



Ecological Factors Contributing to Black Male College Student Persistence

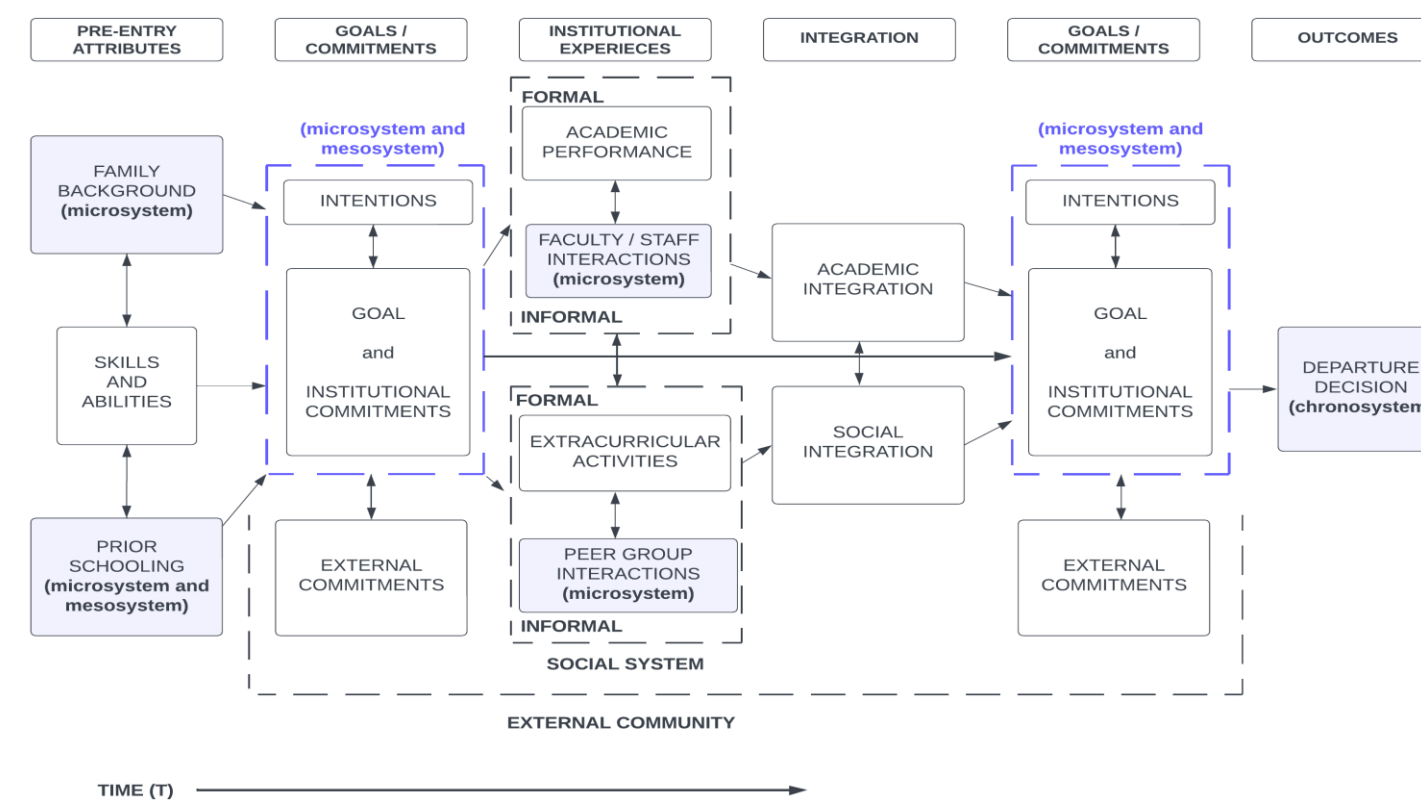
Dr. Keesha Sullivan
 Dr. Patricia Mulcahy-Ernt
 College of Engineering, Business and Education
 School of Education
 University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

Problem & Purpose

- There can be dire consequences for students who do not complete college. “Unemployment is nearly 70% higher for individuals with a high school diploma as compared with those with a bachelor's degree” (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2022). Research has suggested that students with college degrees are happier and experience “lower average indicators of depression and stress” (Faas et al., 2018). The problem under investigation was that only one-third of Black male college students (Brooms, 2021; NCES, 2019; Taffe, 2022) are demonstrating persistence by staying at four-year institutions until graduation. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the interactions between ecological factors that contributed to why Black male college students persist until graduation.

Figure 2

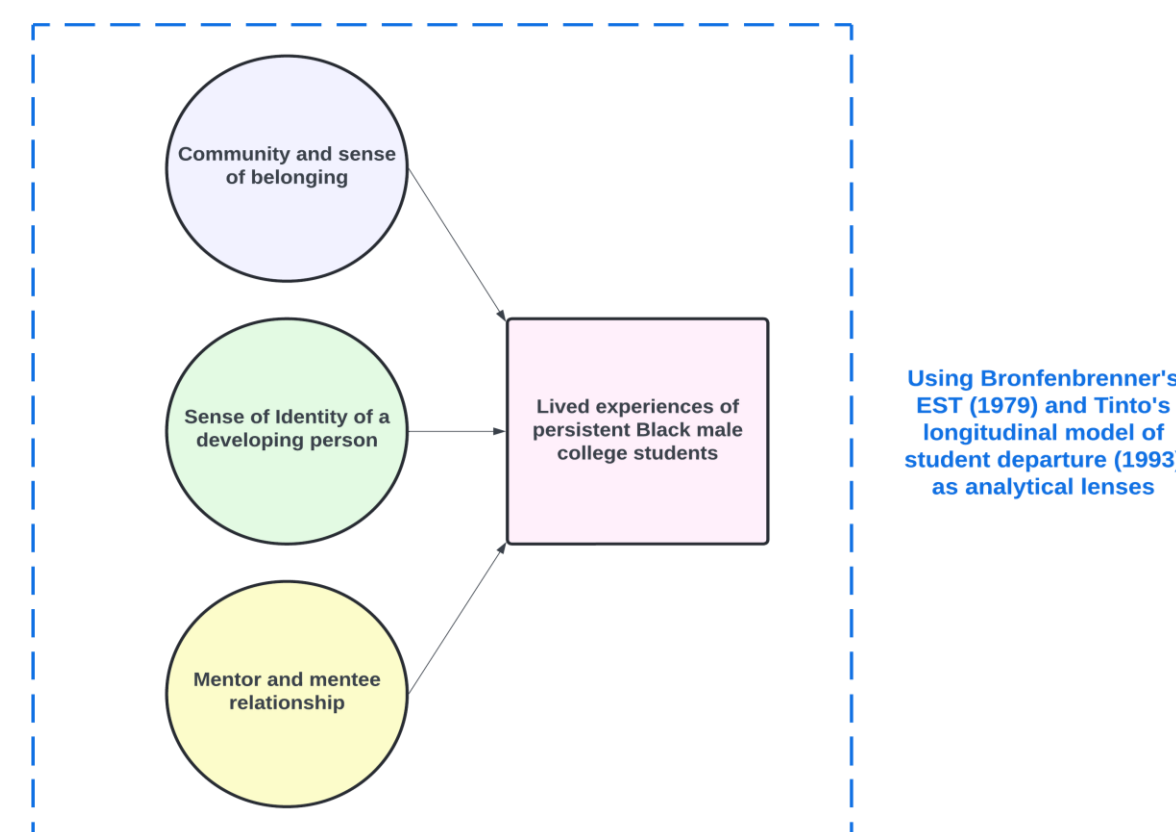
Tinto's LMSD overlaid with Bronfenbrenner's EST



Note. The sources for this model are Tinto, 1993 and Bronfenbrenner, 1979.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework: The Power of Community, Sense of Identity, and Mentorship



Emergence of Themes 3 & 4

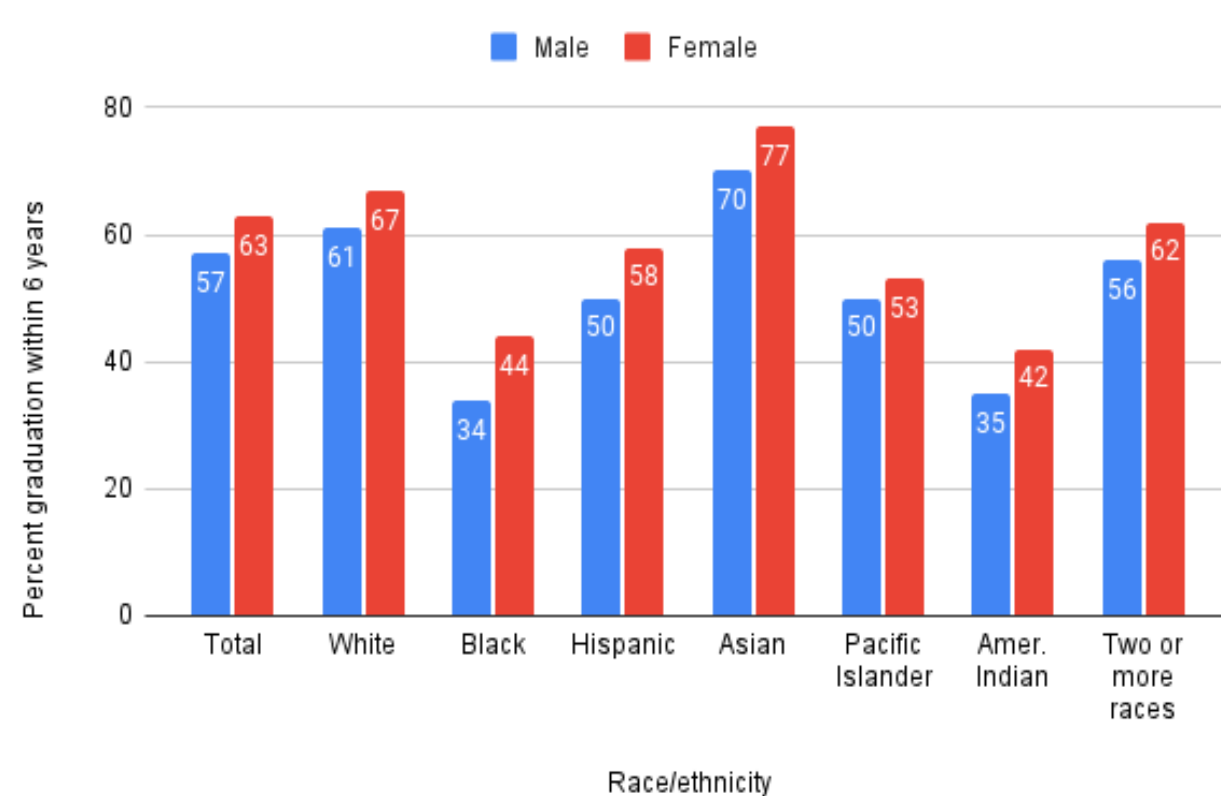
- A third emergent theme that arose from the participant interviews centered on the impact of the identity of the Black male participants.
- The fourth and final theme that came to light through the participant interviews emphasized the influence of adult and peer mentors.

Interpretation of Findings

- To describe the viewpoints and experiences related to the problem under investigation, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) was employed. Bronfenbrenner's EST allowed the researcher to examine how the participants' various environmental (ecological) contexts, social interactions, and the interactions between these two may have contributed to their persistence until graduation.

Figure 1

Percent Graduation Within 6 Years Versus Race/Ethnicity



Study Results

- The type of narrative design that was used for this study was the personal narrative approach (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) where the interviewees told their personal stories to describe the Black male participants' communities and sense of belonging, their sense of identity, and the mentors' roles in their lives.
- Additionally, the researcher analyzed the interactions between ecological factors that contributed to the Black males' persistence until graduation at their four-year institutions.

Research Question

- What interactions between ecological factors may lead to the persistence until graduation of Black male college students from four-year institutions?

Methodology

- Qualitative study
 - Semi-structured interviews
 - Coding of interview notes
 - Researcher's journal
 - Narrative Inquiry Approach

Emergence of Themes 1 & 2

- The first theme that emerged from the interviews focused on the importance of the parents in the lives of their sons and the parents' expectations for them.
- The second theme that emerged from the interviews focused on the significance of clubs/associations and friends of the Black male participants and how the participants were affected by these interactions.

References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brooms, D. R. (2019). Not in this alone: Black men's bonding, learning, and sense of belonging in Black Male Initiative programs. *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Education*, 51(5), 748–767. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00506-5>
- Caporale-Berkowitz, N. A., Boyer, B. P., Muenks, K., & Brownson, C. B. (2022). Resilience, not grit, predicts college student retention following academic probation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(7), 1654–1669. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000721>
- Creswell, J.W., & Guetterman, T.C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (6th ed.)*. Pearson
- Faas, C., Benson, M. J., Kaestle, C. E., & Savla, J. (2018). Socioeconomic success and mental health profiles of young adults who drop out of college. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(5), 669–686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1406598>
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2019a). *Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2012*. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipedsdatatools/tables/119_326_10.asp
- Taffe, N. (2022). He needs to be in a learning community - Learning community, a place of respite and brotherhood while persisting in college. *Journal of College Access*, 7(1), 145–162.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition on (2nd ed.)*. University of Chicago Press.