The impact of social capital on promoting the success of African American faculty

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ABSTRACT  The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the impact of social capital on helping African Americans succeed in the academy. Social capital examines ways in which some individuals are privileged because of their membership in a social network. This chapter will largely be auto-ethnographical, drawing from my personal experiences, integrated with the appropriate bodies of literature. The goal of this chapter is to provide an effective strategy for promoting the success of African Americans in the academy.

KEYWORDS  African Americans, faculty, retention, social capital.

Introduction

As a new PhD who desired to enter the professoriate, I was not cognizant about what I needed to do or activities in which I needed to engage to gain entrée to the academy. While I believe the school where I chose to complete my doctorate was excellent, because of the funding disparity between many public predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and their historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) counterparts (Brown, 2001; Gasman, Baez, Drezner, Sedgwick, Tudico, & Schmid, 2007), the faculty at the HBCU I attended were forced to devote more of their time teaching than advising or engaging students in research. Research has shown that funding disparities between PWIs and their HBCU counterparts, among other things, not only impacts faculty salary at HBCUs, but also hamper their ability to conduct research because the majority of their time is consumed with teaching (Gasman et al.; Minor, 2008; Palmer & Griffin, in press; Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Milem, 2007).

Despite the fact that faculty at the university I attended did not have tremendous time to build and nurture quality relationships with students and engage them in research, the faculty that comprised my doctoral program were exceptionally talented and well respected scholars, practitioners, and administrators. In fact, two were former presidents of community colleges and one served as Executive Director and Associate Director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Further, one faculty member served as a Vice President (VP) of Student Affairs at
several HBCUs and is presently a Provost at one, and one of the adjunct faculty serves as a VP of Planning and Information Technology and has over 30 years of higher education experience. Collectively, they have published extensively on topics including African American male achievement, student engagement, Black Greek Letter Organizations, diversity, college presidency, multiculturalism, accreditation, assessment, and quality assurance. One of the greatest gifts that these faculty members instilled in me, and I would other students, is a “can do attitude.” They did this by showing warmth in their interactions with students, displaying concern for their general welfare, and simply by being minorities who had earned the “three magic letters”: Ph.D.

Consequently, when I completed my degree, while I had the non-cognitive skills (e.g., motivation, persistence, and discipline), and cognitive skills (the ability to conceptualize and conduct research), I was lacking what I considered to be the most important factor, the ability to do the following: (a) navigate the politics of the academy; (b) publish in refereed journals; and (c) find out which professional organizations I should engage in to help facilitate mentorship, guidance, and social networking. Building networks and forming social relationships with junior and, in many cases, senior faculty, aided tremendously in my accomplishing the aforementioned goals. Further, my fraternal relationships and connections have benefited me as well. Similar to my relationships with junior and senior faculty, these relationships have afforded me necessary social capital that I am able to access for assistance in the academy.

My situation in terms of completing a PhD and not having the wherewithal to navigate the academy is not unique. While on the surface our stories may not be the same, many African American faculty at PWIs often experience similar struggles. In fact, much like African American students at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer, in press), African American faculty at White colleges experience isolation, lack critical relationships with mentors, and other key support agents (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh Bonous-Hammarth, & Stassen, 2000; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998), all of which impact their ability to successfully navigate the academy, publish in refereed journals, and participate in key organizations and activities (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005). Engaging in these activities is important because they significantly enhance the likelihood of faculty earning promotion and tenure.

Focusing on the retention of African American faculty in higher education, particularly at PWIs, is critical for several reasons: (a) Research has shown that the racial
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demographics of the United States will change from being overwhelmingly populated by White Americans to increasingly populated by African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The change in the United States’ racial demography suggests that not only will the population of college students become increasingly diverse, but the American workforce including the professorate, will largely reflect this change in the country’s racial demographics; (b) African American faculty provide a sense of mentorship and support for Black students as well as other underrepresented minorities on campus (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Antonio, 2002; de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1991); (c) African American faculty help to deconstruct myths and stereotypes held by White students, who never had a Black instructor (Antonio; de la Luz Reyes & Halcon); (d) African American faculty promote a sense of cognitive dissonance regarding the negative assumptions that many White faculty may have of African American faculty (Alexander & Moore); and (e) As a result of their experiences of oppression and marginalization, African American faculty may bring a different perspective on justice and equality as it relates to institutional policies, practice, and governance (Alexander & Moore; Antonio; de la Luz Reyes & Halcon). Research from Allen et al (2000) adds to the justification of African American faculty by noting “the absence of African American faculty members lessens the probability that African American students will complete graduate and professional programs at the same rate as White students” (p. 113).

Notwithstanding these rationales regarding the importance of African American faculty, research suggest that PWIs remain ill-equipped at retaining minority faculty (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Kulis, Shaw, & Chong, 2000; Williams & Williams, 2006). Recognizing the importance of African American faculty and the benefits they provide to higher education, this chapter will discuss the impact of social capital on promoting the retention of African American faculty. This chapter will largely draw from my experience with support from empirical research. To provide some context about African American faculty, this chapter provides an overview of the experiences and challenges of African American faculty in higher education.

Review of Literature of African American Faculty in Higher Education
A new report from the U.S. Department of Education reveals that in 2007 there were 37,862 African American faculty members at degree-granting institutions in
the United States (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009b). According to this report, African Americans have made minimal progress in securing faculty positions. In 1981, African Americans were 4.2% of all faculty in higher education. More than a quarter century later, African Americans accounted for 5.4% of the total faculty at all degree-granting institutions (ibid.). With progress at this rate, “it would take nearly a century and a half for the percentage of black faculty in higher education to match the percentage of blacks in the overall American workforce” (ibid., para. 1). Furthermore, research from the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2009a) noted that African Americans are less successful than their White counterparts in earning tenure and promotion. The article noted:

- Blacks are less successful when we look at tenured faculty. In 2007 there were 13,388 blacks holding a tenured faculty post at degree-granting educational institutions in the United States. They made up 4.6 percent of all tenured faculty.
- Thirty-five percent of all black full-time faculty members in 2007 held tenure.
- For all white full-time faculty members, 44.6 percent had obtained tenure.

Branch (2001) notes that African American faculty at White institutions encounter a myriad of problems, which impede their retention and success. He notes that the discriminatory or “chilly,” campus climate of PWIs is a major challenge to the retention and success of African American faculty. Branch points out that a chilly environment for African American faculty can be characterized by several factors: (a) the lack of a formal mentoring environment for African American faculty; (b) the perception by African American faculty that they are not valued and taken seriously; (c) a belief that African American faculty were hired to meet an affirmative action quota, and not because they were the most qualified; and (d) not underscoring the importance of diversity, but expecting African American faculty to assimilate with the “White Ways” of the institution. Because of the chilly work environments of some PWIs, African Americans have reported experienced discrimination, resulting in a stressful work environment. Further, they have also reported unsupportive work environment(s) and isolation, which has provoked some to leave PWIs.

While research has shown that African Americans experience chilly and unwelcoming environments at PWIs, these environments are indicative of the lack of support networks and relationships that African Americans may have with White faculty in their departments (Williams & Williams, 2006). For example, when African American faculty are hired, they may be the only person of color in their department. This issue engenders barriers to support and facilitate an unpleasant work environment “in which lack of support is a reality, and at times, those in the major-
ity have displayed indifferent and unwelcoming attitudes” (Williams & Williams, p. 288). The unpleasant environment and relationships with their peers make it difficult for African American faculty to develop nurturing relationships with their White peers. Research has shown that some African American faculty have been so socially isolated by their White colleagues that they felt more comfortable interacting with students of color than their White peers (Hagedorn & Laden, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000; Williams & Williams, 2006).

African American faculty have reported having “personal or professional discomfort regarding their research, scholarship, and ultimately, acceptance in the campus community” (Williams & Williams, 2006, p. 289). Further, Williams and Williams, as well as other researchers (e.g., Hagedorn & Laden, 2000; Turner & Myers, 2000), point out that White faculty display an indifferent attitude toward African American faculty’s credentials and discredit their research on minority issues.

Research from Allen et al. (2000) reports that the problems contributing to the underrepresentation of African American faculty at White institutions are a microcosm of the problems that African American face in a larger societal context. Specifically, they note:

The positions of different racial/ethnic within the academy hierarchy are consistent with their different status, wealth, and power in the U.S. society. African American faculty members face barriers due to the historical, cultural, and social factors that frequently have shaped their relations with Whites generally. Pervasive attitudes of racism as well as differential access and power continue to limit educational opportunities for African Americans in the United States. Such inequities produce the achievement discrepancies in contemporary U.S. education that explain the relative scarcity of African Americans as members of the nation’s higher education faculty. (p. 113)

Aside from the aforementioned dilemmas posing a challenge to the success of African Americans at PWIs, Branch (2001) explains that the inability of African Americans to successfully navigate the tenure process poses another problem to the retention of Black faculty at PWIs. Other researchers (e.g., Carter & O’Brien, 1993; Cartledge, Gardner, & Tillman, 1995) support Branch’s supposition by arguing that African American faculty are least likely to receive a favorable tenure decision compared to their White counterparts.

The pool of minority PhDs is another factor contributing to the underrepresentation of African American faculty in the academy (Branch, 2001; Heggies, 2004; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, African Americans have experienced an inconsistent growth and decline over
the years in terms of the number of doctoral degrees awarded (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2008). In 2004, African Americans were awarded 1,869 doctoral degrees, 1,688 in 2005, and 1,659 in 2006. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* notes that “although African Americans have made solid progress in doctoral awards, much remains to be achieved. African Americans are nearly 13% of the U.S. population. Therefore, African American doctoral awards still amount to less than one half the level that would occur were racial parity to prevail” (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2008, para. 5). Because of the limited production of African American PhDs, there seems to be a dearth supply of African Americans entering the professorate.

Notwithstanding the problems and challenges that African American faculty encounter in higher education, research has shown that retaining African American faculty provides a myriad of benefits not only to African American and White students, but also to the higher education community in general (Alexander & Moore, 2008; Antonio, 2002; de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1991). One factor that might be employed to enhance retention for African American faculty is cultivating and establishing a community of support through social capital. According to researchers (e.g., Fries-Britt & Turner, 2005; Williams & Williams, 2006), building and using social capital has a positive impact on the retention of African American faculty at PWIs. The subsequent section of this chapter will provide an overview of social capital.

### Social Capital

The term social capital is drawn in part from Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social reproduction, where he notes that much like economic capital, social capital can be accumulated and has the propensity to gradually reproduce itself (Dika & Singh, 2002; Trainor, 2008). The concept of social reproduction explains “how social properties are generated, given value, and reified among individuals in social institutions” (Brown & Davis, 2001, p. 41). In general, social capital examines ways in which some individuals are privileged because of their membership in a social network. Bourdieu (1973) posits that the amount of social capital individuals possess hinges on the size of their network as well as their economic and cultural standing.

Importantly, Bourdieu views social capital as a mechanism of control that the ruling classes use to maintain a dominant position over the general population (Lin, 2001). In this way, social capital can be seen as a negative attribute; however, when members of the underclass gain social capital, they can act in ways that disrupt the influence and power of the upper class, making possible the achievement of certain
goals, not plausible in the absence of such social structures (Coleman, 1988). Coleman's conceptualization of social capital is premised on understanding the norms, trust, authority, and social control that an individual must learn to succeed. Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo (1995) provide a more lucid explanation of social capital. They explain that social capital “is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in a social network of actors and organization” (p. 862). According to Brown and Davis (2001), social capital “is a type of resource that is socially reproduced, such as the possession of knowledge, accomplishments, or formal and informal relations and network” (p. 41). By means of social capital, individuals may gain support from a social network, which facilitates the awarding of “social rewards, such as status, privilege, and positions in certain social circles, professions, or organization” (Brown & Davis, p. 41). Social networks and relationships refer to the vastness of personal connections, which facilitate the informational exchange about jobs and other resources. “These networks are based on the characteristics of the contact person who has the potential to influence access to opportunity and outcomes of these and other privileges” (p. 42).

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), the transmission of social capital has been generally used in the contexts of families and their networks. “Social class and family background often determine the sources of networking and relation that particularly advantages individuals for better employment opportunities, connections to political influential people, and access to services and resources that improve life chance” (Brown & Davis, 2001, p. 42). According researchers, Bourdieu’s original conceptualization was predicated on the social networks through families and communities (Brown & Davis; Dika & Singh, 2002). However, researchers have applied the theoretical underpinnings of social capital to examine access, retention, and persistence for college students, in the context of supportive relationships with the college community (e.g., mentors, peers, and counselors) (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Smith, 2007; Tierney & Venegas, 2006) Further, other researchers (e.g., Brown & Davis; Palmer & Gasman, 2008) have applied the tenets of social capital to examine the supportive enclaves of Black colleges and how these environments promote social and academic success for African Americans. In this sense, Bourdieu’s initial concept of social capital has been used to explain how it “generates new cultural resources (e.g., networks, attitudes, behaviors, and expectations) within the environment and experience” (p. 42).

In this chapter I am using the latter reference of social capital (e.g., supportive
networks and relationships that lie outside of the sphere of family influence and resources) to explain the impact of social capital on my experiences in the academy. In a larger sense, this chapter will be auto-ethnographical (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2005; Holmes & Rivera, 2004). With this exploratory methodology, I will generally provide some context about my personal life focusing on feelings, thoughts, and emotions. The goal of auto-ethnography “is to use your life experience to generalize to a larger group or culture . . . [as well as to] enter and document the moment to moment, concrete details of a life” (Ellis & Brochner, 2003 as cited in Holmes & Rivera, 2005, p. 17). In this sense, I will create a detailed narrative of how I formed supportive relationships with others in the academy and worked to build a supportive community, which has played a fundamental role in my ability to be successful in the academy. Specifically, in this chapter, I will focus on the impact that accumulating social capital has had on my ability to publish, gain career guidance and networking, and form scholarly collaborations. To contextualize my experience, it is important to give a brief biographical sketch.

**Brief Biographical Sketch**

I am a young African American male, who grew up in the inner city of Philadelphia. During high school, I decided I wanted to become a professor, though I was not certain in what field I wanted to develop a specialization. Originally, I thought I wanted to research and teach American history, but when I applied to graduate school, I decided that I wanted to focus on student services and higher education. After receiving my M.S. in counseling with an emphasis on higher education, I decided to pursue my PhD at an HBCU. Since pursuing my undergraduate and graduate degrees at PWIs, I wanted to attend an HBCU because research I encountered while working toward my Master’s degree suggested that African Americans have better experiences academically and socially at HBCUs. After graduating with my PhD in 2007, I placed an earnest emphasis on publishing prior to entering the job market. Working diligently and with the social capital that I had accumulated, I landed the tenure track position of Assistant Professor in Student Affairs Administration in the fall of 2008.

**Publishing and Scholarly Collaborations**

About the time I completed chapters four and five of my dissertation, which were based on a study of Black males at an HBCU, I immediately thought about
what type of publications I could generate. While I was eager to publish, I had little support or encouragement from colleagues in my doctoral program. In fact, most students in my program had little interest in publishing because they were not interested in becoming faculty. I wanted to talk with my chair about publishing or inquire if she would be interested in co-authoring an article with me. Unfortunately she, like other graduate faculty at the university, was overwhelmed with her teaching responsibilities and serving as chair or co-chair on multiple dissertation committees. Consequently, she did not have time. Nevertheless, I did not allow this to deter me; I was resolute to publish.

To try and bring my goal to fruition, I used some data from my dissertation, which I had yet to defend, to develop into an article. The article was not difficult to write because I merely cut from various chapters of my dissertation. For some reason, writing comes easy to me, but proofreading does not. By being cognizant of this, I sought to find a fellow graduate student that could proofread my article. In exchange for his service, I would add him as a second writer to the article. Jack (a pseudonym) was the student that I wanted to work with on this project. I met Jack at a major research conference a few years prior to working on my dissertation. During the time that we met, he seemed very much like me—focused, driven, and ambitious. When I contacted him to see if he was interested in working with me on the article, he declined. Jack, however, suggested one of his friends, Brian (a pseudonym), a fellow doctoral student, as a person who might be interested in helping me. He gave me Brian’s email address.

Upon contacting Brian, I learned that he was interested in helping with the article. In particular, I asked that he edit the article and write the abstract. Brian agreed. Nevertheless, it took about four or five months for me to get anything from him. When I finally received the article from Brian, he had made minimal changes and seemed to have put in minimal work, but was eager to claim co-authorship. Prior to submitting the article for publication, I emailed the article to a professor I met at a major research conference to get critical feedback. A month after I asked him to review the article, I followed up with him because he was slow to respond. He explained that because he did not have time to peruse the article, he forwarded the article to a good friend to see if he could review it. Eventually, his friend gave me positive feedback.

I also sought feedback from a prominent scholar in my field. I emailed the article to him and asked that he critique it. I was counting on his feedback because he
was well-published. Even more so, I was certain that he would review it because I thought we were friends. Much to my chagrin, he never responded. In a subsequent conversation I had with him, without attacking him directly, I expressed my frustrations over faculty who preached the importance of providing mentorship and guidance to graduate students and junior faculty in a public forum, but who too often did not follow through on their message when they were contacted privately.

I eventually submitted the article to a journal. After waiting for what seemed like an interminable about of time, I found out that the article was rejected. While discovering that the article had been rejected was difficult, it was even more difficult when I read some of the reviewers’ comments. Three reviewers read the article. With the exception of one reviewer, the reviewers’ comments were mean spirited and derogatory. I took the feedback from the one reviewer who provided considerable suggestions and recommendations on how I could improve the article and enhanced the article. Based on the outright rejection, I decided that it would be best if I did not work with Brian. I decided to have a tenure track professor from a different department at my doctorate granting institution proof the article. Again, in exchange, I agreed to add her as co-author. I subsequently submitted the article to a different journal. After waiting for months, the article received a conditional acceptance based upon some minor revisions.

While my first foray into publishing caused me to be apprehensive about the process, I stayed focused on getting more articles from my dissertation published. As I pondered the themes of my dissertation, one of the factors that became very clear was the supportive nature of the HBCU in which I conducted my study. Participants explained how this support transcended faculty, staff, and administrators; it involved the entire institutional community. Consequently, I decided to conceptualize the article by focusing on the impact of social capital on the retention and persistence of the participants in my study. As I began to critically ponder the article, I emailed a prominent professor, Dr. Cooper (a pseudonym), to ask if she would be willing to co-author the article with me. In the email, I offered to give her a writing sample and a copy of my curriculum vita. Similar to my previous encounter of contacting professors who were prolific scholars, I assumed that she would not return my email. The fact that we had never met supported my speculation.

Amazingly, however, Dr. Cooper replied. In her message, she offered to help me as long as I agreed to work hard. As one could imagine, I was beyond elated. I immediately worked on developing a draft of the article to demonstrate my seriousness,
dedication, and hard work. Over the next several weeks, we emailed drafts of the article back and forth. During this time, Dr. Cooper and I were able to establish a rapport through email chats. As the article neared completion, she encouraged me to submit the article to a top tier journal. I acquiesced.

After the article was submitted, we received a revise and resubmit. Initially, when Dr. Cooper informed me of the revise and resubmit, I was daunted. I thought the article was going to eventually get rejected. Dr. Cooper explained to me, however, the things the reviewers wanted us to focus on were not bad, and that we had a good chance of getting the article accepted. She encouraged me to focus on the reviewers’ concerns first and then she would look over them. In retrospect, I am glad that she did this because I learned so much about responding to reviewers’ concerns. After scrupulously addressing each concern of the reviewers, we resubmitted the manuscript. A few months later, we received another revise and resubmit. This time the reviewers’ concerns were very minor. After addressing their concerns, we resubmitted the article. It was eventually published in that journal.

During that time, Dr. Cooper told me that if I ever needed a letter of recommendation, I should let her know. I was grateful and bewildered because she and I had yet to meet, and she was willing to put her name and reputation on the line for me. We met a year later at a major conference where she introduced me to other prominent professors. She encouraged me to network and build rapport with other scholars. She also agreed to be my mentor, which I desperately needed. Since meeting her, she has played an active role in my professional life. When I write articles or have concepts in mind for books or other writing projects, I can share these ideas with her, and she will share her perspective. Despite her busy schedule, she has always been there for me and has given me the kind of support I wish I had received from faculty members at my doctoral granting institution.

My experience with this professor helped me to realize several things. First, despite my negative experiences reaching out for support from various people, it is important to remain persistent and focused. While some people promise to mentor and assist graduate students and junior faculty in a public forum, their words may not be indicative of their true intentions. Nevertheless, it is important to not become deterred but to stay focused on building a support community.

I also learned that there are professors willing to help others succeed in the academy. In fact, some would even venture above and beyond what people may ask of them to help one succeed in the academy. For example, having been motivated by
Dr. Coopers’ message that I continue building and establishing a network of support. I introduced myself to Dr. Jeffrey (a pseudonym), a prominent scholar who writes on a variety of issues impacting African American males in the context of elementary and higher education. As we conversed, I told him that I would like to write something with him; Dr. Jeffrey responded by giving me his business card and urging me to email him. While I took the card, I was initially reluctant because of my past experiences of corresponding with faculty who promised to help but ignored my emails when I contacted them. However, when I contacted Dr. Jeffrey he promptly returned my emails. He even held firm to his commitment to co-author a manuscript, which turned out to be a book chapter with me.

After working with three different people on various publications, (e.g., a book chapter and journal articles), I really started to realize the value of building a community of support to help me in the academy. One of the factors that affirmed my supposition was perusing the CV’s of professors who have been successful in publishing. I noticed that the vast majority of professors who had been tremendously successful in publishing cultivated a community of support whose social capital they used to help them in their pursuits to earn tenure. The relationships in this community do not merely benefit one, but all. In this sense the relationship is reciprocal, where everyone benefits from the collective social capital of the group.

Having realized this, I became more determined to establish a stronger support network. As such, by working with others to publish, they would not only be helping me, but also helping themselves. I have been fortunate to have individuals in my fraternity who are professors to help me in my endeavor. One of my fraternity brothers, David (a pseudonym), has been tremendously helpful to me in this process. Our relationship is reminiscent of how Drs. Sharon Fries-Britt and Bridget Kelly Turner (2005) characterized their relationship. Specifically, they explained how they formed a bond of support with each other, which enabled them to write for publications, support each other, and keep each other motivated and invigorated.

Similarly, my relationship with David has inspired me to work hard, stay focused on conceptualizing articles, and have the energy and discipline to bring those concepts to fruition. One of the things I find really motivating about working with David is setting a date that I will get the article back to him. Prior to formulating that goal, there have been times when we talked about collaborating on an article, and because I was not motivated, the article never got completed. However, talking to him and coming to a consensus about a date on which he or I will have our part
of the article to each other really has inspired me to stay focused. As I have noticed the benefits of this approach, I have employed this tactic with others that I collaborate with on projects. Working with David has also helped me to become a better writer and thinker. While in some cases I do the majority of the work, he will thoroughly read the manuscript and make appropriate edits and changes. His feedback, in this sense, helped me reflect on my weaknesses and limitations as a writer and critical thinker, which has helped me to grow and overcome those limitations.

David is also able and willing to disabuse my poor conceptualization of an article. For example, I was working on an article about the impact of summer remedial programs on the academic success of African American males in higher education. After I assumed that I had completed the article, I gave it to him to read, edit, and make changes. When I received the article from him, he had reconceptualized the article, making significant changes. David’s insight, dedication, and motivation have helped me tremendously. Since working with him, we have produced several conference papers, books chapters, and journal articles. We also have more projects in the planning stages.

As I discussed previously, other members of my fraternity have been supportive as well. Some of my fraternity brothers have offered me opportunities to write chapters in their books. Others have been willing to give me advice and support when needed. Additionally, other fraternity brothers, who have served as guest editors of journals, have helped me by extending to me an opportunity to publish my work in the issues of the journals that they edit.

**Career Guidance and Professional Engagements**

In terms of career guidance, several people that I have met have provided career advice and assistance. For example, Dr. Cooper has written letters of recommendations for me when I have applied to post docs, faculty positions, and awards. She worked hard to get me an interview for a faculty position at a prominent research institution. She has also encouraged me to actively publish, specifically in top tier journals. Similarly, Dr. Jeffrey has also assisted with my career. Much like Dr. Cooper, he has written letters of recommendations for me regarding faculty positions and other career related activities. He has also been very helpful in helping me decide to which schools I should apply while I was on the job market.

Some of my fraternity brothers have also provided career guidance and assistance. Similar to Drs. Cooper and Jeffrey, they have written letters of recommenda-
tion, encouraged me to make a commitment to write daily, and inspired me to main-
tain my focus on getting a tenure-track faculty position when I have received letters
of rejection from institutions.

The supportive community that I have established has also encouraged me to be-
come actively involved in scholarly organizations germane to my profession. Because
of the encouragement and guidance I have received from my supportive community,
I have been actively engaged in major research organizations in higher education,
such as the Association for the Study of Higher Education and the American Edu-
cational Research Association. I have also been involved in student service organiza-
tions in my profession, such as the American College Personnel Association and the
National Association of Student Affairs Professionals. My involvement is these or-
ganizations has helped to increase my social capital. In additional, I have joined the
editorial boards of journals, such as the *Journal of Negro Education*, the *Journal of Col-
lege Student Development*, and the *Journal of the Professoriate*, to name a few.

**Discussion**

Similar to my experience, research (e.g., Fries-Britt, 2000; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005;
Williams & Williams, 2006) has shown the importance of social capital and its im-
 pact on facilitating success in the academy for African Americans. In particular,
Williams and Williams noted that the accumulation of social capital . . . “is extremely
important for junior faculty members, especially, African American males, who feel
a sense of isolation due to distinct physical characteristics and negative media im-
ge s” (p. 290). They emphasized that building social relationships and connections
are important because they will help faculty cultivate a supportive community to ac-
cess in their pursuit to earn tenure.

Fries-Britt and Kelly (2005) also described the impact of social capital on their
success in the academy. Specifically, in the article, “Retaining Each Other: Narratives
of Two African American Women in the Academy,” they provided insight into how
they were able to develop a relationship which enabled them to support, motivate
and encourage one another. This relationship allowed them to be productive and
ambitious scholars. Reflecting on the impact of this interaction to her success as a
scholar, Kelly noted, “I’ve since found that one way to support myself as an African
American woman faculty member in a program of which I am the only one, in a de-
partment and college, of which I am one of two Black women, is to find other
women of color and White women to write with” (p. 234). In a book, *Succeeding in an Academic Career: A guide for Faculty of Color*, edited by Mildred Garcia (2000), other researchers have documented the inextricable link to forming supportive and meaningful networks and connections with other scholars and their relationship to success for African American faculty.

It seems as if the higher education community has realized the significance of developing social capital and its impact on the success of African American faculty. For example, Brothers of the Academy (BOTA) was formed to provide a supportive community for African American male scholars. In this organization, African American male academicians are able to find other male scholars of color who could possibly provide mentorship, guidance, support, and access to someone with mutual research interests. In this sense, African American males are able to benefit from the social capital of the members in this organization to facilitate their success in the academy. Similarly, there is an organization for females of color—Sisters of the Academy (SOTA), whose function parallels that of BOTA.

**Recommendations**

Several recommendations from my experience can be useful to help African American faculty succeed:

a) I think it important to realize that we all need people. As indicated previously, many African American faculty members, who have been tremendously successful in publishing, have been able to amass a critical amount of social capital, which have helped them significantly in negotiating the tenure process. Further, in my short time in the academy, I have come to realize that being successful in the academy is not measured by prestige of one’s doctoral granting institution, but their social relationships and connections.

b) While the prospect of reaching out to other faculty members may seem like a daunting or intimidating task, and in some cases your efforts may be met with rejection, it is important to be persistent. As my experience demonstrates, while some people may give lip service to mentoring and supporting faculty members, there are some people who are actually serious about helping faculty members succeed.

c) Similar to the experience of Sharon Fries-Britt and Kelley Bridget Turner, I think it is important to find a writing partner whose research agenda aligns with yours. In this sense, you will have someone to not only encourage you and keep you invigorated to write but also someone to bounce ideas off of, provide meaningful feedback to those ideas, and help bring these ideas to fruition.
Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the impact of social capital on my experience in the academy. Through social capital, I have gained meaningful relationships and connections with junior and senior faculty. These connections have helped me tremendously in becoming knowledgeable about the politics of the academy, publishing, and becoming engaged in professional organizations. Hopefully African American faculty who lack critical relationships and connections will be inspired by my experiences to understand the fruitfulness of intentionally building social capital to significantly enhance their chances of succeeding in the academy.

References


Social Capital and Faculty


