

ABSTRACT

The Influence of Wealth in Explaining the Racial Gap in College Access

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College is increasingly essential for economic and social mobility. Current research devotes significant attention to race and socioeconomic factors in college access. Yet, wealth's role, as differentiated from income, is largely unexplored.

Utilizing a nationally representative dataset, this study analyzes the role of wealth in the college choice processes of students who applies to and attends four-year colleges. The hypothesis that wealth matters and does so largely through the provision of differential habitus, social capital, and cultural capital that supports the college-going process is tested through the application of a series of binary logistic regressions.

The results indicate that wealth is a significant predictor of who attends four-year colleges, even after habitus, social capital, and cultural capital are included. This indicates that wealth matters in a way beyond the way kids are raised.

Furthermore, controlling for wealth, many of the disparities in college-going associated with race disappear. Notably, black students are more likely than white students (and Hispanic students not significantly different than white students) to attend a four-year college when controls for habitus, social capital, and cultural capital are included.

Within racial and ethnic groups, wealthier black and white students have an advantage in four-year college-going over their same-race-but-less-wealthy counterparts, even after controlling for academic achievement, habitus, social capital, and cultural capital. Wealthier Hispanic students have an advantage over their less wealthy Hispanic counterparts when academic achievement is controlled, but this advantage is lost when habitus, social capital, and cultural capital are controlled. Wealthy Asian students do not have a four-year-college-going advantage over less wealthy Asian students.