

# Men of Color Transitioning to College: The Case for Community Assets, Community Programs, and Social Capital

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**Abstract:** *Transitioning from high school to college is a challenging time for young adults and can be more difficult for first generation students. In some cases, adolescents are assisted by community assets (coaches, teachers, church/family members) and community-based leadership education programs. This combination may provide youth with critical skills to navigate the collegiate environment. The authors interviewed eight adult men of color who had participated as adolescents in a cohort-based, six-month life-skill development program. The goal was to identify attributes of the program that aided in their transition to college by examining the findings through the lens of Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth model. The findings suggest that the structured program along with other disclosed community assets positively influenced these students' choices to enroll in college and provided necessary skills needed to navigate their first year of college.*

The enrollment in higher education continues to remain steady. Despite this, the overall success and graduation rates for first-in-family, low-income, Black and Latino students are much lower than other groups (Aidman & Malerba, 2017). For Black men, more than 50% do not attend college and even smaller numbers choose to attend four-year colleges and universities, with Black males ranking the highest in attrition rates (Strayhorn, 2017). Still, urban families and school administrators need to better align expectations for graduating men of color (Carey, 2017). Adjusting to life away from home, forming new relationships, and increasing academic demands are just a few of the challenges awaiting all first-year students. These changes are amplified when individuals may not have developed coping skills. However, social capital and other localized human assets tend to heavily support an inner-city, first-generation student's decision to attend college (Chen & Zerquera, 2017).

The purpose of this research was to understand the lived experiences of inner-city boys who completed a six-month, youth life-skill development educational program. The Power of Dad program focuses on building leadership efficacy within inner-city boys who grow up without their biological father living in the home. This project team interviewed alumni from the Power of Dad program to explore the lessons learned from the program that aided in their transition to college. To participate in the Power of Dad program, subjects grew up without fathers in the home and completed the six-month program. The sample for this data collection consisted of eight men of color ranging from 18–23 years of age who went on to attend either a community college, regional university, or a large land-grant institution. These young men participated in a larger, adjacent data collection with a purpose to

outline the efficacy of this particular community-based leadership education program (Buschlen, Chang, & Kniess, 2018). During the interview process, questions were asked related to whether a participant was attending college. If the participants were attending college, those young men could choose to voluntarily participate in an additional data collection. The research question driving this study was “How did alumni from a youth development program experience the transition to college?” This project is focused on participants who self-reported their ethnicities as African American and Hispanic. While the program is open to young men from all races and ethnicities, this data collection interviewed men of color who also self-identified as attending college. No participants from the larger data set were attending college at the time of the data collection.

## Review of Literature

While the percentage of White 25–29 year olds who attained bachelor's degrees or higher increased from 1995–2015, the White-Black gap in bachelor's degree or higher attainment increased from 13 to 22 percentage points and the White-Hispanic gap increased from 20 to 27 percentage points (Kena et al., 2016). In the last few years, a noted increase in research and scholarship around the phenomenon of Black men, attrition rates, and the role played by higher education has been explored (Wood & Newman, 2017). Though some students may leave college due to grades or finances, others may leave for different reasons. Researchers have noted several noncognitive variables, including self-efficacy, related to student departure (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013). Participation in life-skills development programs prior to college helps students develop character, self-confidence, life skills, and self-efficacy

(Buschlen et al., 2018; Higham, Freathy, & Wegerif, 2010; Hine, 2014). Lessons learned from community-based youth programs can help with the transition to college (Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto, & Bell, 2011; Hilton & Bonner, 2017). Participation in organized activities as a child or adolescent has been linked to favorable behavioral changes and heightened social development (Buschlen et al., 2018; Morris, 2015).

Prior research has noted that fatherless adolescent boys are at higher risk for academic and social maladjustment, such as poor academic performance, violence, relationship struggles, and dropping out of high school (Bishop & Lane, 2000; DeBell, 2008; Mack, Peck, & Leiber, 2015). Furthermore, even though some of them are able to enter college, these youth struggle with educational attainment (i.e., college attendance and graduation) compared to their peers from households with two biological parents (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000; Björklund, Ginther, & Sundström, 2007). Many single parent households deal with issues such as employment, finances, stable housing, and other basic needs (Lee, 2014). Thus, it is important to identify antecedent factors which can assist young men as they transition to college life (Astin, 1993; Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Tinto, 1993). Buschlen et al. (2018) measured the lasting impacts of the Power of Dad program and noted that interviewed alumni engaged as servant leaders in their community and became mentors in the program.

The first year at college is a time of change and transition. Changes occur in living environments, academic expectations, and relationships with family and friends. Before one enrolls in college, societal messages and background characteristics shape how one views college, especially for men of color (Harris & Wood, 2016; Strayhorn, 2017). For example, racist stereotypes about men of color, including academic inferiority, criminal behavior, and disinterest in college can lead men of color to question enrolling in and their ability to succeed in college (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2016; Wood & Newman, 2017). Researchers studying the transition to college have indicated that involvement, or engagement, with the college environment is critical to first-year student success (Aidman & Malerba, 2017; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure conceptualized persistence in college in terms of academic and social integration. While Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure has been widely used to understand why students leave colleges and universities, researchers have critiqued his model's applicability for minoritized student populations (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Nora, 2002; Tierney, 1992). For example, Nora (2002) found family and other support structures were important factors in individual persistence in college. For this study, we were interested in how the relationships

formed in a community-based leadership program and allowed these men of color to develop both cultural and social capital from an asset-based perspective.

Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth model acknowledges forms of cultural capital from different racial and ethnic groups in society. Yosso (2005) described six alternative forms of capital or community cultural wealth minoritized students bring with them to the college environment. These forms of capital were: (a) aspirational capital; (b) linguistic capital; (c) familial capital; (d) social capital; (e) navigational capital; and (f) resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Localized social capital and social networks seemingly promote the ideals of a college education to potential students (Chen & Zerquera, 2017). In the absence of a father, supportive family members, church members, athletic coaches, teachers, and other community mentors all have the potential to serve as assets for these developing young men. The community-based system supports youth in all facets of their lives, offering a powerful pattern for success (Aidman & Malerba, 2017). Similarly, institutional climates and relationships with others, both on and off campus, enable minoritized student groups to persist in higher education (Strayhorn, 2017).

An element that has not been extensively studied is how participation in precollege leadership development programs supports the vision of academic attainment in higher education. For example, meta-analysis-based research that examined more than 50 youth mentoring programs (including leadership programs) has indicated that participation in these programs has positive implications for academic achievement of adolescents from various types of family arrangements (e.g., two-biological-parent and single-mother/father household; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). However, these programs only examined the youth's academic outcomes in adolescence and did not examine whether the experiences in the programs are also beneficial for youths' adaptation to college life or their social adjustment to a new environment.

### Leadership Development Programs and Precollege Programs

Leadership education prepares students for occupations, develops character, provides praxis for leadership skills, and allows youth to understand active citizenship while participating in their community (Buschlen & Johnson, 2014; Sessa, Morgan, Kalenderli, & Hammond, 2014). The process of leadership efficacy unfolds over time throughout one's life as the person continues to develop a leadership persona (Polk, 2013; Priest & Donley, 2014; Rosch, Boyd, & Duran, 2014; Rose, 2010). In a collegiate setting, the goal is to produce leadership learning outcomes which seamlessly connect

students to both individual and community outcomes (Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014). As a result, a need exists to better understand the intersection between the leadership learner, the setting, and how the leadership lessons learned transcend the setting. While research exists regarding the process of leadership learning within adults, less research is available regarding youth leadership learning (Brumbaugh & Cater, 2016; Guerin et al., 2011; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002).

Youth leadership development programs also provide opportunities for goal setting which may include planning for college. Key features of college access programming include academic support, social and emotional support, family involvement opportunities, leadership development, and service learning (Corwyn, Colyar, & Tierney, 2005). While the adolescent leadership development program in this study did not have college access as its primary aim, key features of college access programs, such as social and emotional support, leadership development, and service learning, were embedded in the design of the adolescent leadership development program in this study.

### The Adolescent Power of Dad Development Program

Millions of children around the world grow up without a father in the home and are in need of the service of mentors and programs which can develop life skills. The Power of Dad program is now in its thirteenth year and is dedicated to teaching 22 life skills over the span of six months that young men need in the absence of their father. The mission of the Power of Dad is to encourage, educate, and enhance the relationship between fathers and their children. This process includes a strong focus on life skills, leadership skills, service, and communication skills of young children who live without their fathers in the home. The Power of Dad program is designed to provide participants with a step-by-step mentoring process that involves physical, mental, spiritual and emotional challenges. The program takes students on a journey and deals with their past, present, and future. The program ultimately prepares and releases them through a rite of passage/graduation in which participants are honored before their peers and loved ones. Each participant finishes the program with a heart that has been healed, a clearer purpose and a game plan to accomplish that purpose. While the curriculum is focused on life skills, many elements in the syllabus focus on transferable leadership skills.

Buschlen, Chang, and Knies (2018) outlined key takeaways from the Power of Dad program. Prior to the cohort-based program, young men reported a violent and angry existence, which lacked effective communication and trust toward men. Some of the participants self-reported suicidal ideations (Buschlen, et al., 2018). The

program helped the participants better understand who they are, how to work as a member of a team, and how to engage their community through service. Participants reported that the act of being served by mentors in the program enticed them to serve their communities in exchange. Almost all of the young men returned to serve as a mentor in the program. This brings to light one of the key findings from the larger data collection – transcendent leadership lessons (Buschlen, et al., 2018). The program, the mentors, and the founder of the program, by means of the curriculum and investment into these young men, seemingly transcend the setting. The Power of Dad program provided a life changing experience, and for some, a lifesaving experience (Buschlen, et al., 2018).

### Methodology

To further understand this phenomenon, participant narratives, both individual and shared, were examined. Researchers chose to apply the concepts found in transcendental phenomenology which is used to distill many common experiences to a universal set of related data (Creswell, 2013). When implementing this methodology, researchers explore the phenomenon, remove any personal connection to it, and collect several samples from multiple participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon examined in this project revolved around the shared stories and experiences of alumni who had completed a leadership and life skills program. Individual interviews were conducted with a single member of the research team and one participant at a time. A different member of the research team managed subsequent follow up interviews.

### Participants

The participant pool was generated with support from the Power of Dad organization. A mailing list was created and emails were sent out, phone calls made, and text messages sent to potential subjects. The initial sample (n=10) participated in a larger, parallel data collection related to the program's overall efficacy. If a subject also attended college, then that person was asked to participate in this additional project. Participants were with the interviewer for close to two hours, if the participant also attended college. The latter third of the interview time was focused on their collegiate experience related to this data collection. The sample for this project was (n= 8) and represented male participants ranging in age from 18 to 23 years who grew up without their biological father in the home. The young men were currently enrolled at colleges or universities at the time of the data collection. Seven of the participants were African American and one was Mexican American. All were from the same metropolitan, Mid-Western

city. The program served all races and ethnicities. The larger sample included two White participants who both worked in their community and did not attend college at the time of the data collection.

### Data Analysis

Following full transcription by Rev.com, a member of the research team read the transcripts and filled in any missing information based on inaudible gaps (outlined on the Rev.com transcript). Then, each researcher created individual data sets based on personal interpretations of themes. Following that, researchers met and discussed individual findings and potential themes. Interrater reliability was implemented in this endeavor (Creswell, 2013), which included an ongoing dialogue to discuss and exchange thoughts and ideas regarding the emerging themes (Creswell, 2013). After the major themes were constructed, a member of the research team initiated an outreach to a small group of interviewees to confirm and further refine the themes. This was done to enhance the outcomes through data triangulation (Mills, 2010).

### Findings

Three key themes emerged from the interviews regarding the subject's persistence in college: precollege influences, first year challenges and successes, and the leadership program's lasting impacts. Each theme is discussed below and relevant quotes from participants pertaining to each theme will be provided. The interviews yielded data related to the participants' recollection of how their social capital or community assets also helped to shape their academic vision. Again, the interview protocol focused on three distinct time frames: their initial experiences at college, their challenges and successes in the transition, and their application of the lessons learned from the youth leadership development program. While the larger, initial data collection focused on the impact and efficacy of the life skills provided by the Power of Dad program, the latter data collection focused on how these young men navigated their first year of college.

**Precollege Influences as Community Assets.** During the interviews, participants often described a person or community asset, whether it was a family member or mentor or an event that served as a catalyst for them to pursue a college education. In the absence of a father, many of the subjects reported participation in ongoing church activities, Boy Scouts, Big Brothers, and formal/informal athletics. Many of them also reported interactions with other community assets who helped them develop a desire for academic attainment. For example, participants noted that their mothers influenced them to attend college, which is a common motivating

factor (Carey, 2017). Most of the young men relied heavily on the assistance and trust found in their relationships with mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, in the absence of a male:

I decided to attend college because of my mom. I was seeing her struggle. My mom went to college and graduated, having three kids, three young boys at the time, and seeing how she was motivated by us. Now I'm motivated by her. That was the big thing.

I seen [sic] her [mom] struggle, and me being me, I don't like seeing my mom struggle at all, so that just instilled in me to try to become a man, be a better man than my father was.

Another participant also described the influence of family members on the desire to attend college: My grandmother and my mom [attended college]. My mom has a master's degree; my grandmother has a bachelor's degree; and my sister is now currently in college. It's just the norm in our household that you go to college.

The above quotes from participants illustrate the role family members played in the expectation to attend college. Other participants noted that the decision to attend college was assumed. Family members served as a motivator to attend college, or aspirational capital in Yosso's (2005) model. One participant explained:

The honest answer is family-wise it was like, 'Oh yeah, you're going to go to school,' but I really wasn't getting that type of support during that time about school. Basically, I was all on my own doing it, establishing it, and taking out these loans, doing something I've never done before. ... I just kind of winged it, signed all these papers that I have no idea about.

Although his family provided the impetus and verbal encouragement to attend college, he noted that he did not have family members or others to help explain the student loan paperwork and other forms entering college students need to sign. Another participant echoed similar feelings stating that it was "second nature" that he was going to attend college, but he "... didn't know what college I wanted to go to, or what I wanted to do in college." Two young men credited the program's director for helping to provide the desire to create future life goals:

That's what shifted the atmosphere for me, seeing that they were actually trying to help. They wanted to do something and change me. That had driven me and seeing the expectation that he had for the young men there. He knew we had potential to do whatever we wanted in life. I wanted to change something in life.

One participant articulated the need for reciprocity as he now works to become a community asset for others. Others reported the connections found through the mentoring of athletic coaches and other mentors as a means to develop vision:

I've been a mentor in the program and I'm also a track coach right now. I graduated high school this past year, started college, and now I'm a track coach. I coach basketball at Center Courts also, so I'm giving back to the community as well.

While family members motivated the majority of the participants to attend college, others were motivated by a goal they had set for themselves. One participant indicated that though his family did not play a role in his decision to attend college, he "wanted what would get me to the next level." The community assets (parents, mentors, coaches, community partners, family members outlining future goals) provided the motivation and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) to pursue a college education. Participant experiences during the first year of college are highlighted in the next theme.

**Successes and Challenges in Navigating the First Year of College.** Participants remarked on the size of the institution in their initial comments. The participants described the change below:

It was bigger than I thought. ... We went on tours, but I didn't really know where I was going. When I got on campus, I learned my way pretty quick, for two or three days learned the big things, the main things. It was just giant, a lot to take in.

After adjusting to the size of the campus, participants focused on their academic coursework and then on forming relationships with other individuals on campus. Strategies the participants used to navigate the college environment during the first year were time management, communication, and self-motivation. One participant described his strategy for success in college as

...being successful at college, yeah, dedication. Successful at college is time management, basically, and then when you're going to class and then you've got to go to work or you've got to go to work and then go to class, you've got to find time to get assignments done. ... not only that, but communication, because there's going to be things that come up where you can't attend class, and you've got to go out of your way to try and get a hold of your professor.

Participants realized that they had to take ownership for their experience at college to reach their academic goals, a lesson taught in the leadership program. Many of the young men noted that their college friends were

"partying" and making "bad decisions" while they tried to avoid those choices. They knew the dangers associated with that sort of choice and chose to focus on their goals.

One participant stated, "My plan to start off was just to get all A's. I succeeded at that. Another was just to remain focused on everything." The main focus for the participants was succeeding academically in terms of GPA and then establishing their social network. One participant noted that being away from home "gave me space; it gave me independence." He further went on to state, "I've met new people, new friends, people that are well-driven and want to graduate, you know? That's encouraging when you hang around people who want to graduate and get things done."

In addition to classes, events during the first week of classes were also helpful in meeting others. One participant noted, "I met people quick, because everybody's trying to meet people. The welcome week, all the freshmen try to get their groups of friends. It wasn't hard." While forming relationships with others was important, one participant noticed that he needed to balance his social interactions. He realized he was very social, but also that he had "to be around people but to a certain extent. Now I'm to a point where I can't deal with people too much because it's ruining me." Although this participant did not mention if it was relationships at home or college that were causing him difficulty, he did indicate earlier in the interview that the environment he was raised in was emotionally volatile. College provided an escape from his environment, but he remained careful about managing relationships both at home and on campus.

Other than trying to maintain balance among classes and relationships, a main challenge that participants noted was the financial cost of college. A participant mentioned the difference between the first and second semesters in terms of college costs:

Money was a challenge for a stretch [of time]. For the first semester I was all set, had the financial aid and everything covered. When the second semester came, and I got my financial aid and I didn't get a refund, I just had no money. Then I got the callback for a job, but that was not 'til two weeks into the second semester, and you have to buy your books the first week.

Another participant noted the large expense of a college education pressured him to "make it work." He further stated, "but I feel like a lot of things are expensive for no reason. So expensive." Tuition, fees, textbooks, and living expenses can add up and at times are not advertised well in terms of total college costs. Another participant described his struggle with ADHD and how it was challenging to focus in college when there are many

things competing for one's attention. Another interesting finding revolved around the fact that many of the subjects did not feel shamed or intimidated by the thought of asking for help. They sought out help from others around them in the college environment. The three impacts of the Power of Dad program are further discussed in the following section.

### Leadership Program's Impact

When participants were asked about the lessons from the six-month, cohort-based, youth leadership development program, they described how goal setting, interpersonal relationships, and mentoring were key in navigating their college experience. Many reported not feeling shamed or intimidated by the thought of asking for help. They sought out help from others on a regular basis. This concept of asking for help is not common among this group of young men, but it is an element taught in the leadership training program. One participant indicated that the program "helped with my communication, my understanding of basic sympathy, basic understanding of other people. [The program] gave me great motivation also."

Other participants talked about being an example and mentoring others largely because the founder and the coordinator of the youth leadership development program was an example for them. Another participant talked about utilizing empathy and openness to help a friend whose parents were going through a divorce. He said, "I started to talk with her and tell her about my life, like 'It'll be all right.'" Several of the participants returned to mentor in the youth leadership development program and others sought out leadership or service opportunities on and off campus. A few examples of service activities include becoming a high school track coach, working in soup kitchens, working with individuals with disabilities, and passing information on about voting. The young men articulated that before the program, service to others was not part of their lives. Following the program, after being served by others, the young men's capacity for civic engagement increased.

In addition to goal setting, interpersonal relationships, and mentoring, the foundation provided through the youth leadership development program in this study enabled some participants to seek out other leadership or academic programs in college. Participants in other leadership development programs commented on how participating in these programs gave them navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). A participant in a leadership development program for his major in business indicated that he did feel better prepared than his classmates:

I know people that weren't in those programs, and they seemed pretty lost. They had a general concept of what to do, but they didn't actually know. I had

the steps, then they introduced us to people that were higher up, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, in the business college. They're our mentors in the programs, so you get to talk with them, ask them how college was, like panel discussions.

Another participant in another program indicated how it was similar to the youth leadership development program and stated the program, "[Made] sure you that you're on top of your schoolwork, studying, good grades. It's basically the same as [youth leadership development program], just on a college campus." Participants sought out these programs not only to help in navigating the college environment, but also to reinforce and build upon the lessons they learned in the youth leadership development program.

### Discussion

The participants' experiences with community assets and the youth leadership development program as pre-college adolescents confirm prior literature pertaining to the transition to college, college access programs, and Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth model. All participants remarked on navigating the size of the institution and establishing a strong academic record. They described the need to "remain focused. Keep my head in the books." The need to establish themselves academically, in terms of GPA, is indicative of the academic integration component of Tinto's (1993) model. Socially, the participants were not concerned about their ability to make new friends or maintain connections with old friends. It should be noted that many of the participants reported weak or failing relationships prior to the program. While this does not disconfirm the applicability of the social integration aspect of Tinto's (1993) model, it does illustrate that participants were confident in their abilities to establish new relationships at college following the program's intervention and their own personal growth.

Although the youth leadership education program in this study was not designed for the explicit purpose of creating access to college, the program introduced and implanted lessons in the participants that allowed these fatherless men of color to navigate the collegiate environment. This occurred through the intervention's framework and through the social capital gained by completing the program (Aidman & Malerba, 2017; Hastings et al., 2011; Higham et al., 2010). The lessons on goal setting, listening and empathy, relationship building, and time management were ones they carried with them into college and lessons that seemingly transcended the program for these young men. Goal-setting lessons helped the participants stay focused and committed to a larger goal. As one participant stated, he needed to "keep my

eye on the prize, because I veer off somewhere, I have to remember why I'm actually here." Key features of college access programming that were present in this youth development program were academic support, social and emotional support, and leadership development (Corwyn et al., 2005). The academic support and leadership development were evident in the goal-setting lessons. The social and emotional support provided through lessons on listening in the program and through the mentorship provided by community assets throughout the program propelled these young men forward.

One item that all participants commented on was the high cost of college. As college costs continue to rise, it will be important for similar programs to address college costs for individuals by providing financial aid workshops to help plan for postsecondary education. At least one participant in the study reported he had enough money to cover the first semester but did not have the amount he needed to cover future semesters. Information on college costs, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), grants and loans would help students understand their options for paying for college.

Additionally, the youth leadership development program cultivated aspirational and navigational capital in participants (Yosso, 2005). The participants talked about how conversations with community assets such as family members or future goals for themselves led to their decision to attend college. One participant stated that he "wanted to go to college because I want to own my own business one day." Goals and encouragement from the program and individuals in their lives built aspirational capital in participants. A few participants noted how taking part in this youth leadership development program influenced them to seek out other leadership programs and opportunities when on campus. Whether it was a program related to their major or a program focused on leadership development, participants described how they were able to understand what they needed to do in college. As one participant stated, he "had the steps" where he noticed other classmates struggling with what was expected of them. Seeking out new opportunities and programs to maximize networks is representative of Yosso's (2005) navigational capital. Participants had aspirations for their futures and sought out opportunities to maximize their future goals.

### Limitations

This data collection captured a unique set of participant experiences which may differ as the program and program's cohort changes from year-to-year. Therefore, the findings from this research project are not generalizable to other settings or programs. Also, since participants were asked to recall past experiences, time may have sharpened those experience as it relates to their

current lives and this too may limit the findings. Since many of these young men have served the program as mentors, after participating in the program, they may have developed a stronger connection to the program and its lessons. Additionally, this study did not examine other influences in the college environment that may have aided their development such as high school pre-college events, meetings with guidance counselors, and similar types of programs.

### Implications for Community Partners

From this study, there are implications for both community partners and higher education professionals. Community partners and out-of-school educators/mentors play a key role in the analogy "it takes a village to raise a child." Community-based programs such as the Power of Dad need to seek additional grant funding to support the development of community youth while working with educators to develop a focused, success-based curriculum for the target population. These organizations should also engage in structured assessment to ensure the learning process is effective. Research partnerships, similar to this endeavor, can be expanded to showcase the overall need for programs by partnering with local university faculty or research firms. The structured research can also be used to solicit grant dollars as evidence of programmatic effectiveness.

Individuals working in higher education should seek out and connect with similar youth leadership development programs in their communities. Outreach professionals in colleges and universities could collaborate with these structured programs to provide information to individuals on the college admission process, financial aid, and other leadership opportunities at their institutions. Connecting individuals in these programs with higher education professionals can help them build early networks (additional mentors) to help students reach their goals. By creating partnerships with these organizations, the curriculum may be amended to include sessions directly related to college success, financial aid, persistence, registration, and the like. Faculty, engaged in research, can connect to programs to assist with curriculum, programmatic assessment, grant writing, and research.

In this study, the primary concern from participants throughout the interviews was college affordability. To help with the cost, higher education professionals, especially those working in financial aid, should consider offering grant or scholarship opportunities to help individuals who complete youth leadership development programs to help cover the rising costs of college. This is especially vital when dealing with low-income individuals and men of color. Even a grant or scholarship to cover the cost of books would be helpful in alleviating the financial stress on participants.

## Conclusion

The transition to college is challenging for most students. When coupled with the additional life stressors found within the narratives of these eight young men, their perceived success and persistence in college seemed slight, at best. Yet, their participation in the Power of Dad youth life-skill educational program developed critical skills, leadership, and various forms of cultural capital needed to navigate the collegiate environment while being supported and guided by their community assets. Specifically, for this group, lessons on goal setting, relationship development, and listening seemingly kept them on track in the collegiate environment. Higher education professionals are recommended to reach out to community partners who assist inner-city, first-generation students in similar developmental programs to provide information regarding the college application process, financial aid, and navigating the college environment. Fatherless men are faced with many barriers that hinder them from educational attainment; thus, beyond participation in any youth leadership development program, it is very important to continue providing these young men with resources that can facilitate their transition and success in college.

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