" indicator is the gender gap in college enrollment. This is 9.6 percentage points in the column (1) model that controls for gender, race, ethnicity, state fixed effects, and year fixed effects, which is in the range of the 8.0 – 10.5-point gap shown in Figure 1B. When we add all of the controls listed above in the column (2) model, the gap attenuates or shrinks to 7.9 percentage points. So, before applying any decomposition methods, we know that these controls only explain 17.6 percent of the gender gap in young adult college enrollment, leaving 82.4 percent unexplained (7.93 / 9.62 = 82.4%).

Turning to decomposition results in Table 1, the small portion that we can explain is almost entirely attributed to 8th-grade proficiency rates on NAEP math and reading tests. Reading proficiency registered as an important predictor of college enrollment (Table A1 in the appendix), and adolescent boys were less likely to meet proficiency thresholds on the 8th-grade NAEP reading test. We can also attribute a statistically significant but very small amount of the gender gap to disability. Individuals with identified disabilities are much less likely to enroll in college, and young men in the ACS are slightly more likely to have an identified disability. Political and economic factors are not significant contributors to the gender gap in college enrollment.

Our findings in this section are consistent with earlier research showing that women outperform men in some aspects of academic achievement before college, which may contribute to an advantage in college enrollment (Conger, 2015). Our findings for disability as another contributing factor (albeit a small one) motivate more research in this area, particularly for learning disabilities that are more common for young boys and men, and that are associated with lower rates of college going (Carruthers et al., 2022).

Insignificant results for political and economic conditions do not rule out those factors as important in college enrollment decisions for young adults, or even as having different levels of importance for young men and young women. Future research using finer data on these aspects may yield additional insights. Note that the factors that registered as important in explaining the gender gap in college enrollment were unique to each ACS respondent—their own disability identifications, and their cohort/gender/state 8th grade proficiency rates—whereas political and economic factors were defined more broadly at the state level. Other factors will be more difficult to quantify, such as the frequent sentiment among young men that they "just didn't want to" complete a college degree (Parker, 2021).

Trends in Young Adult Time Use, Leisure, Recreational Computing, and Video Games

Section 1 reviewed trends in young adults' college enrollment and employment but defined both statuses in fairly blunt and discrete terms. In the ACS, we can see if an individual is enrolled in higher education and if they are employed, but not how they divide their time between these and other activities. We turn to the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to investigate more granular measures of education, employment, and leisure activities. The ATUS covers a nationally representative subset of individuals who complete the Current Population Survey and includes a 24-hour diary for each respondent, broken into 15-minute increments.

Our analysis of the ATUS largely follows Aguiar et al. (2020), who document differences between 2004-7 and 2014-17 allocations of time across the following categories:

- Work: Time spent engaged in work for pay (including commuting and travel), whether for employers or in self-employment.
- Job Search: Preparing and sending resumes, researching jobs, interviewing for jobs.
- Home Production: Chores, maintenance, cooking, shopping, caring for adults in the household.
- Child Care: Caring for children in the household (separate from other home production activities).
- Education: Time spent attending classes, completing assignments.
- Leisure: TV, movies, reading, sports, hobbies, recreational computing (which includes browsing, scrolling social media, online chatting, and gaming), and any portion of total eating, sleeping, and personal care in excess of 7 hours per day.

Among other findings, Aguiar et al. (2020) showed that young men aged 21-30 reduced their work hours between 2004-7 and 2014-17 by 1.8 hours per week, on average, and increased their recreational computer use by 2.7 hours per week, on average. Although older men and women of all ages also recorded more leisure time in the mid-2010s, they did not substitute work for recreational computing to the same degree as young men. Most of young men's recreational computer usage was allocated to video games, as well as most of the growth in their leisure computing.

Aguiar et al. (2020) go on to formalize the idea of "leisure luxuries," that is, activities that command a disproportionate share of any additional free time. Using the ATUS, they show that playing video games, and recreational computing more broadly, are leading examples of leisure luxuries. Finally, they estimate that improvements in gaming technology may have accounted for the majority of the decline in young men's weekly working hours between 2004-7 and 2014-17.

We extend their analysis in a few ways that are pertinent to our overarching question, "Where are the young men?" First, we shift the comparison from 2004-7 / 2014-17 forward in time to 2014-17 / 2021-24. Both sets compare time usage across periods of economic expansion, and the more recent data allow us to examine whether the original findings hold in a post-pandemic context marked by shifts in labor market connections, educational transitions, and digital engagement. Second, we compare time allocations across age groups 18-24 and 25-55 rather than 21-30 and 31-55. This lines up with the same broad division we use in Sections 1-2, as well as age bands for traditional versus nontraditional college students. The 18-20 year-olds, though a small portion of the ATUS, nonetheless represent an important transitional period where young adults begin college or full-time work. And third, we include full-time students in both age groups.[3]

[3] Aguiar et al. (2020) exclude full-time students under age 25 because the ATUS did not ask 25-plus respondents about their school attendance until 2013. Our analysis is limited to 2014 and later. We follow their weighting computations so that subgroup results are nationally representative in terms of educational attainment.

Table 2. Change in weekly hours allotted to work, home, education, and leisure activities, by gender and age group

Young Men (18-24)				
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Work	31.96	28.57	-3.39	(2.03)
Job Search	0.52	0.22	-0.30	(0.17)
Home Production	10.10	8.44	-1.65	(0.85)
Child Care	1.73	0.87	-0.86	(0.41)
Education	2.54	2.41	-0.13	(0.74)
Leisure	70.42	76.97	6.56	(1.92)
Older Men (25-55)				
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Work	40.00	39.27	-0.73	(0.56)
Job Search	0.47	0.29	-0.18	(0.06)
Home Production	13.76	13.31	-0.45	(0.28)
Child Care	3.74	3.90	0.16	(0.15)
Education	1.03	0.90	-0.13	(0.11)
Leisure	58.17	59.21	1.04	(0.48)
Young Women (18-24)				
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Work	23.37	21.50	-1.87	(1.81)
Job Search	0.17	0.37	0.20	(0.14)
Home Production	17.53	14.59	-2.94	(0.98)
Child Care	6.51	4.05	-2.45	(0.70)
Education	4.42	4.77	0.35	(0.88)
Leisure	64.32	71.08	6.76	(1.68)
Older Women (25-55)				
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Work	27.35	28.36	1.01	(0.47)
Job Search	0.24	0.19	-0.05	(0.04)
Home Production	21.50	20.41	-1.09	(0.29)
Child Care	8.11	7.76	-0.35	(0.20)
Education	1.33	0.97	-0.36	(0.11)
Leisure	57.76	58.46	0.70	(0.41)

Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Time Use Survey. The table describes weekly time spent in different activities, measured in hours, by gender and age group. Standard errors for mean differences are in parentheses.

Table 2 shows how time use has changed across the two four-year time periods, one pre-pandemic and one post-pandemic. Looking first to the levels of work, education, and leisure, young men spent about 33% more time at work than young women in 2021-24, whereas young women spent almost twice as much time on educational activities as young men. Young men spent a larger amount of time in leisure than any of the other demographic groups. Women age 25-55 spent the most time in home production and child care (28.2 total hours in 2021-24), and Men age 25-55 spent the most time at work (39.3 hours in 2021-24).

Now focusing on changes in time at work and school, we find that while young men and women were more likely to be employed in recent years (Figure 2), they were spending less time at work. Women age 18-24 spent 1.87 fewer hours at work in 2021-24 than in 2014-17, although this change was noisy, with a standard error of similar magnitude. The 3.39-hour average decline for young men was more precise and represented a 10.6 percent drop in hours of work. In contrast with young adults, age 25-55 individuals worked about as much (men) or more (women) in 2021-24 than in 2014-17.

All four demographic groups increased their leisure time, but the magnitude of additional leisure was much larger for young men and women (6-7 additional hours per week, on average) than for older men and women (about 1 additional hour). For young men, additional leisure time came largely at the expense of work, whereas young women substituted away from home production and child care.

Patterns documented in Table 2 raise important questions: What is driving this increase in young adults' leisure, and how are they allocating their leisure time? **Table 3** shows that the answer to both questions is largely recreational computing, the major sub-category of which is playing video games. Young men typically spent 13 hours per week over 2021-24 in recreational computing, and out of that total, nearly 11 hours per week playing video games. Video games alone accounted for 77 percent of the increase in young men's weekly leisure hours. We see a similar pattern for young women, but less extreme in terms of the level and growth of computing and video games. Young women spent about 8 hours per week in recreational computing, close to half of which was spent playing video games. Older men and women also exhibited a statistically significant increase in leisure computing and video games, but by a much smaller magnitude.

We go on to replicate other parts of the Aguiar et al. (2020) analysis and report key results in **Tables A2 and A3** of the appendix. Results suggest, as in the earlier study, that recreational computing is a leisure luxury, since a 1 percent increase in leisure time corresponds with a disproportionate 1.5 – 2.6 percent increase in recreational computing across all four age and gender groups (Table A2). By comparison, we estimate that a 1 percent increase in leisure time would increase eating, sleeping, and personal care time by just 0.5 – 0.7 percent.

Qualitatively, video gaming and computing technology have advanced rapidly over the last 20 years. Higher quality gaming increases the value of each hour spent gaming, and in turn, increases the "cost" of working an additional hour rather than gaming. Table A3 lists the estimated effect of better computing technology on time spent working, in percentage terms. Results indicate that age 18-24 men's labor supply fell 6.5 percent due to gains in the value of leisure, which would account for 61 percent of the actual decline shown in Table 2. These rapid improvements had smaller and imprecise

effects on younger women and the older demographics. Collectively, our time use analysis suggests that the rise in screen-based leisure among young men is not solely a consequence of labor market changes but also a structural shift in leisure.

Table 3. Weekly hours spent with recreational computing and video games, by gender and age group

	Young Men (18-24)			
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Total Leisure	70.42	76.97	6.56	(1.92)
Recreational Computing	8.19	13.10	4.91	(1.07)
Video Games	5.77	10.85	5.08	(0.95)
	Older Men (25-55)			
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Total Leisure	58.17	59.21	1.04	(0.48)
Recreational Computing	2.70	3.87	1.17	(0.15)
Video Games	1.43	2.59	1.16	(0.12)
	Young Women (18-24)			
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Total Leisure	64.32	71.08	6.76	(1.68)
Recreational Computing	3.38	8.19	4.81	(0.81)
Video Games	1.84	3.95	2.12	(0.55)
	Older Women (25-55)			
	2014-2017	2021-2024	Change	St. Err.
Total Leisure	57.76	58.46	0.70	(0.41)
Recreational Computing	2.01	2.36	0.35	(0.09)
Video Games	0.75	1.06	0.31	(0.07)

Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Time Use Survey. The table describes weekly hours spent in leisure, with recreational computing (a category of leisure), and playing video games (a subcategory of recreational computing). Standard errors for mean differences are in parentheses.

Section 1 offers a short answer to the question, “Where are the young men?” They are less likely than young women to be in college, more likely to be working, and about as likely to be out of both school and work.

Section 2 scratches the surface as to why young men are increasingly less engaged with college. Academic readiness is likely a contributing factor, along with physical and learning disabilities to a much lesser extent. More localized data on these measures, as well as political and economic conditions, would improve what we know about the post-pandemic gender gap in college going.

Finally, Section 3 reviews finer measures of time allocation between work, school, and leisure to shed more light on the target question. We find that young men were spending significantly less time at work in recent years and more time with recreational computing, especially video games. This pattern is a continuation and acceleration of pre-pandemic trends and appears to be driven, in part, by steady improvements in computing and gaming technology and the value of leisure time.

A newer post-pandemic development is parallel growth in leisure time between young men and young women, but in different ways and at the expense of different things. Over three-quarters (77 percent) of the 6.6-hour weekly gain in young men’s leisure time can be accounted for by spending 5.1 additional hours with video games. Young women spent 2.1 more hours with video games post-pandemic, but this is a comparatively small 31 percent of their total 6.8-hour weekly increase in leisure. Young men are largely substituting leisure for work, whereas young women are giving up relatively more home production and child care.

So, where are the young men? Our findings suggest that they are less engaged with college for reasons that are difficult to pin down, working but less engaged with work day-to-day, and increasingly in different digital spaces than women.

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Table A1. Associations between age 18-24 college enrollment, state political preferences, cohort 8th grade achievement, and state occupational and economic conditions

	(1) Women	(2) Men
Cognitive difficulty (0,1)	-7.537***	-9.243***
	(0.536)	(0.575)
Ambulatory difficulty (0,1)	-9.000***	-8.370***
	(0.631)	(0.629)
Independent living difficulty (0,1)	-19.32***	-16.02***
	(0.625)	(0.783)
Difficulty caring for self (0,1)	1.591	4.789***
	(0.964)	(0.842)
Hearing and/or vision difficulty (0,1)	-5.441***	-6.303***
	(0.503)	(0.591)
Republican vote share in most recent presidential election (0-100)	-0.136+	-0.144**
	(0.0773)	(0.0582)
Cohort's 8th grade math proficiency rate (0-100)	0.0434	-0.0282
	(0.0945)	(0.0649)
Cohort's 8th grade reading proficiency rate (0-100)	0.195+	0.252**
	(0.116)	(0.109)
Age 25-35 share in male-dominated, high school-dominated jobs (0-100)	-6.261	3.056
	(11.85)	(11.56)
Age 25-35 share in male-dominated, college-dominated jobs (0-100)	-4.481	-14.79
	(12.24)	(13.12)
Age 25-35 share in female-dominated, high school-dominated jobs (0-100)	5.369	-4.327
	(12.32)	(11.92)
Age 25-35 unemployment rate (0-100)	26.82	22.61
	(18.60)	(15.88)
Age 25-35 median wage and salary income (thousands, 2023$)	0.000337	-0.0564
	(0.0751)	(0.0594)
Age 25-35 average business income (thousands, 2023$)	-0.209	-0.496
	(0.354)	(0.417)
Age 25-35 average investment income (thousands, 2023$)	0.898	0.799
	(0.701)	(0.514)
Observations	1,439,631	1,492,133

Notes: Authors' calculations using the 2006 - 2023 American Community Survey. The table reports coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses, from regressions associating individual college enrollment with the individual, cohort, and state variables listed at left. Additional controls include indicators for race and Hispanic ethnicity, state of residence fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered within state.

+ statistically significant at 10%, ** at 5%, *** at 1%

Table A2. Engel curve estimates by gender and age group

	Men age 18-24	Men age 25-55	Women age 18-24	Women age 25-55
Recreational computing	1.62	1.85	2.56	1.53
Standard error	(0.44)	(0.34)	(0.81)	(0.25)
Eating, sleeping, and personal care	0.72	0.65	0.49	0.62
Standard error	(0.15)	(0.04)	(0.16)	(0.03)

Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Time Use Survey and following Aguiar et al. (2020). The table lists estimated elasticities between time spent in either recreational computing or ESP, and total leisure time. Bootstrapped standard errors are in parentheses.

Table A3. Estimated effect of computing technology on labor supply, by gender and age group

	Men age 18-24	Men age 25-55	Women age 18-24	Women age 25-55
Δln(N)	-6.47	-0.29	-1.99	0.57
Standard error	(3.41)	(0.61)	(1.95)	(0.45)

Notes: Authors' calculations using the American Time Use Survey and following Aguiar et al. (2020). The table lists estimated shifts in labor supply, in percentage terms, from changes in computing technology. Bootstrapped standard errors are in parentheses.