

Not What Every Other Girl Wants: Native American Women's Educational Aspirations

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Purpose

- What are the educational aspirations of Native American women?
- What factors influence these aspirations and subsequent higher education enrollment decisions?

Higher Education Participation Rates

- Percentage of 18 to 24 year olds that enroll in higher education - Utah minority groups
 - 58% of Asians
 - 29% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders
 - 28% of Blacks/African Americans
 - **19% of Native Americans**
 - 13.4% of Hispanics/Latinos

(Perlich, 2006)

Women in Utah

- Total USHE enrollment = 49.1% female
 - 8.5% below national rate
- Native American enrollments—57.8% female
 - 2.4% below national rate
- White enrollments—48.7% female
 - 7.6% below national rate

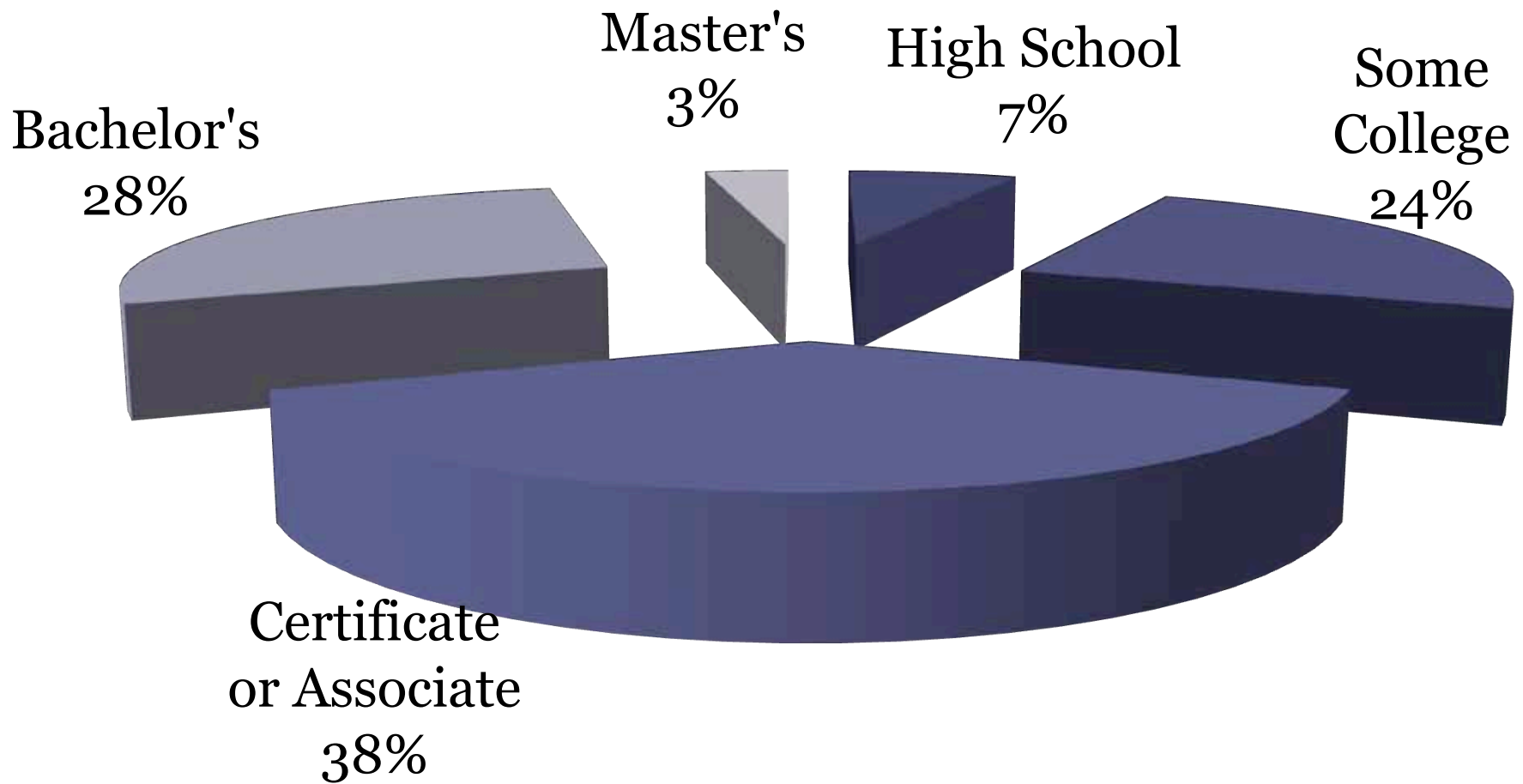
(King & Madsen, 2010)




Data Collection

- Participants - 29 Native American women
- Qualitative & quantitative data
- Online survey
- No enrollment after high school; enrolled but didn't complete; completed

Education Level



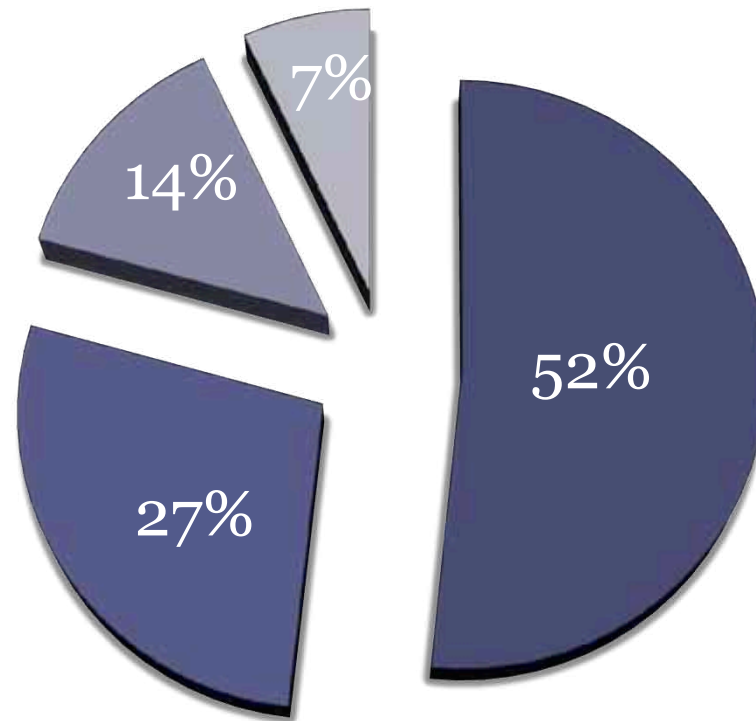


I don't want what every other girl wants. I want to be educated and able to support myself. I would like to be an example for my fellow Native American women who haven't decided if they want to attend a higher education institution.

Study Participant

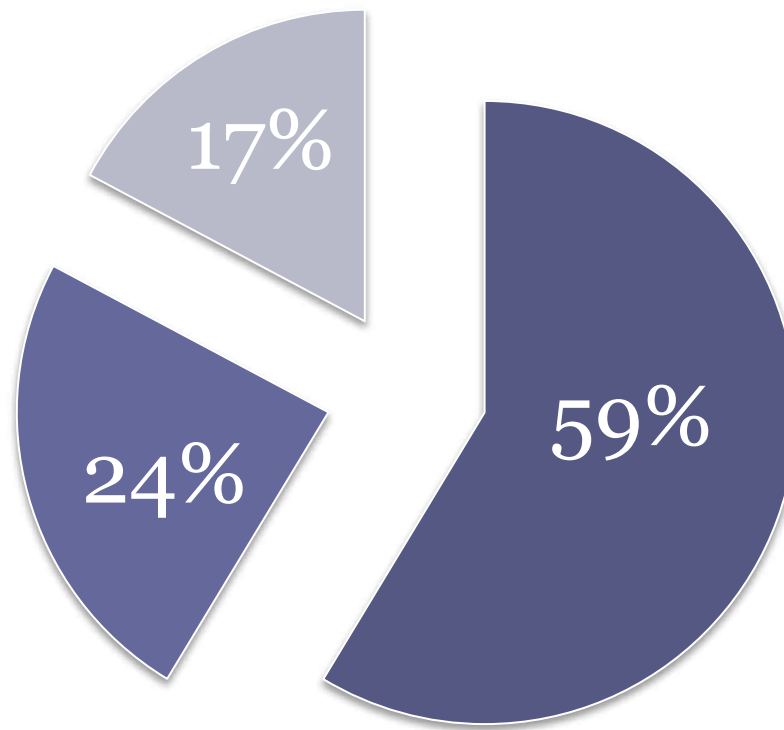
Age

■ 19-24 ■ 25-34 ■ 35-40 ■ Over 40

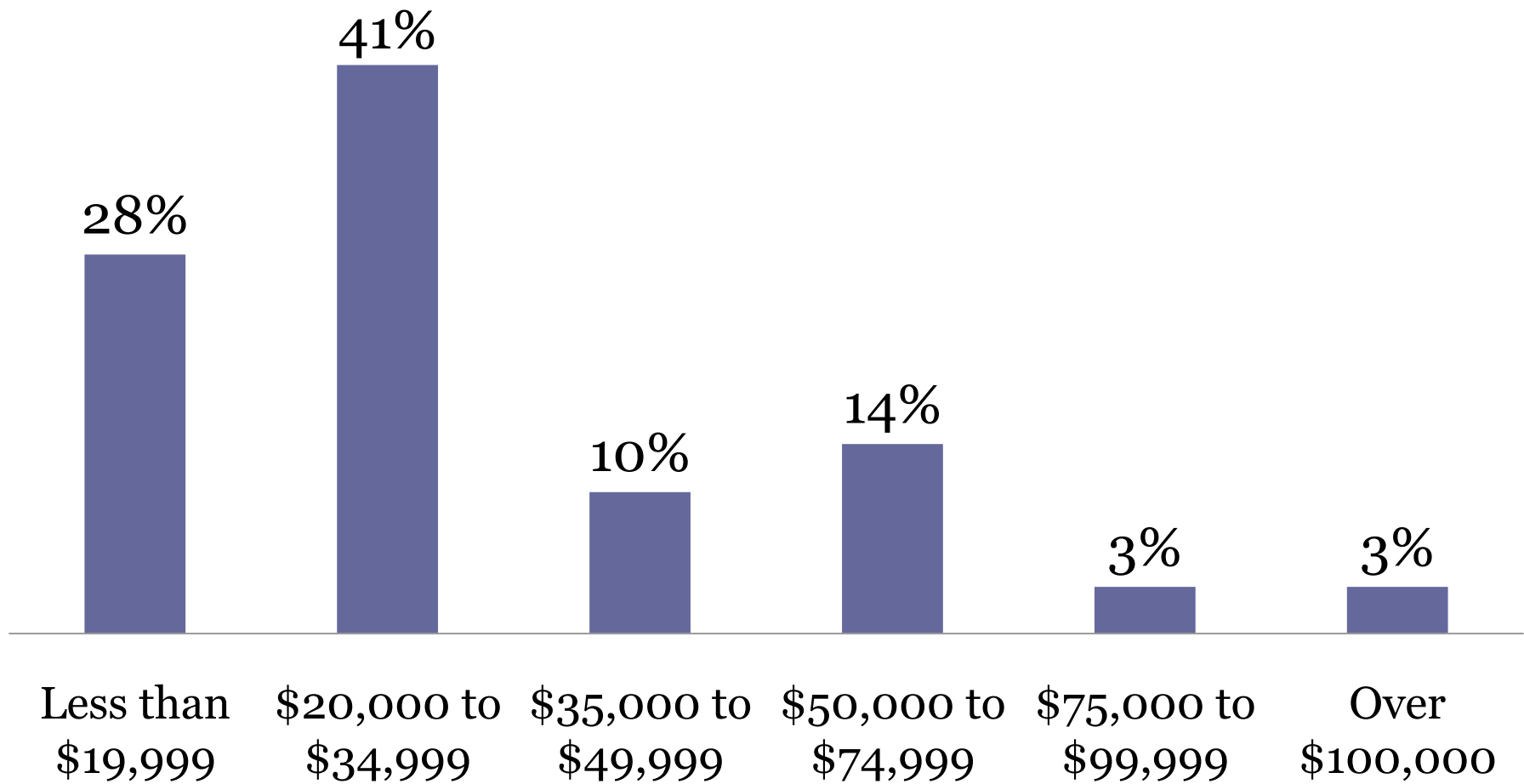


Marital Status

■ Single ■ Married ■ Separated/Divorced



Parental Income



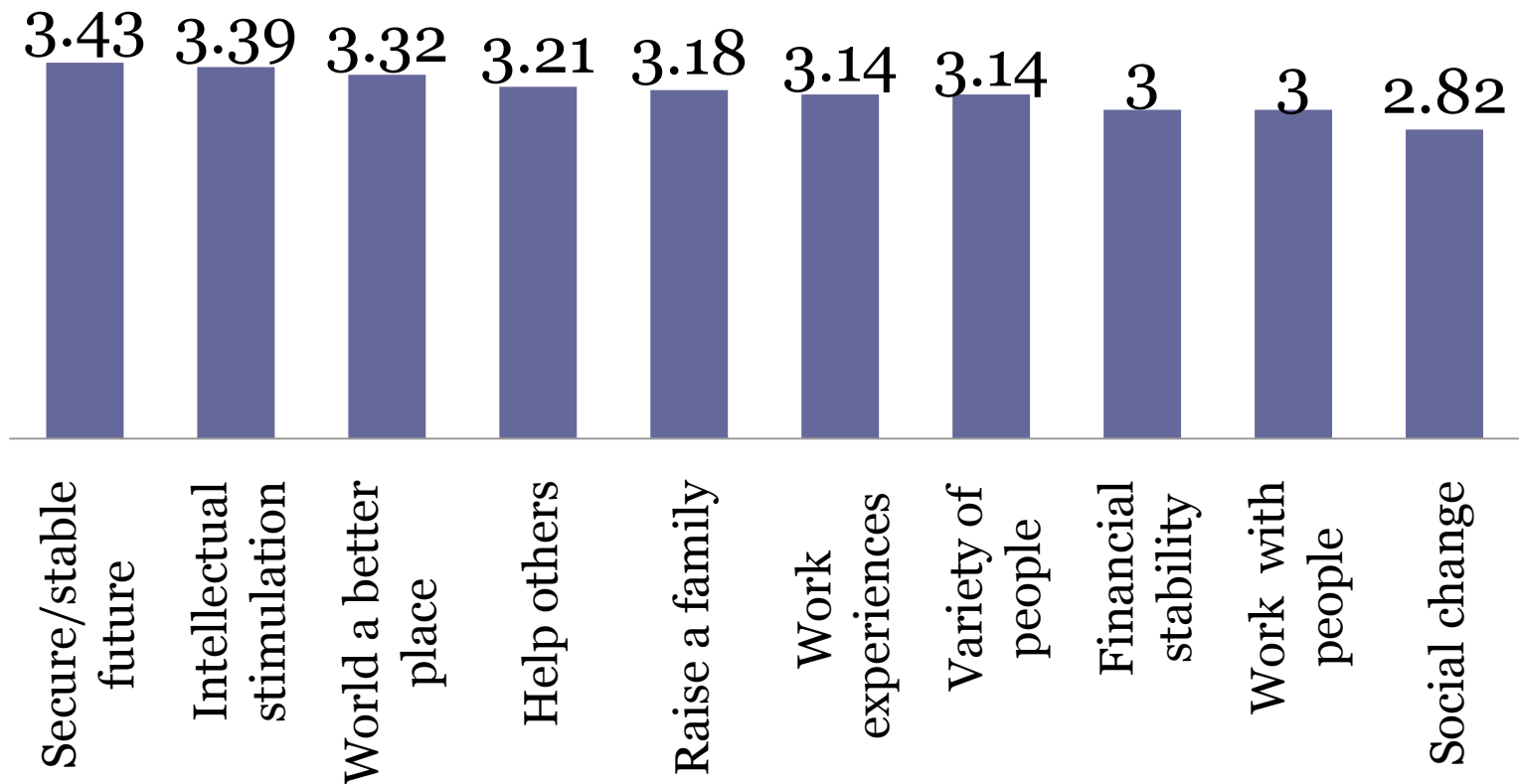


Future Aspirations

“As long as I can have things for myself and help my family out, then I will feel accomplished. That's all I want is to be successful.”

Future Aspirations & Lifestyle

■ Scale: 1 (Not important) - 4 (Essential)



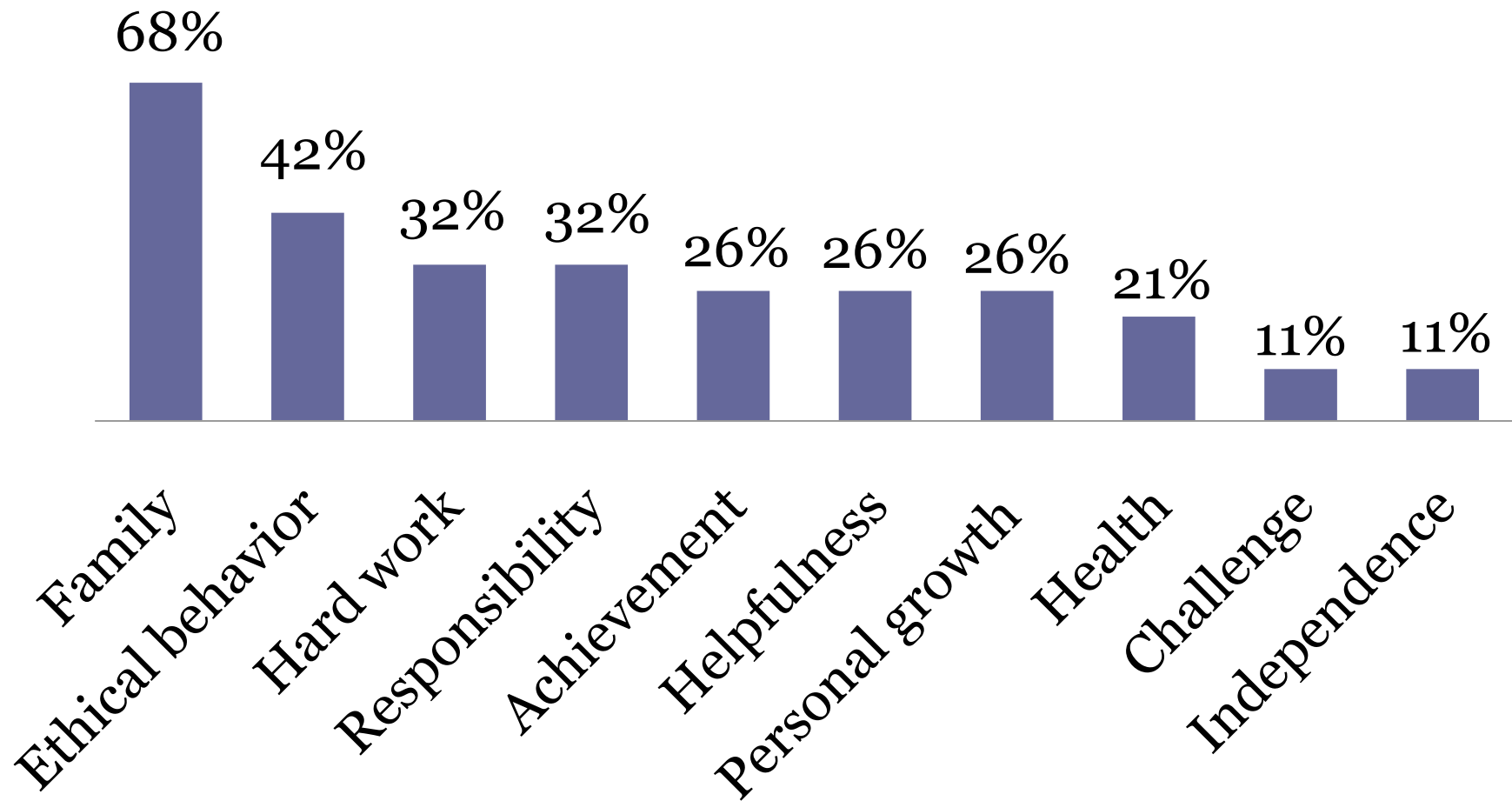
Better Life & the Desire to Give Back

- “The most important factors that influenced my decision [to get an education] were my family. I figured they took care of me as a child and young adolescent, now it is my turn to take care of them.”
- “I really want to move back to the reservation because I believe that is where I am supposed to be. There are so few people willing to invest their time in the reservation and make a difference. . . . I don't think I will be making a lot of money, but that is OK with me. I have never really needed it before. I really just want to help other people.



Influences on Aspirations

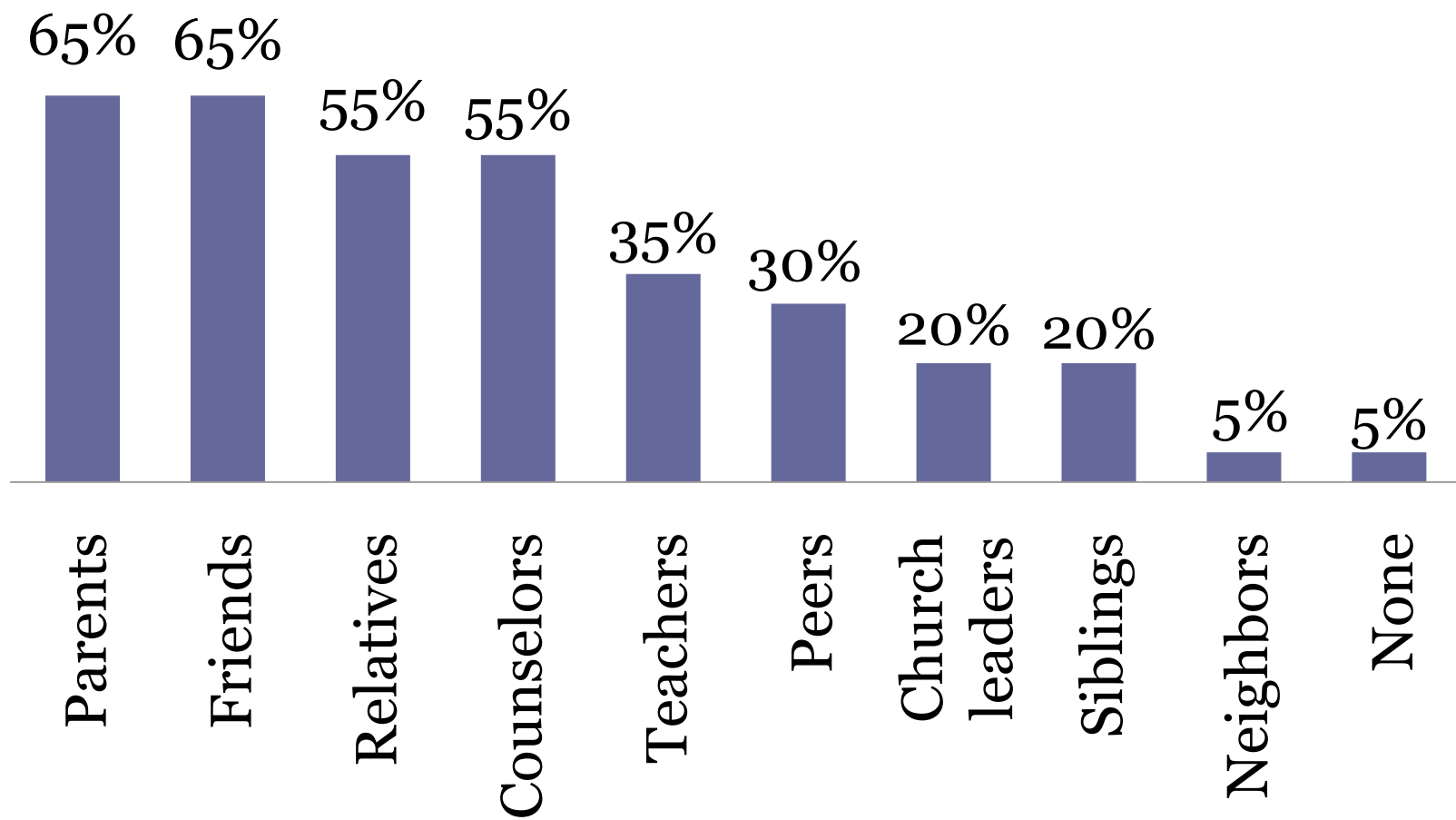
Most Important Values



Values and Personal Attributes

- “I think that all of us are capable of doing whatever we put our minds to and I set the same standards for myself. I believe that I have the same opportunities as everyone else and therefore I can do everything and anything. My long-term life goals are to continuously educate and develop myself as a human being, to always be considering new horizons for my people, and to help my family in any way that I can.”
- “Although I am no longer active in my faith, these conversations [speeches and directives by church leaders related to the importance of education for women] definitely influenced my college decisions, and made attending college feel more important.”

Conversations About College



Family, Friends, Teachers, Counselors

- “My mother helped me develop a love for learning. I have these great memories of reading every night with my mom. I think I know every nursery rhyme, song and children's book. I have always had a love for reading and she supported this by always taking us to the public library in the summers.”
- “My white friends in Utah did a lot of talking about going to the same college with one another. Most of my friends did attend college and received degrees.”
- “I did have one teacher who always believed that I would go to college and accomplish many things.”
- “I had several counselors whom I worked with on a personal level during high school, to make decisions about where I'd go to college, what my emphasis would be, etc.”

Culture & Womanhood

- “I think that education is very important whatever gender you are. I also feel that education is beneficial especially for Native American women. Our reservations and our people from whatever tribe need educated individuals to work for them.”
- “I figure I come from a family of strong women and a lot is expected of me. Though my biggest motive is my child and to be able to offer her a better life than that of previous generations in my family.”
- “Through college, a women can gain a sense of responsibility, independence, self worth, and learn to better understand people.”



Discussion

Key Themes

- Aspirations – better quality of life, stability, personal growth, help others
- Multiple sources of validation from a variety of sources – immediate & extended family, friends, counselors, teachers
 - “An enabling, confirming and supportive process . . . that fosters academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44)
- Values & attributes – ethics; determination; hard work, achievement; confidence; love of learning; influence of religion, home, upbringing

Barriers

- Lack of validation – negative comments by teachers; lack of outreach, guidance, or belief in ability
- Financial
 - “Most of my friends are in college or are trying to get in. Whenever we talk about college, financial aid always comes up it's scary to think about all the loans and paying them off by ourselves. My friends usually say it isn't that bad but . . . school is thousands of dollars. Thousands of dollars we don't have!



Summary

- Multiple sources of validation
- Values that support determination & success
- Centrality of family influence
- Like-minded friends
- Financial support