

# Chapter 23

## Perceived Discrimination Among African–American Faculty and the Elliott Kemp Organizational Change Model

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter is relevant to the field of leadership psychology as the fundamental notions of psychology involve the study of how mental processes affect behavior. With perceived discrimination being a covert awareness experienced by some, it is important to obtain an in-depth understanding of how perceived discrimination may be the cause of lower employee engagement resulting in higher levels of intention to quit, and ultimately leading to overt job-seeking behaviors. Due to the limited research in these areas, the motivation for exploring gaps in perceived discrimination and intention to quit is an urgent need. This is also important because there is evidence suggesting that despite the advances of African Americans in obtaining the necessary education qualifying them for employment, very little progress has been made towards obtaining tenured, professor, or senior positions in academia.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **African Americans & Perceived Discrimination in Higher Ed**

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans have been admitted to previously all white schools and colleges and have even obtained employment within these same organizations. These fundamental shifts in hiring have given way to an increase in employment opportunities for this group, allowing them to secure roles in various predominately white institutions throughout the United States. Unfortunately, and despite years of progress, this group still reports more feelings of perceived discrimination than their White counterparts (Wilder et al., 2015). Perceived discrimination is more subtle discrimination that is

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not as overt as discrimination seen during the Civil rights era (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Due to the subtle nature of perceived discrimination, after the discriminatory event, the individual is left to ponder if the discrimination is actually occurring. Whether discrimination is taking place in the institution or not, research has indicated that the individual perceiving discrimination is still adversely affected and may inadvertently exhibit behaviors not conducive to the optimal work culture (Areheart, 2020).

Volpone and Avery (2013) found that higher levels of perceived discrimination resulted in psychological withdrawal resulting in lateness, absenteeism, loss of job satisfaction, and intent to quit. Each of these behaviors can severely affect the culture of an organization and may even contribute to poor performance and a lack of retention of specific disregarded groups. In another study, Eagan and Garvey (2015) found that perceived discrimination contributes to higher levels of stress, a condition that has been linked to negative job performance. Some research has offered an explanation for higher levels of perceived discrimination, suggesting that African Americans report more instances of discrimination because they tend to be the minority in these colleges and universities (Assari & Lankarani, 2018). This is consistent with ingroup vs. outgroup studies and research substantiated by Henri Tajfel's and John Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory that indicates that higher levels of racial identification may cause higher levels of perceived racial discrimination as opposed to actual exposure to racial discriminatory events. According to Henri Tajfel's and John Turner's (1979) research, African American faculty will perceive more discrimination experiences than other groups because of their belonging to a more marginalized group. Because of these findings and others, there is a definite need for interventions that can address these vulnerabilities in higher education. As such, this chapter outlines recommendations for diversity efforts that will bring about change in organizations plagued with reports of perceived discrimination and provide solutions for organizations attempting to uncover inequitable practices that have acted as a barrier to racial equality and progress.

This chapter is relevant to the field of leadership psychology as the fundamental notions of psychology involve the study of how mental processes affect behavior. With perceived discrimination being a covert awareness experienced by some, it is essential to obtain an in-depth understanding of how perceived discrimination may be the cause of lower morale and toxic work culture, ultimately leading to overt job seeking behaviors among employees. Due to the limited research in these areas, the motivation for exploring gaps in perceived discrimination is an urgent need. This knowledge is also essential because there is evidence suggesting that despite the advances of African Americans in obtaining the necessary education qualifying them for employment, very little progress has been made towards achieving tenured, professor, or senior positions in academia.

## **African Americans in Higher Education Post-Racism**

According to recent research in the area of equality and race relations, the United States has had much progress and was even declared "post-racism" after the election of its first black president Barack Obama (Bell, 2019). Bell (2019) reports that efforts to combat racism and inequality had shown some significant progress during President Obama's presidency. Unfortunately, however, under the current political administration in the United States, led by President Donald J. Trump, there has been an extreme increase in racism and hate crimes targeting people of color (Bell, 2019). With the increase of these maladaptive norms, white supremacy activity and police shootings of unarmed minorities, these highly publicized crimes have led to ongoing protests and civil unrest (Donohue, 2017). Consistent with the systemic injustices uncovered in government, African American faculty have reported that inequality

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