



## Exemplary Followership: A Characterization of an African-American Sorority

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### Abstract

This exploratory non-experimental quantitative study aimed to characterize the followership behaviors of Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority (pseudonym) and determine if there is a difference among the generational cohorts within the membership. In predominantly African-American sororities, membership can be extended to women at the collegiate level and well after graduation, thus creating an organization with women of all ages and intrinsic values, beliefs, and behaviors. This study applied the concepts of Kelley's (1992) exemplary followership model and generational cohort theory to examine the similarities and differences between age groups within Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority. Kelley's Followership Questionnaire and a short demographic survey were used to obtain data from 178 sorority members. Descriptive statistics generated a profile of the participants. The results indicated that the sorority centralized around two of the five followership categories defined by Kelley: pragmatist and exemplary. Multivariate analysis of variance and analysis of variance procedures were used but found no significant correlation between the differences in generational cohorts and their followership behaviors. Although studies on followers have been explored in the workplace, information is scarce regarding how generational diversity impacts the dynamics of fraternal groups. This study provides insight into opportunities for organizational leaders to enhance followership training by focusing on principles to move followers from pragmatist to exemplary. Furthermore, the results of this study add to the gap in the literature on generational cohort theory and exemplary followership.

Keywords: generational characteristics, like-minded, critical thinking, active engagement

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When becoming a member of any of the nine National Pan-Hellenic Council (2023) organizations, individuals know it is a lifetime commitment, regardless of whether they

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join through a college campus or years after graduation. Although the primary purpose of each organization is educational, economic, social, and community uplift, the foundational ideals, principles, and beliefs make each organization somewhat unique, causing those interested in fraternal and sororal life to choose a specific organization. Founded on Christian principles and the desire to bring about social change, one sorority, Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority (pseudonym), has thrived for over 100 years, becoming one of the largest predominantly Black organizations in the world. Given the organization's longevity, continuous initiation of members at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the expectation of lifetime commitment, it is understandable how multiple generations of members comprise the organization's rosters. Organizational leaders are tasked with understanding how to best engage with their multifaceted body to ensure the mission and objectives continue to move forward.

Generational studies have examined how an individual's cohort may influence their values, beliefs, and behaviors in the workplace (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Twenge, 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). In a leadership study, Legas and Sims (2011) discussed how influential leaders should capitalize on the skills and knowledge that each generational cohort contributes. However, leaders have found it challenging to inspire and understand their followers when they span multiple age groups (Deeken et al., 2008).

Leadership and followership are tightly coupled; one cannot exist without the other (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 1992). Kelley (1992) posited that 80% of an organization's success is attributed to its followers' contributions. However, scholars have paid limited attention (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) to the concept of followership as a component of leadership. Gatti et al. (2017) acknowledged that it is not clear whether context or workplace culture influences the role of a follower or if it is embedded within a person's innate character. Leaders must be aware of their followers' styles that enable them to perform best. Leaders must create environments conducive to exemplary followership by changing their leadership styles or moderating the organizational culture (Adams & Gibson, 2022).

## **Problem Statement**

Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority has been established for over 100 years with alumnae and collegiate chapters in the United States and multiple countries. One's desire to be part of something bigger that promotes similar ideals and values was significant enough to cause women to join the organization. The organization's mission is to uplift the community and invest in the development of its members. As with many organizations, the focus has been on cultivating its leaders. Little attention has been paid to the most prominent member category – the followers.

Membership in a work organization usually means receiving compensation for the work done. Membership in a sorority requires one to pay dues to do the organization's

work. It is essential that members feel engaged and encouraged so they will continue to support the organization financially and through service. Without members, the organization would fail. Not only would sorority members lose their bond with each other, but the work in the community and the benefits brought to others through the services provided by the sorority would cease.

The good thing is that there is a continuous influx of new members of all ages each year, so the pool of workers is maintained. However, leaders must contend with the natural distinctions of the different age groups that must work together yet have been molded and influenced by the times in which they were raised (Zemke et al., 2013). Every leader wants followers who will help them be successful. Leaders need to be aware that these generational perceptions and attitudes (Twenge, 2010) influence followers' behaviors that impact their work.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to better understand followership in a sorority, particularly by characterizing the followership types among Lambda Alpha Zeta sorority members and exploring how these followership types are associated with the generational cohorts that comprise the organization's membership. The aim was to gain insight into the organization's members' followership styles and act as a baseline for future research. The findings from this study may guide organizational leaders on how to engage better and retain their multigenerational followers.

### **Significance of the Study**

The concept of followership has begun to catch the attention of scholars (Chaleff, 2009) but not to the extent of reaching the levels of leadership research. Google, Google Scholar, and Regent University's online library did not reveal any results where the scope of followership research was conducted in the context of a fraternal environment. This study will answer the call for more research in several ways: (a) investigate the concept of followership as suggested by Ghias et al. (2018), (b) provide empirical research using Kelley's Followership Questionnaire (KFQ) as suggested by Peterson and Peterson (2021), and (c) contribute to the understanding of exemplary followership as suggested by Finlayson (2021). This study is the first to explore followership within an African-American sorority. The results will contribute to the gap in the literature regarding generational influences on followership behaviors when examining fraternal organizations.

### **Research Questions**

A sorority's success depends on its ability to mobilize its members to do the work. When maneuvering in a multigenerational sorority, understanding the followers' preferences will enable leaders to keep engagement high to reach the objectives. Based

on the literature suggesting continuing the expansion of followership, this study answered the following research questions:

RQ1: How are followership behaviors distributed among Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority members?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the generation cohort of a Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority member and their followership behavior?

### **Scope and Limitations**

Due to the limited time for conducting this study, this study should be considered a pilot with a small sample size. The ability to generalize the results across other sororities or fraternal organizations will be limited. The study does not investigate other underlying constructs that may influence the participants' responses. This study does not measure causality. Additionally, the data for the study were collected at one point in time, making it unreasonable to establish if the preferred characteristics of followers are consistent over time.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Baby Boomers.* Individuals born from 1946 to 1964 (Dimock, 2019).

*Generation X.* Individuals born from 1965 to 1980 (Dimock, 2019).

*Generation Z.* Individuals born from 1997 to 2012 (Dimock, 2019).

*Millennials.* Individuals born from 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

*Silent Generation.* Individuals born from 1928 to 1945 (Dimock, 2019).

*Sorority.* An organized society of women bound together by a common cause and dedicated to the development of its members (Turk, 2004).

## **Literature Review**

The framework of this research requires a foundational understanding of the different generations and the characteristics that may contribute to their perception of followership. This review covers generational cohort theory, generational characteristics, the concept of followership, and Kelley's (1992) exemplary followership model.

## Generational Theory

A generation may span 15-20 years but is usually bound by the time it takes one group to have children (Pew Research Center, 2015). Inglehart (1977) coined the term *generational cohort theory*. A generational cohort is an “identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). Angeline (2011) proclaimed a generation as individuals that share birth years and political, economic, and historical life events that create a social bond for that generation.

People develop their value system during their childhood years, which is carried throughout life (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). Twenge and Campbell (2008) proposed that parents, peers, and media also contribute to shaping the lens through which a generation evaluates its values and belief systems. Sessa et al. (2007) placed less emphasis on genetics as impacting differences within generations but were proponents of shared social experiences as the primary contributor. Sessa et al. identified a significant shift in resources or mentors’ motivation as contributing factors to a generational cohort’s worldview. Guthrie (2009) detailed that these everyday experiences presuppose a generation’s thinking and influence their expectations.

Generational theory is not without criticism. One problem is the lack of agreement on the various periods defining each cohort (Macky et al., 2008). Another problem Giancola (2006) argued is that it could not be assumed that all individuals of a generation experience the economy or culture from the same perspective. Giancola contended that factors like gender, ethnicity, or social status may contribute to individual perspectives, thus shaping values, beliefs, and attitudes. Also, Macky et al. (2008) highlighted that the ability to separate differences in being a member of a generational cohort from one’s position in career, organizational tenure, or life-cycle stage is unclear.

## Generational Characteristics

The implication of shared common beliefs, values, and attitudes among a particular generational cohort has been cultivated through different formative experiences. Burke (2015) contended that older generations “bring wisdom, experiences, and contacts, an understanding that things don’t last forever” (p. 11). Younger generations look for collaboration and more social responsibility, proclaimed Arsenault (2004), and require continuous feedback (Zemke et al., 2013). Though differences exist, Burke remarked that age differences in an organization may lead to increased innovation and creativity, improved problem-solving, and better leadership. Organizational leaders need to understand these differences among their followers. Although there are discrepancies in the start and end date of each cohort, this research focused on the five generations defined by Dimock (2019) of the Pew Research Center that span the membership of a sorority: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z.

## **Silent Generation**

The Great Depression (1929-1941) and World War II (1939-1945) were two of the geopolitical events that the Silent Generation experienced (Zemke et al., 2013). Individuals who witnessed these and other life-changing events were apprehensive about the future. Zemke et al. (2013) noted that these experiences had made this generation risk-averse, reluctant to change, and conservative. Pew Research Center (2015) reported that the Silent Generation characterized themselves as more patriotic, responsible, hardworking, compassionate, and moral than the other generations.

The Silent Generation prefers uniformity and consistency, contended Zemke et al. (2013). Additionally, Zemke et al. indicated that this generation is likely to conform and will not readily complain but remain loyal. According to Wiedmer (2015), this generation is motivated by money, rewards, and position. They work hard and believe in big institutions. However, Zemke et al. declared they also want structure and uniformity with a clear delineation of duties, and Wiedmer proclaimed they prefer a hierarchical organizational structure. Also, Wiedmer indicated that the Silent Generation strives for family values and keeps work and family separate. Although this generation has mostly retired from the workforce, they remain active in Lambda Alpha Zeta.

## **Baby Boomers**

Families grew after World War II and the Korean War, giving rise to approximately 79 million babies born in the United States (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2011). This rapid growth in the population gives way to the name of this Baby Boomer generational cohort. Baby Boomers grew up when the sentiment was optimistic and prosperous about the future (Zemke et al., 2013). Considered an idealist generation, Zemke et al. (2013) expressed that Baby Boomers held a strong sense of morals and self.

Cogin (2012) characterized Baby Boomers as being dedicated to success at work and reaping the rewards. Their confidence and self-reliance drive their work ethic, making them highly competitive. Depicted as workaholics and closely tied to their jobs, Zemke et al. (2013) noted this generation's rise in divorce rates. Nevertheless, Johnson and Johnson (2010) highlighted that they often resist change. Johnson and Johnson indicated that Baby Boomers are team-oriented and want to be fully engaged with leaders but not micromanaged, explained Cogin.

## **Generation X**

Kupperschmidt (2000) identified Generation X as the first generation to grow up in homes where both parents worked. Even in single-parent homes, the parent was likelier to work outside the home. This environment catalyzed members from this generation to become more self-reliant, informal, and skeptical toward those in authority (Zemke et

al., 2013). Smola and Sutton (2002) denoted that this generation grew up in a time of family, economic, and societal insecurity.

Growing up in the early years of technology expansion, Generation X gravitated to computers, video games, and the internet (Morales, 2021). Zemke et al. (2013) indicated that Generation Xers are creative and not opposed to taking risks. Morales (2021) pointed out that although they have learned to create a work-life balance and are not afraid of change, they are often impatient. Cagin (2012) expressed that Generation X preferred flexibility and autonomy at work but liked engaging in small-group social interactions.

## **Millennials**

Pew Research Center (2015) found that 59% of millennials classified their peers as self-absorbed, and 49% indicated they were wasteful. The research also indicated that Millennials were likelier to consider themselves idealistic yet cynical. Millennials were the first generation to be raised entirely in the age of the internet and social media (Zemke et al., 2013).

In general, Kelly et al. (2016) prescribed that Millennials are optimists but constantly need recognition and encouragement. Zemke et al. (2013) indicated that Millennials' confidence is sometimes considered arrogant or entitled. These traits stem from their elders trying to protect them from failure and constantly bolstering their self-esteem. However, Zemke et al. admitted that this does not prevent them from being dedicated to their work. Work-life balance is also essential to this group. Kelly et al. declared that they look for intrinsic value as their reward more than monetary compensation.

## **Generation Z**

Fry and Parker (2018) identified Generation Z as the most ethnically and racially diverse generation. Generation Z grew up in a time of expanding technology and is highly dependent on it. Seemiller and Grace (2016) characterized Generation Z as innovative, caring, and responsible. A desire to make a positive difference motivates them, but impatience makes them want the process to happen quickly (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Schawbel (2016) stated that Generation Z favors working remotely over a brick-and-mortar office. Flexibility to take time off when needed ranks high among the benefits Generation Z deems critical. Schawbel also reported that this generation prefers face-to-face communication and collaboration but wants companies to engage in new technology and social media. Schawbel also indicated that regular feedback is preferred rather than annual reviews.

## Followership

Followership is starting to emerge as a separate but equally important construct from leadership. The investigation into followership has become more prevalent in recent years (Carsten et al., 2010; Hoption et al., 2012; Sy, 2010) as researchers have recognized the impact and influence followers project on leaders and organizations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). However, there is no single definition of followership. Northouse (2022) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) identified followers from role-based and relational-based categories. Role-based focuses on the position of a follower within a hierarchical system. Northouse explained that the emphasis is on behaviors and styles of engagement the follower brings and how they affect outcomes and leaders. Uhl-Bien et al. reasoned that the relational-based perspective of followership is not based on role orientation but entails the interpersonal relationship and the influence of behaviors.

Shamir (2007) suggested a follower-centric definition of followership, indicating that it is a way to influence a leader's attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Similarly, Chaleff (2009) considered followership an influence exchange to meet a common purpose. Chaleff described followers as supporting the leader but also challenging the leader as courageous followers. The paradigm of followers and leaders having shared responsibility suggests that followers acknowledge their involvement in the organization and are keenly engaged in the objectives (Kean et al., 2011).

Carsten et al. (2010) also considered followership not a specific role but a state of being relative to Chaleff's (2009) definition. Carsten et al. categorized followers as passive, active, or proactive. Passive followers were loyal and followed orders. They looked to their leader's expertise and knowledge. Active followers were willing to participate and offer opinions. While loyal to leaders, they would disagree. According to Carsten et al., proactive followers were considered active participants in the leadership process. They constructively challenged leaders while working to advance the mission.

## Exemplary Followership

Kelley (1992) declared that followers are crucial in achieving most organizational outcomes. Kelley argued that organizations primarily comprise followers rather than leaders, so it is imperative to understand followership. Kelley's perspective classified followers as independent, engaged, and critical thinkers. According to Kelley, the follower identified as a critical thinker can "think for themselves, give constructive criticism, are their own person, and are innovative and creative" (p. 93). Engaged followers "take initiative, assume ownership, participate actively, are self-starters, and go above and beyond the job" (Kelley, 1992, p. 94).

Kelley (1992) juxtaposed the two dimensions of independent critical thinkers and engaged followers and identified five followership styles. Passive followers rely on high

levels of leadership direction and lack critical thinking; they have low levels of engagement. Alienated followers are critical thinkers but do not show commitment toward the organization; they question leaders and are low in engaging with others. Conformists are highly engaged but do not question decisions and look to leaders to do the thinking. Pragmatists are the organization's status quo, following the rules and looking for leaders to guide and think for them. Exemplary followers are independent critical thinkers who will constructively challenge the leader but offer alternatives; they are actively engaged and take the initiative. Kelley's taxonomy of the different types of followers provides the model for the optimal behavior of an exemplary follower.

The independent critical thinker is not excluded from interacting with others or connecting in teams, posited Kelley (1992). They support the shared purpose and are willing to engage in collaboration. Kelley also contended that successful organizations realize how to motivate and engage their followers by seeking an understanding of the different follower types.

## Method

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that quantitative research explores the relationship between variables that can be measured using instruments and analyzed through statistical procedures. The research for this study was conducted using a quantitative method to characterize the followership preferences of Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority members. The independent variables are the five generations that cover the organization's membership: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. The dependent variables are the two dimensions of the followership concept defined by Kelley (1992): active engagement and critical thinking.

## Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a sample from the population can be used to generalize about the entire population. This exploratory investigation used a non-experimental research design through a self-reporting survey and subsequent quantitative analysis. There was no payment or incentive for their information.

## Instrumentation

A brief demographic survey (see Appendix A) was also used. The survey collected the birth year of the participants, the year they became a member of the organization, and if they joined as a collegiate or alumnae. No additional personally identifiable information was collected.

The KFQ is a 20-item tool to measure an individual's followership traits. The questions are based on a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from responses of *rarely* (0) to *almost always* (6). Two dimensions were measured: 10 questions mapped to the independent

thinking domain, and the remaining 10 mapped to the active engagement domain. The results of both dimensions place the individual into one of five followership styles: passive, alienated, conformist, pragmatist, and exemplary. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey questions.

Kalkhoran et al. (2013) evaluated the KFQ and reported that Cronbach's alpha for critical thinking ranged between 0.63–0.74 and 0.69–0.87 for the dimension of active engagement. The Cronbach's alpha for the dimension of critical thinking ranged between 0.63–0.74. Kalkhoran et al. indicated that the reliability coefficients possessed adequate internal consistency and reliability. The KFQ has been adapted for other languages and still showed significant empirical support for its validity (Gatti et al., 2014; Ghislieri et al., 2015).

## **Population and Sample**

The target number of participants needed for the study is based on guidance from Hair et al. (2019), indicating 15 to 20 observations for each study variable. The research contains seven variables. There are five predictor variables (Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z) and two criterion variables (active engagement and critical thinking). Hair et al. suggested that sample sizes should consist of 15 to 20 observations for each study variable. A minimum sample size of 105 to 140 would support the current study.

Members of Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority were the target population. Participants were recruited through three nonprobability sampling approaches. First, my network of friends who are Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority members was asked to participate. Cozby and Bates (2020) indicated that purposive sampling is used to obtain people who meet a predetermined criterion; in this case, they are members of the target organization. Second, using the snowballing method, each person was asked to send the survey link to their network of friends who were sorority members. Young (2015) explained that snowballing could aid the researcher in reaching a large sample size. Third, I engaged in convenience sampling, as identified by Cozby and Bates, by using my social media accounts (Facebook and GroupMe) to ask sorority members to participate. In each case, I briefly described the objectives, eligibility criteria, and a link to the questionnaire. It was explained that the participant provided informed consent by submitting the completed survey.

## **Data Collection**

Participants were required to meet the minimum age requirement of 18, so they had to provide their birth year as part of the demographic requirements. The participants were instructed to reflect on their current chapter association. If the participants were active in a chapter, they would be asked to respond based on the last chapter to which they

paid dues. The study was administered through a single online survey using JotForm. All items from the KFQ were listed along the Likert-like scale for the answer selection. Each question required an answer before submission would be allowed. However, the participants could exit the survey at any time. The survey was active for five days, and 185 responses were recorded. All survey responses went directly to JotForm and were password-protected until retrieved for analysis. The survey responses were downloaded into an Excel file for analysis in SPSS®.

## Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were generated based on the demographic variables collected to provide a profile picture of the sample population (Williams & Monge, 2001). The data described the followership behaviors dominating each cohort and the organization.

Additionally, subgroup analysis was performed using the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test (Green & Salkind, 2017) to determine if there is any statistically significant relationship between followership behaviors and generational cohorts. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the variance among the means of the data between groups (Williams & Monge, 2001). Finally, the calculation based on Kelley's (1992) topology was conducted to determine the followership styles of the members.

Frequency analysis procedures were used for the demographics. The demographic results are in Table 1. In SPSS, the birth year variable was converted into a categorical variable for each generational cohort. The number of surveys completed was 178. Respondents comprised all generational cohorts; however, only five respondents represented the Silent Generation and Generation Z categories. The respondents comprised 38.19% Baby Boomers, 57.14% Generation X, and 4.76% Millennials.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Frequency Analysis

| Generational cohort | n  | %  |
|---------------------|----|----|
| Silent              | 5  | 3  |
| Baby Boomers        | 56 | 31 |
| Generation X        | 80 | 45 |
| Millennials         | 32 | 18 |
| Generation Z        | 5  | 3  |

Other demographic data captured in this study included the respondents' current chapter of affiliation. This information was collected to provide a better profile of the sample participants. Table 2 displays the results.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Participants Profile

| Chapter    | Silent | Baby Boomers | Generation X | Millennials | Generation Z |
|------------|--------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Collegiate | 0      | 0            | 0            | 0           | 1            |
| Alumnae    | 5      | 53           | 76           | 23          | 2            |
| Not Active | 0      | 3            | 4            | 9           | 2            |

Descriptive statistics were conducted for the continuous variables measured by the KFQ— independent thinking and active engagement— relating to the overall organizational profile. The values for the subscales were calculated by creating two new variables and adding the scores corresponding to the appropriate question. The independent thinking score was the sum of Questions 1, 5, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. The active engagement score was the sum of Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 15. Table 3 shows each variable’s mean, minimum, median, and standard deviation analysis by cohort.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics by Generational Cohort for the KFQ

| Generational cohort           | Min. | Max. | M     | SD    |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Silent Generation ( $n = 5$ ) |      |      |       |       |
| Independent thinking          | 26   | 49   | 38.40 | 8.26  |
| Active engagement             | 28   | 45   | 36.40 | 8.00  |
| Baby Boomers ( $n = 56$ )     |      |      |       |       |
| Independent thinking          | 18   | 60   | 43.05 | 10.35 |
| Active engagement             | 20   | 60   | 48.07 | 10.23 |
| Generation X ( $n = 80$ )     |      |      |       |       |
| Independent thinking          | 24   | 59   | 43.94 | 7.74  |
| Active engagement             | 24   | 60   | 47.14 | 8.28  |
| Millennials ( $n = 32$ )      |      |      |       |       |
| Independent thinking          | 24   | 57   | 44.69 | 6.93  |
| Active engagement             | 22   | 57   | 45.69 | 8.41  |
| Generation Z ( $n = 5$ )      |      |      |       |       |
| Independent thinking          | 45   | 60   | 53.40 | 7.10  |
| Active engagement             | 42   | 60   | 52.20 | 8.50  |

The MANOVA procedure was used to analyze how the five independent variables of the generational cohort impacted the KFQ's two dependent variables. The Box's equality of covariance matrices test indicates that the homogeneity of dispersion matrices is insignificant,  $F(12, 1278) = 1.17, p = 0.30$ .

The MANOVA results also provided a Wilks's  $\Lambda$  of 0.896 is significant,  $F(8,344) = 2.42, p = 0.015 < 0.05$ , which means we can reject the hypothesis that the population means on the dependent variables of the KFQ are the same for the independent variables of five generations. The multivariate  $\eta^2 = 0.053$  indicates that 5.3% of the multivariate variance of the dependent variables is associated with the generational factor.

The ANOVA procedure was used to analyze between-subject effects on each of the subscales of the KFQ with the generational cohort as the independent variable. The Bonferroni procedure was conducted with a test for each ANOVA at the 0.025 significance level (see Table 4). The ANOVA indicated that the  $p$ -values of both variables were nonsignificant because they exceeded the required level of 0.025.

Table 4: Test Between-Subject Effects Correct Model

| Dependent variables  | Type III SS | df | MS     | F    | Sig. | Partial eta squared |
|----------------------|-------------|----|--------|------|------|---------------------|
| Independent thinking | 662.57      | 4  | 165.64 | 2.30 | .061 | .050                |
| Active engagement    | 817.90      | 4  | 204.48 | 2.54 | .041 | .056                |

The KFQ's measurements of independent thinking and active engagement were used to classify each participant into one of five styles: exemplary, alienated, conformist, pragmatist, or passive. The formula for identifying each style is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Followership Style Calculation

| Style      | Independent Thinking Score | Active Engagement Score |
|------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Exemplary  | > 40                       | > 40                    |
| Alienated  | > 40                       | < 20                    |
| Conformist | < 20                       | > 40                    |
| Pragmatist | > 20 & < 40                | > 20 & < 40             |
| Passive    | < 20                       | < 20                    |

The respondents are categorized as either exemplary or pragmatist based on the scores. No respondents' scores fell into the other three followership styles. Although 100% of Generation Z and 40% of the Silent Generation fall into the exemplary category, it is worth noting that each one of these age groups had five respondents. Due to the low number, the results may not represent the population for these cohorts. The results indicated that exemplary followers comprise 66% and pragmatists comprise 34% of the sample. Table 6 summarizes the results by generation.

Table 6: Followership Style Category

| Style      | Silent Generation | Baby Boomers | Generation X | Millennials | Generation Z |
|------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Exemplary  | 40%               | 63%          | 69%          | 66%         | 100%         |
| Alienated  | 0                 | 0            | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| Conformist | 0                 | 0            | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| Pragmatist | 60%               | 38%          | 31%          | 34%         | 0            |
| Passive    | 0                 | 0            | 0            | 0           | 0            |

## Discussion

This quantitative study aimed to investigate the dimensions of followership styles and determine if there is a significant difference between the generations among Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority members. This study of 178 Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority participants provided insight into the follower attributes and styles within the organization. The topology developed by Kelley (1992) categorized followers into one of five styles. However, the model for Lambda Alpha Zeta has shown a strong centralization around two followership styles: pragmatist and exemplary.

Kelley's (1992) assessment of pragmatist followers indicates they will execute tasks as needed but not go above and beyond. According to Kelley, they may question leaders but not regularly or in public. This behavior could parallel the thought process of members, thinking they must follow the social order to be accepted in the organization. They want to do an excellent job while reducing the risk of failure. Lambda Alpha Zeta seeks women to promote and support its ideas, programs, and policies. As part of the membership intake process, strong, cohesive bonds are forged that instill commitment and confidence to ensure the members align with the organization's values and beliefs.

The exemplary followership finding is congruent with the expectation that members of Lambda Alpha Zeta are high-functioning, high-achieving, and productive. Kelley (1992) identified exemplary followers with high levels of independent thinking and active engagement. The expectation is that members will use their skills, talents, and ingenuity to help the organization achieve its mission. Although committed to the cause, Kelley suggested that followers should not accept the leader's decision without adequately evaluating its validity. The organization functions on the premise that success can be achieved when working together.

Kupperschmidt (2000) claimed that those with parallel chronological, social, and historical perspectives would show similar behaviors, attitudes, and values, forming distinct cohorts. The results of this study indicated no significant correlation when exploring whether there are differences between generational cohorts and their followership behaviors, therefore not providing any evidence to support Kupperschmidt's supposition.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study should be repeated to ensure consistent findings are upheld with a different set of participants. The voices of the Silent Generation and Generation Z were minimal. Targeting these unrepresentative groups should be included in the strategy to ensure a more inclusive sample could provide more clarity and a more accurate picture of the follower behaviors within the organization and across the generations.

Additional research should probe the demographic profile of organizational members, which may provide more insight as to why members are categorized into only two followership styles. It would be prudent to launch an investigation to understand if other influences or personal characteristics impact followers to be attracted to the organization.

This study was limited to members of Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority. It is not easy to distinguish between the effects of culture on followership scores versus the effect of the culture within a different organization that would foster diverse values, beliefs, and missions. Future studies should consider different organizations or, potentially, a cross-organizational study that compares and contrasts followership styles among the fraternal population.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners**

There are opportunities for organizational leaders to enhance followership training by focusing on principles to move followers from pragmatist to exemplary. Additionally, leaders should strive to understand how different generations think and act and what motivates them to reach their maximum potential and efficiency.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Previous research has studied generational differences and followership behaviors; however, this study is the first to evaluate followership behaviors between generations within an African-American sorority. The results of this study can add to the gap in the literature on generational cohort theory and exemplary followership. However, an important theoretical implication of this research is that there is no significant evidence that generation influences an individual's preferred followership behavior.

## **Practical Implications**

African-American fraternities and sororities are an integral part of our society. Having a lifetime membership policy and opportunities to become a member at any age, these organizations must contend with leading across generations. For these organizations to remain productive and relevant, investments must be made in developing their members and motivating them to commit to the work. Leaders can implement training to help develop desired followership behaviors. By identifying the follower profiles, leaders can analyze their culture and provide meaningful experiences to members of all ages.

## **Conclusion**

Followership is an essential element of leadership. Leaders must be cognizant of the follower's role and the beliefs surrounding their meaning of followership. Exemplary followership is the ideal behavior leaders covet to ensure the organization successfully achieves its goals and objectives. The current study used a quantitative approach to examine the application of followership and generational theories in an African-American sorority. The findings of this study provide a followership profile of the membership that supports a uniform organization in behavior regardless of age. The results should not be generalized to other organizations. More studies should be conducted to ensure consistency in the findings from this study. Without followers, there would be no leaders. Followers are the next leaders; therefore, it is paramount to understand and cultivate followers so they will be ready to take the reins when it is their turn to lead.

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## **About the Author**

Selené Hudson Brent has worked as Cisco's IT Technical Project Manager for 11 years. She is active in her church and multiple community organizations and has held various leadership roles. With a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and an MBA from North Carolina State University, she brings a strong foundation of knowledge and expertise to her work. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Survey

This information aims to determine eligibility to participate in this survey and will provide a profile of the respondents for the assessment. The information will be used to analyze responses associated with your Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority membership.

Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Year initiated into Lambda Alpha Zeta Sorority, Incorporated: \_\_\_\_\_

Current chapter type: Alumnae \_\_\_\_ Collegiate \_\_\_\_ Not Active \_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Followership Questionnaire

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| 0      | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 2 | 3            | 4 | 5 | 6             |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--------------|---|---|---------------|
| Rarely |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |   | Occasionally |   |   | Almost Always |
| 1.     | Does your work help you fulfill some societal goal or personal dream that is important to you?                                                                                                                |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2.     | Are your personal work goals aligned with the organization's priority goals?                                                                                                                                  |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3.     | Are you highly committed to and energized by your work and organization, giving them your best ideas and performance?                                                                                         |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4.     | Does your enthusiasm also spread to and energize your coworkers?                                                                                                                                              |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5.     | Instead of waiting for or merely accepting what the leader tells you, do you personally identify which organizational activities are most critical for achieving the organization's priority goals?           |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6.     | Do you actively develop a distinctive competence in those critical activities so that you become more valuable to the leader and the organization?                                                            |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7.     | When starting a new job or assignment, do you promptly build a record of successes in tasks that are important to the leader?                                                                                 |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8.     | Can the leader give you a difficult assignment without the benefit of much supervision, knowing that you will meet your deadline with highest-quality work and that you will "fill in the cracks" if need be? |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9.     | Do you take the initiative to seek out and successfully complete assignments that go above and beyond your job?                                                                                               |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 10.    | When you are not the leader of a group project, do you still contribute at a high level, often doing more than your share?                                                                                    |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 11.    | Do you independently think up and champion new ideas that will contribute significantly to the leader's or the organization's goals?                                                                          |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 12.    | Do you try to solve the tough problems (technical or organizational), rather than look to the leader to do it for you?                                                                                        |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 13.    | Do you help out other coworkers, making them look good, even when you don't get any credit?                                                                                                                   |   |              |   |   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

- |     |                                                                                                                                              |               |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| 14. | Do you help the leader or group see both the upside potential and downside risks of ideas or plans, playing the devil's advocate if need be? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 15. | Do you understand the leader's needs, goals, and constraints, and work hard to help meet them?                                               | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 16. | Do you actively and honestly own up to your strengths and weaknesses rather than put off evaluation?                                         | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 17. | Do you make a habit of internally questioning the wisdom of the leader's decision rather than just doing what you are told?                  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 18. | When the leader asks you to do something that runs contrary to your professional or personal preferences, do you say "no" rather than "yes"? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 19. | Do you act on your own ethical standards rather than the leader's or the group's standards?                                                  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 20. | Do you assert your views on important issues, even though it might mean conflict with your group or reprisals from the leader?               | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |