WHEN DOES MONEY MATTER? PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PAYING FOR COLLEGE AND STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS, PREPAREDNESS AND ENROLLMENT


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Racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities persist in college enrollment rates throughout the United States. In this dissertation I investigate the extent to which differences in parents' perceptions of paying for college could help to explain these disparities. I analyze racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences in measures of parents' perceptions of paying for college before students enter high school. I then test the extent to which these perceptions influence students' college expectations, preparedness, and enrollment behaviors. I also investigate the extent to which differences in parents' perceptions of paying for college are able to explain racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in student outcomes along the educational pipeline.

I use data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the U.S. Department of Education. I employ linear and logistic regressions and multinomial models to test hypotheses regarding the relationships between parents' perceptions of paying for college and students' college expectations, preparedness, and enrollment behaviors.

Taken together, the empirical chapters demonstrate that parents' perceptions of paying for college are integral to the process of educational attainment. I find evidence of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences in parents' perceptions of paying for college, as well as evidence that these perceptions are influential in determining students' educational outcomes in the college choice process. However, I find little to no evidence that parents' perceptions of paying for college are able to explain racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic disparities in educational outcomes. A key contribution of the work is to demonstrate the importance of including early measures of parents' perceptions of paying for college in models of educational attainment.

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