

The Association between Partner Status of a Single-Parent and their Ability to Attain a Higher Degree with Consideration of Race



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Introduction

In the United States, nearly 10.6 million parents live in single-parent households (US Census Bureau, 2022).

While the association has been established in the literature, less is known about the ways in which single-parenthood might affect a parent's ability to attain a college degree, especially when under consideration of a parent's race.

While more data is held specifically on single-mothers, it still provides the context for how drastic the difference is between a single-parent's ability to attain a college degree: 31% of single mothers ages 25 and older held a college degree, whereas 54% of married mothers and 40% hold a college degree (Institute for Women's Policy, 2017).

The relationship between attaining a college degree and the disparities within parents who have partners and those who don't holds a connection between the financial well-being of families, as single-parent families are more likely to live in poverty when compared to those in married families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022)

Methods

Sample

The sample of the Financial Well-Being study (FinancialWB) represents the noninstitutionalized adult (age 18 and older) population in the 50 states and Washington, D.C. 14,402 panelists were selected to take the survey, with selection of an elderly population (60 or older), a population of African Americans, Hispanic people, and consideration of respondents below the poverty line.

Measures

Educational attainment is coded as "yes" and "no", where "yes" is attaining a Bachelor's degree/Graduate/professional degree, and "no" is attaining an associate degree/high school diploma/some college/GED/less than high school.

This analysis only includes parent respondents, where respondents without children were eliminated.

To evaluate single-parenthood, the group of parent respondents are separated into whether they are partnered or not, defined by the variable "partnered" where responses are "yes" or "no."

Research Questions

Does single-parenthood have an association with a parent's ability to attain a higher degree?

If there is an association between single-parenthood and attaining a higher degree, is there still an association when considering the race of the single-parent?

Results

Univariate

Race: 10.59% of parents are Black, 15.3% are Hispanic, and 74.11% are white.

Partner Status: 51.85% are partnered, while 48.15% are not.

Higher Educational Attainment: 56.92% did not attain a college degree, while 43.08% did attain a college degree.

Bivariate

Chi-Square analysis showed that parents **who do not have a partner were significantly less likely to attain a college degree** than those with a partner, $X^2=47.6728$, 1 df, $p<.0001$.

The **partner status of a parent** was significantly associated with **the attainment of a college degree**. OR=2.136.

65.78% of single-parents will not attain a college degree while 47.37% of partnered parents will not attain a college degree (Figure 1).

Multivariate

Partner status of a parent is associated with level of educational attainment after controlling for race. OR=1.873 ($p<.0001$).

However, the interaction when accounting for race specifically between white respondents and Black respondents was not found to be significantly associated with the level of educational attainment.

Although the odds ratio between white respondents and Black respondents is 0.3, the p-value was equivalent to 0.7269, proving there is no association.

In contrast, the interaction between white respondents and Hispanic respondents was statistically significant when predicting the attainment of a college degree.

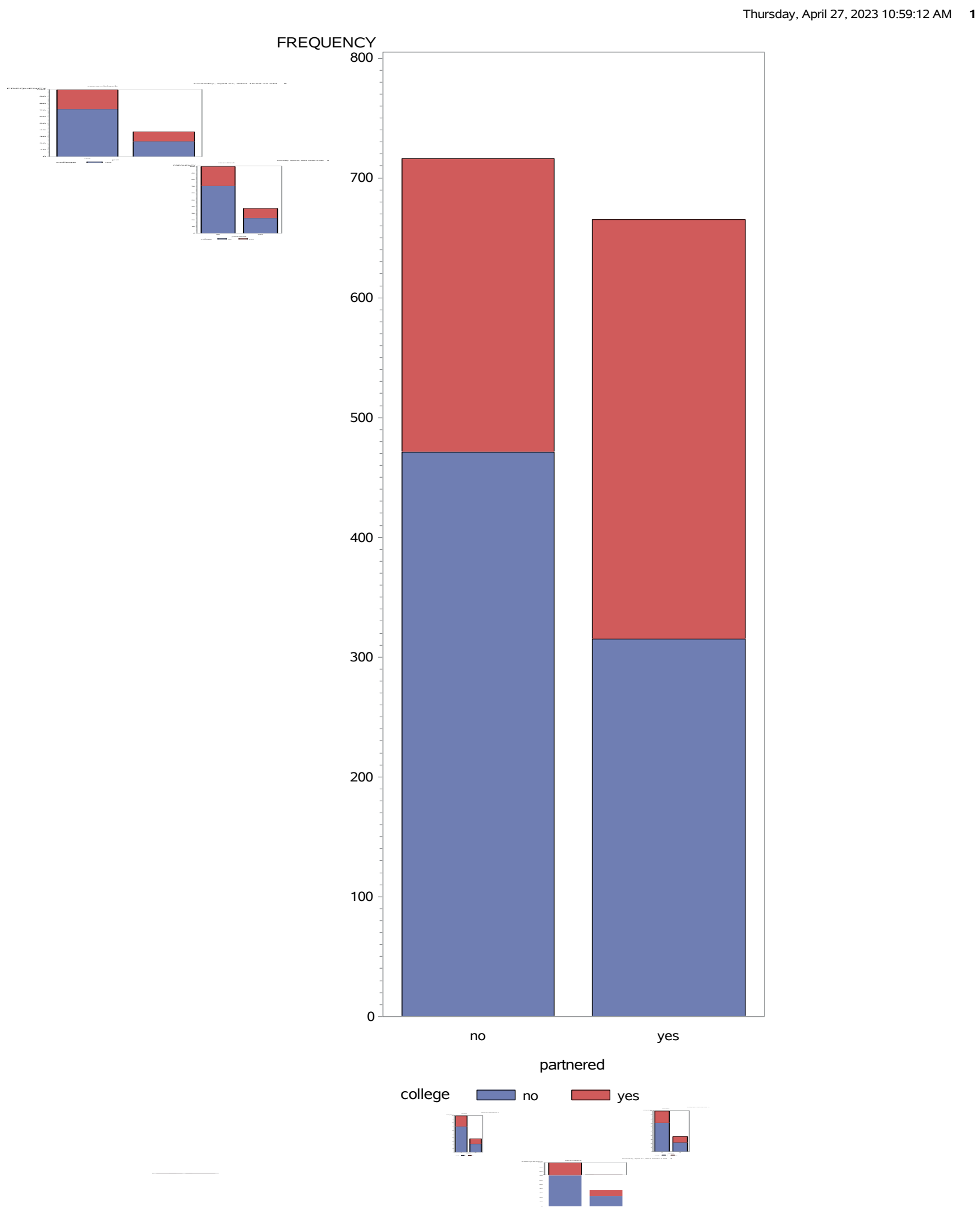


Figure 1. Partner status and level of education among Parents

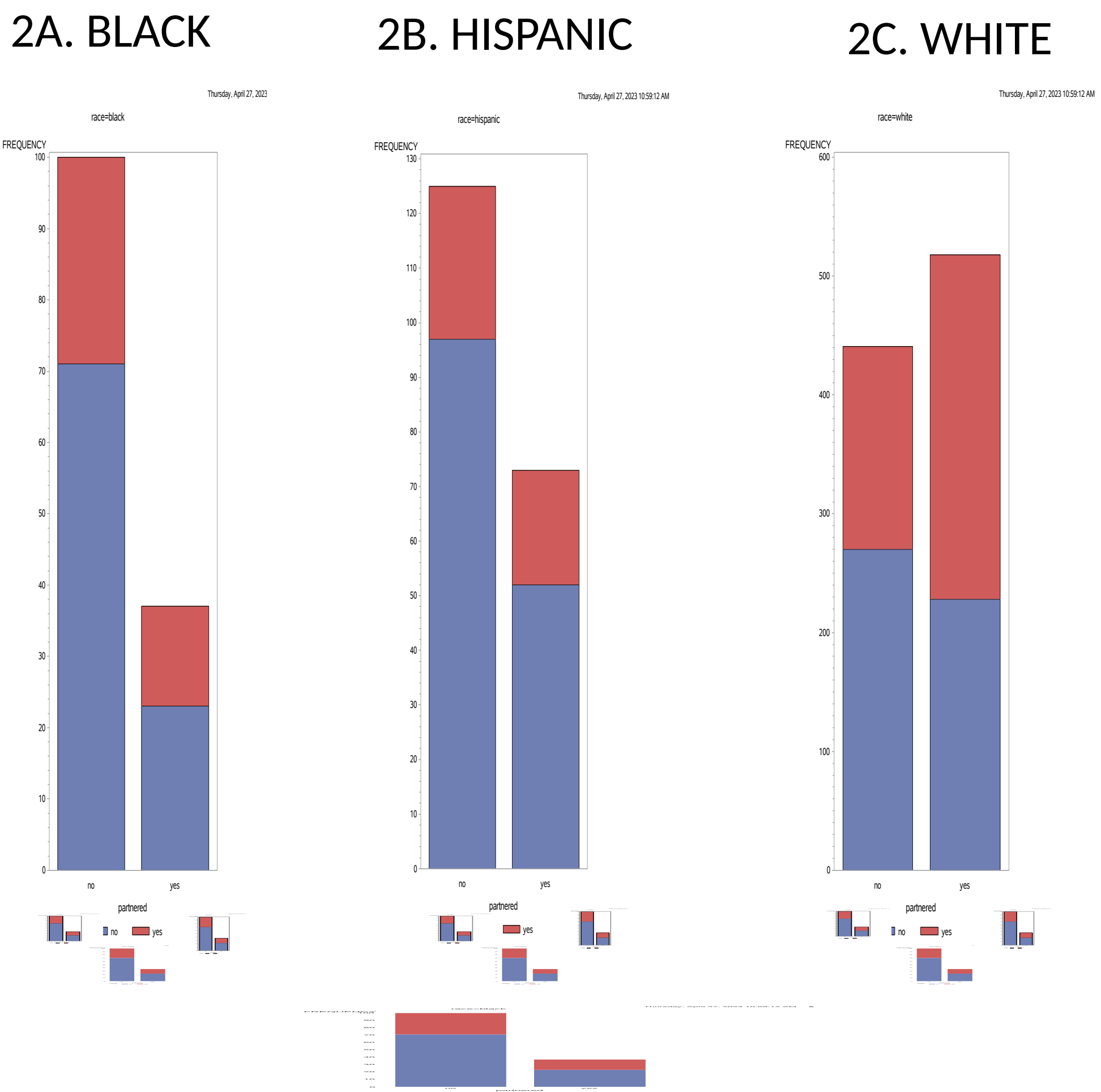


Figure 2: Partner status and level of education by Race among Parents

Multivariate (cont.)

Between white and Hispanic respondents, white respondents are 2.58 times more likely to attain a college degree. (Figure 2B) OR=2.58, $p<.0001$.

Discussion

Individuals who are single-parents may be less likely to attain a college degree when considering all parents.

In the findings, the race of the parent was relevant as well, showing that there is a higher concentration of nonwhite single parents versus nonwhite parents.

Further research is needed to determine the reasoning of why race is a factor in a parent's ability to attain a college degree, like perhaps considering socioeconomic class or sex.

US Census Bureau. "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2022." Census.gov, November 21, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/demo/families/cps-2022.html>.

Institute for Women's Policy. "IWPR #c460 September 2017 Single Mothers in College: Growing Enrollment, Financial Challenges, and the Benefits of Attainment."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Child Well-Being in Single-Parent Families." The Annie E. Casey Foundation, August 1, 2022. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-well-being-in-single-parent-families>.