

Not All Birds Flock Together? Intersectional Homophily Within the Social Support Networks of Black Women Faculty

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Background

- Homophily is the phenomena of associating with similar others (Kalantari, 2021)
- Previous studies suggest that Black women may find their best support in one another (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; B. T. Kelly & Fries-Britt, 2022; Patton, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2023), .

Purpose of Study

- (1) How does homophily (relationships with similar others) manifest within the social support networks of tenure-line Black women faculty in the social science? (2) What individual and institutional characteristics predict greater support for Black women faculty?

Theoretical framework

- We used Black feminist theories to broaden the function of social support, highlighting community among Black women, to be necessary for relief from dominant oppressive ideology and critical for affirmation, validation, and self-definition (Collins, 2022; hooks, 2014; Lorde, 2012).

Methods

- Egocentric network analysis approach (Krivitsky et al., 2025).
- Name generation questions (i.e., “Who are the people closest to you?”), and name interpreter questions such as “how long have you known X?” (Alexander, 2009)
- Exponential random graph modeling (ERGM) is a modified general linear model used to characterize a network as an outcome of various configurations and interactions (Borgatti et al., 2022).

Hypotheses

- *Homophily* (group similarity) will be significantly present in the participant networks by race, gender, and age independently, and within the intersections of these identities.
- *Institutional characteristics*: We hypothesized institution type (HBCU or PWI), Carnegie classification (e.g. R1) and perceived level of institutional support will significantly shape the amount of support for our participants.
- *Individual faculty (ego) characteristics*: We included individual characteristics as control variables for the model: type of degree earned, rank (e.g. assistant vs associate professor), US born, and marital status.

Data

- n=102 Black/African American woman, tenure track faculty in the social sciences, between the ages of 30-65

Findings

- Nearly 60% of the relationships have existed for 11+ years
- Top support actors were identified as friends (30%) or family (22%).
- Individuals who shared the same race *and* gender as participants were 2.61 times or 75% more likely to be nominated as a social support (coef: 0.95; se: 0.23)
- Black women who shared the same race, gender, and age were 2.05 times or 67% more likely to be nominated as social support (coef: 0.50; se: 0.23).
- Individuals who only shared racial identification with participants (e.g. Black men, Black nonbinary), were much less likely, 0.07 times or 6.5% likely to provide social support.
- Married or partnered participants were 2.79 times or 74% more likely to have more support.
- Individuals who were aged 41-50 and 51-60 were more likely to be nominated for support.
- Older alters were 570 times greater or 99% more likely to be named as providing support.
- None of the institutional characteristics included in the model predicted greater social support.

Discussion

- Black women's social networks were intersectionally homophilous, but not homogenous. Black women's networks are significantly supported by other Black women, yet diversity presented in other ways, as age was significant role in network composition, supporting previous research on the value of multi and inter-generational mentorship with Black women faculty (Kelly & Fries-Britt, 2022; Winkle-Wagner, 2023).
- Our findings also suggest growing homophily along the academic lifecourse and changing social support needs over time.
- Second, our study contributed new findings on patterns of support by race and gender but also patterns of connection and homophily by age.