"Me, Myself, and I:" An Analysis of Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Their Postsecondary Trajectories

Aarushi Rohila, Rebecca Adler, Bethany Rittle-Johnson
Vanderbilt University

Background

- Students from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education and STEM fields (e.g., Black and Brown students, those from low-income families) can struggle on a path towards higher education and careers[1].
- These students tend to have fewer networks in general and interact less with those outside their immediate support network.
  - Bonding social capital[4]
    - Networks of family and friends
  - Bridging social capital[4]
    - Networks of people outside the immediate social circle
    - Institutional agents
- This can cause them to make more misaligned decisions (e.g., student's expectation of a career's education level is lower than the actual) regarding their paths after graduation due to limited information from families and minimal resources and support from school personnel[4].

- More misaligned decisions
- Less informed plan for life after high school
- Decreased likelihood to enroll in college
- Lower representation in higher-paying careers

- Their voice matters.
  - Society tends to blame underrepresented students on their struggle towards postsecondary education and careers.
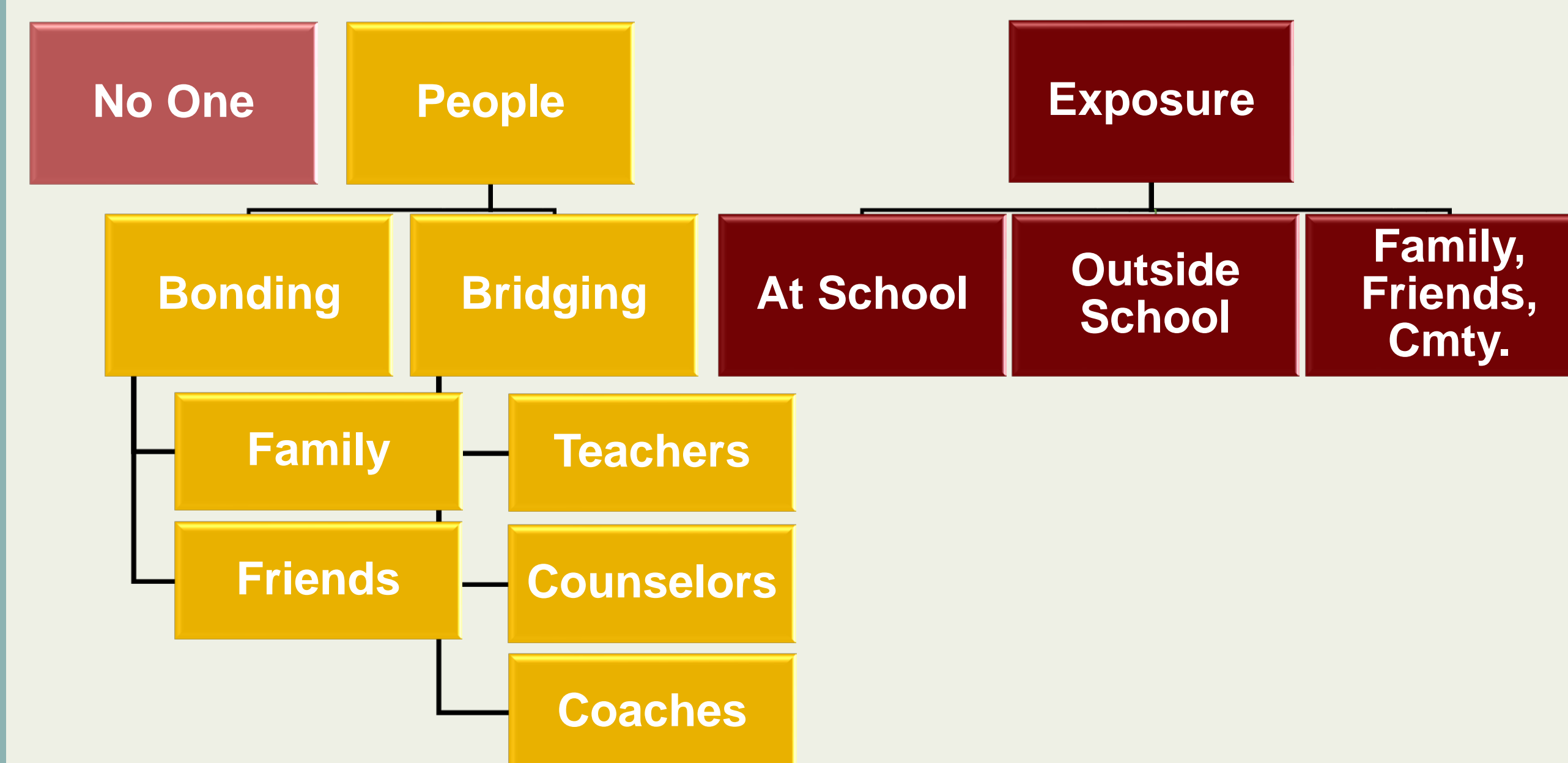
Interview Questions

1. How are you learning about what you might do after high school?
2. What kinds of barriers might get in the way of accomplishing your college and career goals?
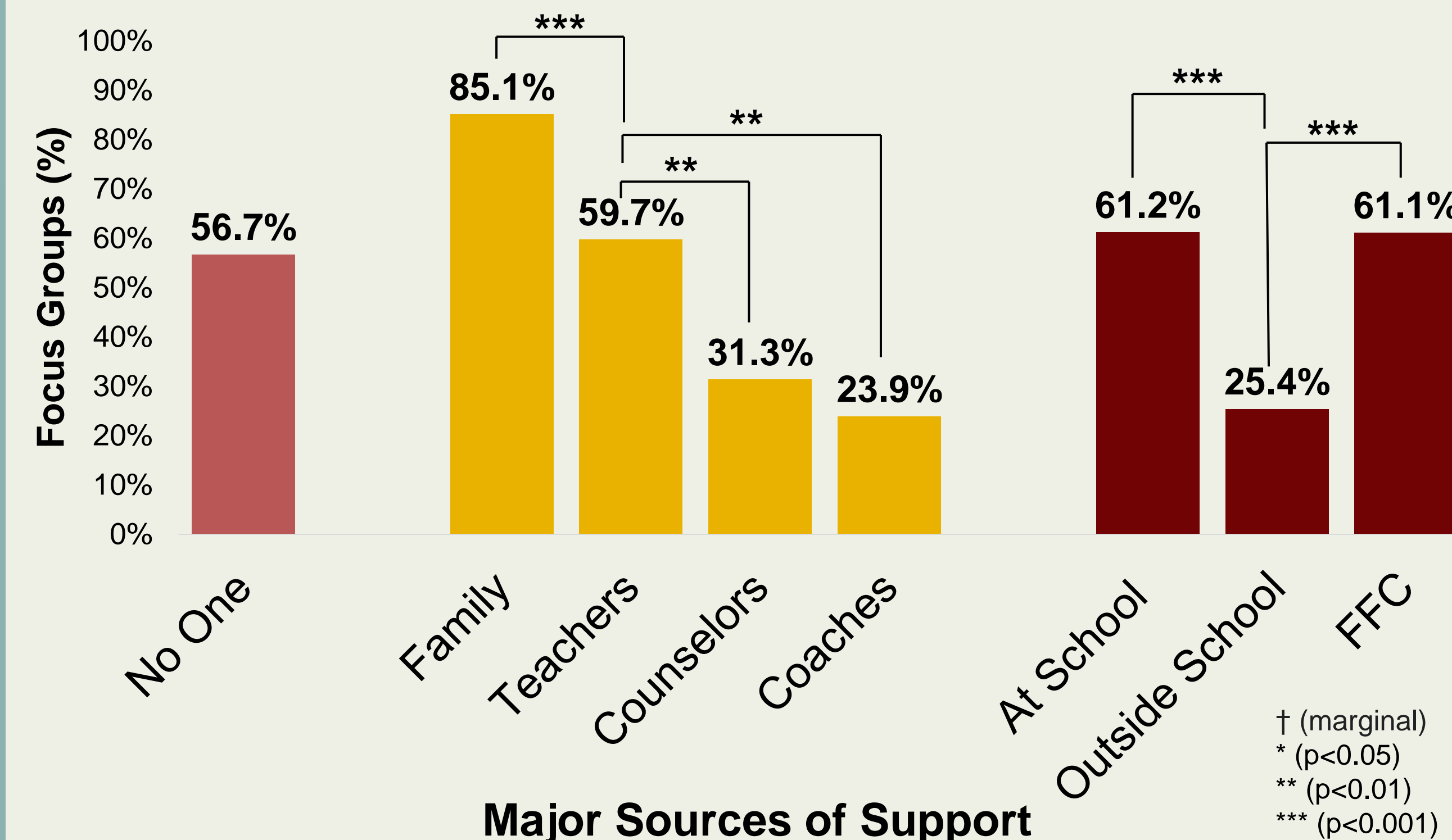
Methods & Analyses

- Participant Sample
  - 251 students from primarily low-income households, 67 focus groups
  - Age (high school)
    - 10th grade (n=42); 11th grade (n=208); 12th grade (n=1)
  - Demographics
    - 56% female, 44% male
    - 81% Black, 8% Hispanic, 6% White, 5% other
- Analyses
  - 2 factors explored:
    - (1) School Diversity[2]
    - (2) Mathematics Course Level
- Division of the School Diversity Factor
  - Focus groups (%) from more segregated schools: 59.7%
  - Focus groups (%) from more integrated schools: 40.3%
  - Segregated schools were defined as 50% or more of the high school's student body being of the same race[3].
- Division of the Mathematics Course Level Factor
  - Focus groups (%) from general math courses: 74.6%
  - Focus groups (%) from advanced math courses: 25.4%
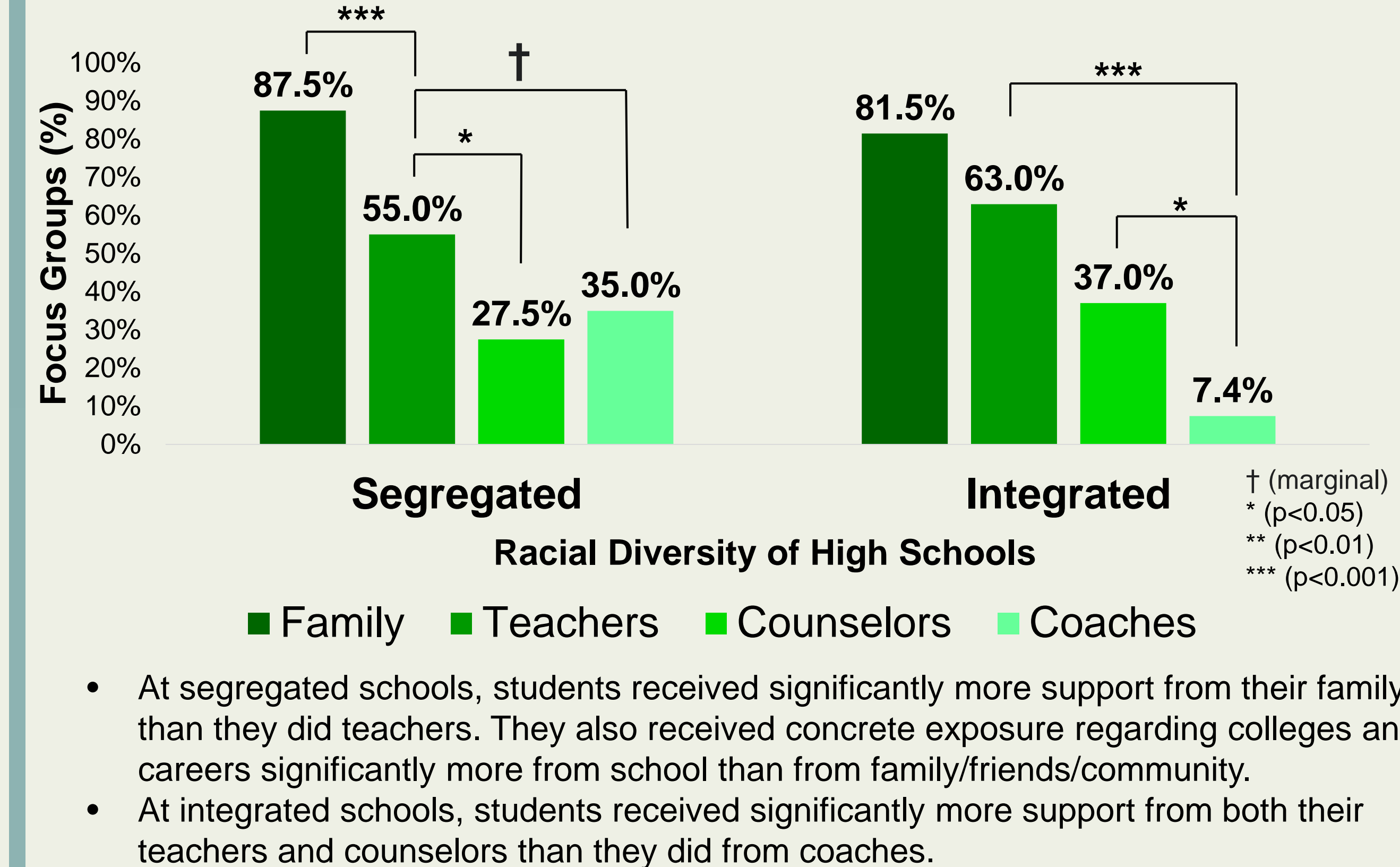
Results: Question 1

"How are you learning about what you might do after high school?"

Major Sources of Support

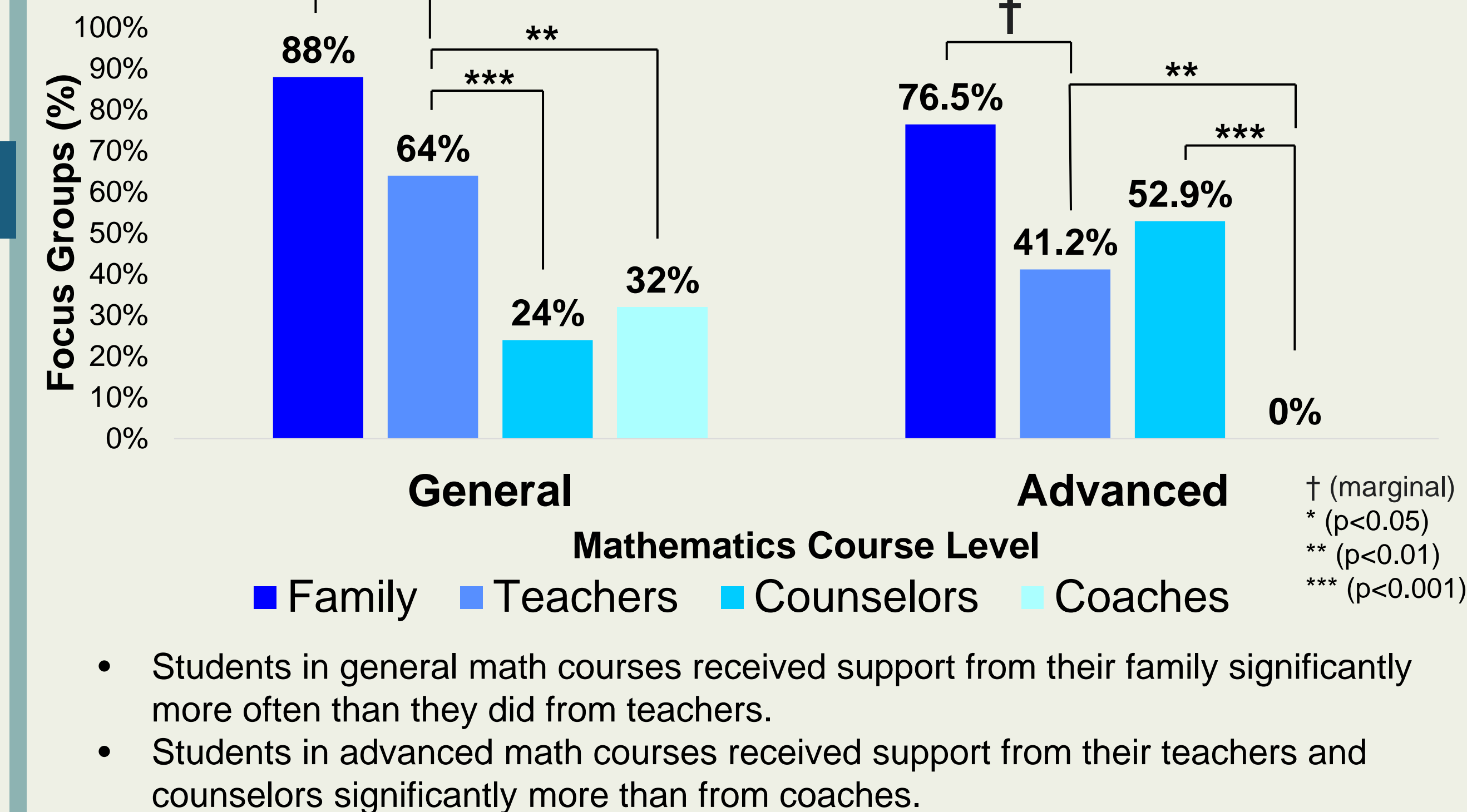† (marginal) * (p<0.05) ** (p<0.01) *** (p<0.001)

- 57% of groups had at least one student indicate that they learned about postsecondary paths on their own.
- 85% of groups had at least one student receive support from family; however, reported exposure to concrete postsecondary information was significantly lower (60%).

Sources of Support Factoring for School Diversity

Racial Diversity of High Schools

† (marginal) * (p<0.05) ** (p<0.01) *** (p<0.001)
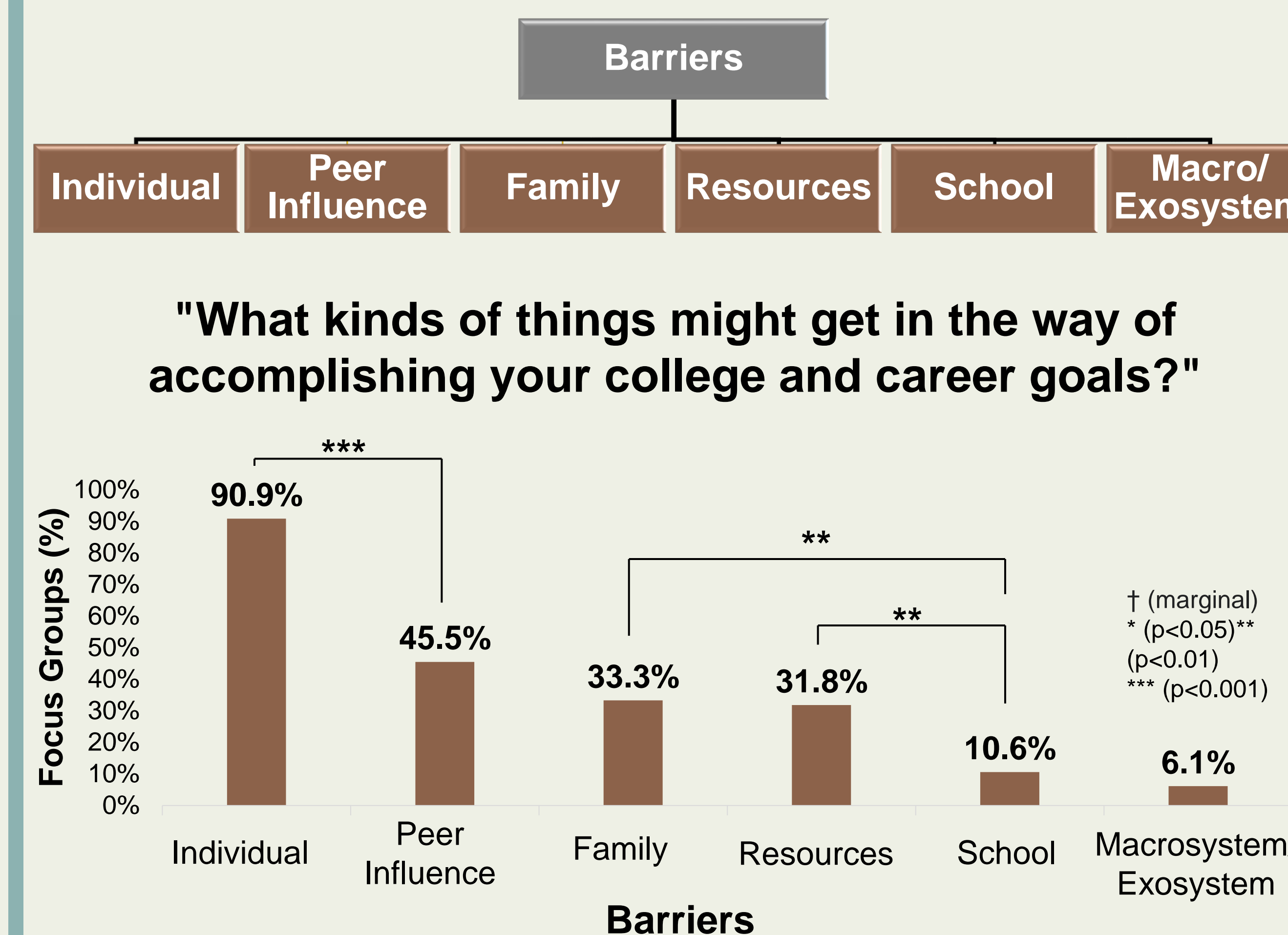
■ Family ■ Teachers ■ Counselors ■ Coaches

- At segregated schools, students received significantly more support from their family than they did teachers. They also received concrete exposure regarding colleges and careers significantly more from school than from family/friends/community.
- At integrated schools, students received significantly more support from both their teachers and counselors than they did from coaches.

Sources of Support Factoring for Mathematics Course Level

Mathematics Course Level

† (marginal) * (p<0.05) ** (p<0.01) *** (p<0.001)

■ Family ■ Teachers ■ Counselors ■ Coaches

- Students in general math courses received support from their family significantly more often than they did from teachers.
- Students in advanced math courses received support from their teachers and counselors significantly more than from coaches.

Results: Question 2

"What kinds of things might get in the way of accomplishing your college and career goals?"

Barriers

† (marginal) * (p<0.05) ** (p<0.01) *** (p<0.001)

- 91% of the groups identified individual barriers which they believed could hinder their goals, including stress and lack of motivation.
- There were no differences by school diversity and math course level.

Discussion

"Nobody really helps us."

"I'm kinda having to figure out these things on my own."

"I don't always got the greatest help…I can't really answer that."

"Me, Myself, and I"

"I ain't got nobody to tell me nothing about that."

"I don't really got somebody like that to help me."

"Nobody. I'm going to do it all on my own."

- Underrepresented students are missing the support they deserve.
- Most support and exposure to colleges and careers comes from family and school.
- Despite the segregation of their schools and unequal division of encouraging teachers depending on the math course level, students still believe that their biggest barrier was the individual. They are relying on themselves to pursue their paths after high school and are blaming themselves if they fail.
- How can we educate families to help their children navigate postsecondary life?
- What kinds of support can schools offer in the form of exposure?
- How can collaboration between families and teachers help students plan for life after high school?

References

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