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Perceptions of Organizational Politics and Interpersonal Relationships in Black Women's Organizations and Sororities

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies

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School of Educational Leadership

Perceptions of Organizational Politics and Interpersonal Relationships in Black Women's Organizations and Sororities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Mitzi S. Willis

January 2023

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Dr. Charles E. Willis II, who challenged me to take action and pursue the doctorate that I always said I wanted. To my baby girl, Addison Grace, who always reminded me that I was a student and I had work to do. Although I thought I was being an example to her, Addison served as a powerful example of discipline and scholarship, motivating me, after decades of not being in school, to always do my very best. To my older children, Trey and Taylor, who missed this whole experience while pursuing their goals and dreams. To my sister, Anjanette, and my brother, Aaron, for not only supporting me as their baby sister during this endeavor but also propping me up, propelling me forward, and reminding me of the strength and resilience embodied in me when I thought I wanted to quit following the death of our mother. To my village for constantly reminding me, in good and bad times, that I could do it. Most importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Marilyn and A. J. Wallace, who always believed there was nothing that I couldn't do, that all of my dreams would come true, and that with their love, support, and belief in God that all things are possible through Christ, who strengthens me.

In Loving Memory of My Parents

Marilyn L. Wallace
December 6, 1942–June 5, 2021

A. J. Wallace
September 15, 1934–July 5, 2009

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Praise be to God for her goodness, grace, and mercy, which instilled in me the wherewithal to navigate all of the obstacles that we confront as Black women. It is through my faith that I have been and will continue to excel academically, professionally, and personally, achieving my goals and dreams while providing love and encouragement to my sisters to use their most powerful tool: their voices.

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To my sisters in the Eta Line of the Xi Psi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and my friends in the Greater Denton County (TX) Chapter, The Links, Incorporated, thank you for allowing me to be your sister and your friend and allowing me to learn and grow through our experiences as members of Black women's organizations and sororities.

Thank you to the 15 members of Black women's organizations and sororities who trusted me with your stories and experiences in these groups. I am eternally grateful for your decision to let me into your inner thoughts about your groups and your membership. I pray your insight will

enhance the understanding of leaders and followers in these historical organizations and enable the recognition that silence is not always golden and that sometimes change is necessary.

To the countless Black women who are members of the historical organizations and have deemed these organizations as your safe space, please know that your membership comes with privileges, and among them is the right to hear the truth and express your thoughts without fear of retaliation. The Black Club women of the past fought and sacrificed for the Black women of today to have a voice, and we have taken the opportunity to be heard in so many aspects of our lives. Membership in our beloved organizations should not be any different. The success and sustainability of these groups are contingent upon the election of leaders who are willing to hear the truth and be accountable for their actions. As members, your voices matter, but you must be willing to recognize those efforts to silence you and use your strong Black woman's voice.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Jennifer T. Butcher, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you for your leadership, guidance, and friendship throughout this process. Thank you for choosing me and investing your time and talents in this expansion of the available research on Black women. Thank you to Dr. Dianne Reed and Dr. Deardra Hayes-Whigham for their commitment to this project, challenging my process, and their relentless desire for excellence.

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Abstract

Although much research has addressed the relationships between leaders and followers, none has focused on these relationships between Black women—specifically, in the context of Black women's social service organizations and sororities—and the impact the leader's chosen style of leadership has on the followers' use of voice. Self silencing is a prominent response to the power dynamic in many leader–follower relationships. The purpose of this study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's social service organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement. This study extends the application of silencing the self theory to leader–follower dynamics in Black women's organizations and sororities. This qualitative study employed a narrative design and semistructured interviews to ascertain the experiences of and gain insight from 15 members of Black women's organizations and sororities on their interactions with leaders in their organization and the impact on their use of voice and their commitment to the organization. The multiple themes identified suggest that the leader–follower relationship—specifically the leader's actions and leadership style—and the culture and interpersonal dynamics of the organization are critical to followers' decision to moderate their voice and their commitment to the organization.

Keywords: Black women, leader–follower, sororities, voice, self silencing, silencing the self theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dillard (2016) emphasized that understanding Black women leaders requires ongoing conversations about the uniqueness of Black women's truths, values, and leadership practices. A perusal of any research database reveals Black women have been the subject of many leadership studies; however, little research has addressed Black women's social service organizations and the relationships between their leaders and followers, which have shaped the experiences of countless Black women for centuries (Brooks, 2018). These historical organizations were forged from Black women's inherent sense of community, and they serve as a venue for these women to remove the masks commonly associated with their roles in corporate environments, which are used for concealing their true identities through behaviors such as code-switching and self silencing (Davis & Afifi, 2019). Although these organizations were founded on principles of relationships, morality, and social justice, some of these groups have questionable leadership, power imbalances, and a quelling of the strong Black voices that have served as a source of strength in the Black community (Etowa et al., 2017).

This study addresses leaders and followers' interpersonal dynamics and communicative practices in Black social service organizations. Recognizing the import of the strong Black woman (SBW) schema, I sought to describe the evolution, and often silencing, of the voices of strong Black women that has dominated the African American community's progressive movements for centuries (Corbin et al., 2018). Specifically, I sought to provide insight into how leadership styles influence Black women followers and how the chosen style of their elected Black women leaders affects followers' voices—whether energizing or minimizing their inherent power (George, 2020). An exploration of this topic requires a study of the intersectional complexities that encourage some to join Black women social service organizations and

sororities, the importance of leadership, leader–follower interactions, and the influence of leadership on their desire to continue their membership and share their experiences with others (Parks & Mutisya, 2019).

Intersectional Complexities of Black Women

Within the phrase "Black women" lies the identity of approximately 7.6% of the U.S. population (United States Census Bureau, 2020). "Black" depicts their race, and "women" defines their sex (Aaron, 2020). The words "Black women" collectively define their identity in almost any environment, and forecast an increased likelihood of race or gender discrimination (Davis, 2019). These words often determine the level to which one is accepted or rejected by others or by the Black woman herself (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Centuries of physical and mental abuse, sexism, racism, and classism have created issues in the Black community (Washington, 2020). These actions have forced Black women to reconcile their self-worth against their perceived worth to society, their workplaces, and their social organizations (Vial et al., 2016). Vial et al. (2016) further indicated this disparate treatment has led to a loss of self-confidence that motivates many Black women to seek refuge among other Black women in Black social service organizations. In these social network groups—organizations that contribute to the ideas that comprise the strong Black women's collective—Black women can be themselves, lift each other, and reinforce their strength and power as women of color (McLane-Davison et al., 2018). McLane-Davison et al. (2018) also stated that these social service organizations, which traditionally performed social work in their communities, created opportunities for shared ideas and unity so Black women could breathe without the judgment that impedes their progress in the workplace and other venues.

The Importance of Leadership

Leadership is not universal; it is dictated by gender and race and by one's social status and interaction with members of the majority culture (Sims & Carter, 2019). In modern organizational environments, where groups strive to increase member commitment and accomplishments while encouraging competition, most leadership styles are either transactional, embodying a give-and-take relationship, or transformational (Qadir & Yeşiltaş, 2020). The transformational leader influences followers' voice and actions through a vision and recognition of the tools necessary to achieve a common goal (Duan et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018). Although there are various leadership styles, the ones followers deem most acceptable rely on ethical behaviors, such that the leader demonstrates moral behavior and sets expectations of morality among followers (Emler, 2019; Kabeyi, 2018; Mesdaghinia et al., 2018). When leaders assert a bottom-line mentality where their interest or success is deemed superior to that of those they lead, followers must decide whether to walk away from the organization or accept this type of decision-making authority and comply with the leaders' questionable actions (Mesdaghinia et al., 2018). A critical part of leading in Black women's social service organizations is determining what type of leader one desires to be, as the type of leadership directly influences the response of one's followers (Benevene et al., 2020; Parks & Mutisya, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Society tends to define Black women by their race and gender, which creates opportunities for discrimination and disparate treatment that may manifest as racism, sexism, or culturalism in their professional or social environments (Aaron, 2020; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Vial et al., 2016; Washington, 2020). According to Davidson (2018), Black women often feel isolated and judged by traditional Black women stereotypes such as being angry,

promiscuous, or unintelligent. These labels result in feelings of being relegated to a lesser status in the organizational hierarchy and often lead to self silencing (Oshin & Milan, 2019).

Self silencing occurs when one consciously decides not to share opinions, thoughts, or concerns about significant conflicts to preserve relationships or avoid discord (Abrams et al., 2019; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). When work spaces are a source of internal conflict for Black women, self silencing may occur, creating opportunities for harm to one's physical and mental well-being (Abrams et al., 2019). In many instances, Black women seek refuge from their work environments among their sisters in Black social service organizations to interact with other Black women without the fear of judgment, reprisals, or other adverse responses (L. Carter & Rossi, 2019; Davis, 2018; Jolly et al., 2022). In 2020, 13 modern-day Black women's organizations reported a total membership of over 5 million (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, 2020). Although this figure is substantial, recruiting and retaining members remain critical to preserving Black social service organizations (Salinas et al., 2019).

As in transactional corporate settings, organizational politics, the leader's temperament, and the pressures associated with membership in Black women groups and sororities may contribute to self silencing (Xia et al., 2017). However, when transactional leaders silence Black women followers, the organization's structure is fundamentally weakened (George, 2020; Vial et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). In many Black sororities and other service groups, mega threats and knowledge hiding occur among the organization's leadership, proving detrimental to organizational commitment (Lin et al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2019). These disputes may put members and leaders in conflict over what is in the organization's best interest, hindering the group's ability to retain and increase membership. However, greater understanding of the impact of this type of leadership is warranted (Epitropaki et al., 2020).

The problem of practice presented an opportunity to describe the influence of the role and tone of leadership on followers in the unique context of Black women's organizations and sororities. As a result, this research enhances the study of Black women, Black women leadership and followership, and self silencing among Black women.

When the Relationship Between Leaders and Followers Results in Silencing

The Black woman's strong Black voice has been the source of change for decades (Washington, 2020). By speaking in a manner that mitigates the impact of racial stereotypes and oppression, Black women have vocalized their strength (Davis, 2018). However, an unethical leader can silence that voice by acting counter to the followers' moral compass or encouraging followers to support questionable behaviors (Mesdaghinia et al., 2018; Mikkelson et al., 2017). Research indicates that silence is not limited to a failure to communicate verbally but may also entail removing a person from a situation that is causing discomfort (Webster et al., 2016). This practice, known as self silencing, creates a vacuum where the leader's actions may go unchecked, and the followers' failure to act may inhibit their ability to fully function in the organization, among other effects (Abrams et al., 2019).

Black women often silence their emotions when confronted with actions they perceive as offensive, unfair, or unwarranted (Davis & Jones, 2021). According to Bruck-Segal et al. (2020),

> Oppression, discrimination, a history of abuse, and gender role expectations emphasizing the salience of caretaking and the prioritization of others' needs may all affect adherence by heightening *silencing the self* (Jack & Dill, 1992), an interpersonal coping strategy in which women suppress their own feelings and thoughts to avoid relational loss, rejection, judgment, and abuse. (p. 717)

Women of color often use silencing the self to avoid interpersonal conflict and conceal their opinions and beliefs (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). The inherent strength of Black women may become subdued when they are in situations where their status is uncertain and the parameters of their interactions with others are unclear (Davis & Jones, 2021). Hence, they may employ self silencing as a protective shield to guard themselves, express their status in an organizational hierarchy, or preserve a relationship (J. Jiang et al., 2018). Moreover, members of Black women's organizations and sororities may employ self silencing to demonstrate submission to organizational leaders, policies, and practices (Goldner et al., 2021).

In the context of Black women's organizations and sororities, self silencing may be a by-product of centuries of racism, sexism, misogyny, and other practices that have relegated Black women to the lowest status in society (Davis & Jones, 2021). Research has linked self silencing, a social and societal practice, to the patriarchal system that has suppressed Black women's progress in professional and social environments (Goldner et al., 2021; Maji & Dixit, 2019). Although members of Black women's organizations and sororities operate in a peer-driven environment many perceive as safe, the hierarchal nature of these organizations creates an environment where Black women must choose whether to exercise their voice but risk membership and retaliation or employ silencing to preserve their organizational affiliation and status (Sherf et al., 2021). In essence, the use of voice within Black women's organizations and sororities is as much a cultural decision as a patriarchal response in that these organizations "tell women who they are or who they should be" (Jack & Ali, 2010, p. 3). Moreover, Jack and Ali (2010) indicated that like male–female relationships, leader–follower relationships in Black women's organizations and sororities articulate principles, morals, and standards that prescribe membership behavior.

Ultimately, understanding the role of leadership in silence requires application of the four tenets embodied in the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS). A practical understanding of the role of voice and silencing in Black women's organizations and sororities requires qualitative analysis of whether members prioritize care of others over themselves, judge themselves by external standards, repress their needs and desires to avoid conflict with others, and outwardly exhibit compliance with accepted standards while purposefully suppressing their discontent with those cultural ideals (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). As researchers have not explored the parameters of leader–follower relationships in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities, this study is needed to determine how use of voice and communicative practices influence the interpersonal dynamics, membership retention, and growth of these organizations (Goldner et al., 2021).

The Influence of Leadership Style on Member Commitment

Leadership style is inextricably intertwined with member engagement and commitment (Qadir & Yeşiltaş, 2020). However, leadership style and follower commitment do not always align, especially when the leader's methods do not satisfy their followers' needs (Ahmad & Loch, 2020). In instances where followers lose confidence in the leader, they may choose to speak out, resisting behaviors that make them question their commitment to the organization (Davis, 2018). The fallout from these violations of trust may be extensive, potentially minimizing the ability to mend the leader–follower relationship (Webster et al., 2016). Regardless, member commitment is crucial to the sustainability of Black women's organizations and sororities (Salinas et al., 2019). Salinas further stated members' decision not to support these groups can devastate their growth and development.

As for most volunteer organizations, the ability to preserve volunteer commitment is of critical importance to Black women's organizations and sororities (Salinas et al., 2019). According to Benevene et al. (2020), positive leadership and volunteer retention have a positive correlation. However, the paucity of studies on the influence of leaders' actions and style on followers' continued engagement in historical Black women's social service organizations and sororities renders this topic ripe for further exploration (Benevene et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2016). Additional research could provide insight into how leaders' actions influence followers' voice behavior, a topic that has received limited attention from researchers (Wang et al., 2018). By learning how leaders' behavior influences followers, how their actions can silence dissenters, and the adverse effects of the leader's behavior on membership growth and retention, Black women social service organizations can better understand the power that effective, trustworthy leadership has on followers and focus on these historical organizations' sustainability (Park et al., 2018; Salinas et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's social service organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement—specifically, how members of these groups respond to different leadership styles. Through qualitative methodology with a narrative design, I gained insight into the experiences, perspectives, and responses to the actions of leaders of Black women's social service organizations and sororities through interviews with leaders and members with a minimum of 5 years of active membership.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this narrative study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the leadership styles of the leaders?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence members' decisions to speak openly or moderate/restrict their voices in interactions with leaders of the organization?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' responses to leaders who exhibit questionable leadership styles?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' willingness to adhere to practices and protocols and how this decision affects morale and commitment to the organization when they choose self silencing in response to the leader's leadership style?

Definition of Key Terms

Black Club women. A historically significant term, "Black Club women" references Black women's efforts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to form community-based groups and clubs to champion and promote programs designed to uplift members of African American communities, creating a space for Black women in American society and culture (E. Richardson, 2020).

Black women's organizations and sororities. The modern version of Black Club women's organizations, these nonprofit groups are founded on the principles and goals of service, promotion, and the survival and advancement of African American people and communities (Dagbovie, 2003).

Interpersonal dynamics. Interpersonal dynamics are the interpersonal interactions and relationships between leaders and followers of a group as they pursue the organization's objectives and their roles as members of the group (Carnevale et al., 2021).

Moderation of voice. From speaking out to self silencing, moderation of voice involves a range of voice behaviors, including curtailing one's natural instincts and desire for self-expression in interactions and environments where free speech may be shunned or unwelcome (Stanojevic et al., 2020).

Organizational politics. The inappropriate, troublesome or self-serving actions members and leaders of an organization take to enhance their status or achieve a personal benefit are usually exercised without regard for the well-being of the organization or other interested parties (Munyon et al., 2021).

Questionable leadership. Determining the appropriateness of another's leadership style requires assessing the leader's willingness to collaborate and use of tactics such as double-talk, flexibility, competitiveness, accountability, and treatment of followers (Ivanov et al., 2021).

Self silencing. Self silencing is the choice an individual makes to remain silent or withhold their views when confronted with actions that may affect their status, standing, creativity, emotional health, or mental well-being (Jack & Ali, 2010).

Social service organizations. These groups of African American women, united by profession, location, familial status, religion, culture, politics, mutual aid societies, or other characteristics, unite to provide service or assistance to members of a defined community or effect meaningful change in a specific area of interest (McNealy, 2010).

Sorority/sororities. From the Latin word *soror*, sororities in the context of the African American community are sisterhoods of African American women who share a common

ideology and desire to participate in social action and community-based programs for members of their community (Parker, 1990).

Strong Black woman. The outward expression of strength manifested by Black women as their mental armor allows them to combat racism, sexism, misogyny, and other discriminatory and degrading actions and stereotypes used to diminish their social status and significance in society (Davis & Jones, 2021).

Summary

Black women's organizations and sororities have historically been, and continue to be, an invaluable resource in African American communities, providing leadership, service, and assistance benefitting women, children, and other people of color. The relationships between leaders and followers and the interpersonal dynamics among the members can determine the growth and development of these organizations. Depending on the leader's leadership style, members may feel activated or silenced when expressing their thoughts and opinions about the organization's functioning. The following chapter presents the current literature on this subject, providing a historical and social context for the existence and significance of Black women's organizations and sororities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement. Specifically, I examined how members of these groups respond to different leadership styles. In this qualitative study using a narrative design, leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities with a minimum of 5 years of active membership provided insight into their experiences, perspectives, and responses to the actions of their leaders. Although some studies have touched on Black women's organizations and sororities and their history, researchers have not thoroughly investigated the leadership styles of these organizations and the interactions between their leaders and followers (Cohen et al., 2017). Born out of the Black Club women's movement, these groups are the product of the racism and sexism that have permeated the lives of Black women in America. These groups have served as the foundation for sisterhoods that bind Black women together through the many obstacles they encounter in their daily lives (Butler-Sweet, 2017). At the foundation of Black women's organizations and sororities are collective desires for education, philanthropy, purpose, and strengthening oneself and one's community (Rosser-Mims, 2018). Becoming a member of these groups allows Black women to support collective goals and achieve shared purposes while developing lifelong friendships and associations (Brooks, 2018).

Like all structured groups, Black women's organizations and sororities have leadership structures that dictate their operations (Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Although most research indicates that leaders prescribe the terms of the relationship, some scholars suggest that the interactions between leaders and followers are mutually impactful, creating a shared reality (Salas-Vallina, 2020). Moreover, in the volunteer realm, relationships are value centered:

Volunteers are not paid employees, so the ability of Black women's organizations and sororities to sustain membership and growth relies not only on the capacity to attract new members but also leaders' ability to retain and nurture their relationships with their follower base (Benevene et al., 2020). Hence, interpersonal power is a prominent feature of leader–follower relationships in Black women's organizations and sororities, and this ability to control followers is the by-product of appeal, knowledge, rewards, and punishments (Joullié et al., 2021).

For Black women's organizations and sororities to stabilize their membership base and continue their growth into the foreseeable future, leaders and members must understand the power dynamic that influences the relationship between Black leaders and followers. To provide insight into this relationship, I described the history of the Black Club women's movement and its evolution into modern Black women's groups, organizations, and sororities; the power dynamic between Black leaders and followers in Black women's service organizations and sororities; and the leadership styles leaders most prominently display. It was essential to acknowledge and interpret the significance of members' responses to the leader's methods, explicitly noting when the member chooses to acquiesce, self-silence, or employ aggressive tactics, as well as the role organizational politics play in defining the leader's style of leadership and how it influences followers' commitment to the group.

This literature review begins with a discussion of the silencing of the self theoretical framework. I then explore the historical emergence of Black Club women and the evolution of this group into contemporary Black women's organizations and sororities. Later, I delve into the interrelationship between leaders and followers, voice and power, and how the strong Black woman's voice influences and is influenced in the Black women's organizational setting. Specifically, I provide insight into the leader's style of leadership, the followers' perceptions of

that leadership, and how perceptions of the leader's trustworthiness affects followers' responses. Finally, I explore self silencing and how one's decision to employ self silencing techniques influences their commitment to the organization, the ability of the group to retain members, and the ability of the group to sustain its growth for generations to come.

Literature Search Methods

The primary literature search databases I used in preparing this literature review were as follows: Margarett and Herman Brown Library at Abilene Christian University, GoogleScholar.com, Researchgate.net, ScienceDirect.com, and Academia.edu. The following list is a sampling of the terms, phrases, and keywords I used throughout the research process: *Black women, Black Club women, Black sororities, Black Greek letter sororities, Black women and sisterhood, sisterhood among Black women, Black Club women and sisterhood, strong Black women, strong Black women voices, Black women and voice, relationships between Black women, interpersonal communication, Black women and interpersonal leadership, Black women and leadership, leader and follower relationships, Black leaders and Black followers, impact of Black woman leadership on Black female followers, Black women and self silencing, self silencing, silencing the self theory, Kamala Harris and Stacy Abrams and Black women leaders, Black women and authoritarian leadership, Black and social club, Black women and social support networks, Black nonprofit leadership, Black volunteer leadership, transformational leadership,* and *transactional leadership*. The following section provides a history of the silencing the self theoretical framework and insight into how the theory has transcended the early theoretical boundaries that framed its applicability, extending to various situations and dynamics where the actions and inactions of others may silence one's voice.

Silencing the Self Theoretical Framework

Stokes and Brody (2019) defined self silencing as the inclination to limit one's expressiveness or individualism to preserve relationships and avoid conflict. Initially, researchers conceived silencing the self as a theory that allowed exploration and understanding of the experiences of clinically depressed women and how these women routinely sacrifice their well-being by putting the needs and expectations of others ahead of their own (Kaya & Çok, 2021). Specifically, women envision themselves as being associated with humanity, a belief that is critical to their sense of self (Maji & Dixit, 2020).

Silencing the self theory is the product of researcher Dana Crowley Jack's desire to know why "women consider the failure of relationships a moral failure" (Jack, 2011, p. 523). She explained this desire to understand why society's standards for women vary from those for men stemmed from a deep depression her mother suffered after a divorce. Dedicating her life to exploring this issue, she studied how disparate treatment between men and women and lack of power in relationships translate into a deep depression that dominates women's lives, voices, and sense of self to the point that they choose silence when confronted with conflict (Jack & Ali, 2010). In Jack's (1991) seminal work, she asserted that women are social beings who place immense importance on their relationships and demonstrate a willingness to forgo independence in favor of interactions with others. Hence, self silencing occurs in interpersonal relationships where one's sense of mental well-being and self-expression are so stifled that one opts to suppress their voice in favor of relationship preservation (Hameiri, 2019). Jack (2011) opined that women believe personal relationships are critical, and the breakdown of those relationships equates to a moral failure.

Jack developed silencing the self theory to explain romantic relationships and how women suppress their thoughts and opinions in relationships with their partners (Shulman et al., 2018). According to Patrick et al. (2019), people—specifically women—tend to conceal their authentic selves to others to avoid judgment, risk self-exposure, and shield their weaknesses. Thus, interpersonal practices such as self-obfuscating, self-falsification, or self-muting become routine responses. However, Patrick et al. also admonished that the choice to mitigate one's self-expression and conceal one's true identity to establish relationships with others undermines the authenticity of the connection and may create an environment where voice is compromised or even lost. For many women who choose silence over self-expression and opt for connectivity over self-preservation, the consequences may prove detrimental to their psyche and social development (Maji & Dixit, 2020). The loss of voice is analogous to the loss of self (Jack, 1991).

Moreover, Jack (1991) stated that without voice and the ability to express one's feelings, there are limited opportunities to revive the authentic self, an integral part of one's well-being. However, Maji and Dixit (2020) asserted the choice of self silencing and the associated consequences are not limited to romantic relationships. More recently, researchers have extended silencing the self theory to other interpersonal relationships.

Expansion of Silencing the Self Theory

Although Jack developed silencing the self theory to explore women's practices in intimate relationships, recent studies have closely associated the theory with cultural norms associated with gender roles ascribed to women (Maji & Dixit, 2019). Arroyo et al. (2020) noted that at the foundation of silencing the self theory is gender inequality. As such, this theory provides an opportunity to evaluate and interpret the mindset of women in the context of their interpersonal interactions. Hence, the socialization of gender roles in various environments and

the accompanying oppression of female workers have produced conditions where women frequently employ self silencing practices (Szymanski et al., 2016). For example, researchers have used silencing the self as a theoretical framework in research related to women living with HIV (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020), in workplace relationships (Maji & Dixit, 2020), in the context of eating and other psychological disorders commonly related to women (Maji & Dixit, 2019), in teacher–student relationships (Patrick et al., 2019), and when exploring strong Black women in majority White work spaces (Abrams et al., 2019).

Researchers have also given attention to the role of silencing in diverse cultures (Abrams et al., 2019; Kaya & Coķ, 2021). Jack (2011) noted that silencing the self theory applies to diverse cultures and contexts because the theory's foundation is the belief that constructive relationships are critical for one's well-being. Jack stated that in relationships where gender inequality or other issues of inequality are present, the beliefs and actions of both the dominant and submissive parties are adversely affected. For instance, many Black women are raised in a culture that requires inner and outer strength, with expectations of resilience, autonomy, and tenacity (Abrams et al., 2019). However, according to Abrams et al. (2019), when confronted with obstacles that may negatively reflect on their image as strong Black women or diminish their image in their home, workplace, or Black women's organizations and sororities, these women may choose silence instead of outward expression. Such choices may allow them to maintain face but may also diminish their feelings of value and worth. According to Kaya and Coķ (2021), for Black women, especially in a group context, the decision to remain silent and suppress their true feelings demonstrates a conscious decision to align themselves with the norms of the family, workplace, or organization. Because of this choice, women may place the needs of

others first while relegating their personal desires to a lesser status. For these women, remaining silent is as much a cultural decision as a personal one (Jack & Ali, 2010).

The Four Dimensions of Silencing the Self Theory

For many women, self silencing is a coping strategy that allows them to moderate their responses to harmful personal and societal provocations such as judgment, exploitation, or rejection (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). Many women suppress their voices or curtail their self-expression to avoid conflict or preserve relationships (Stokes & Brody, 2019). They may believe that concealing their true selves to maintain the relationship is less harmful than speaking their truth (Patrick et al., 2019). However, Patrick maintained the act of masking could result in emotional distress or diminish one's sense of self-worth. In a seminal work, Jack and Dill (1992) identified the STSS, consisting of four dimensions: (a) externalized self-perception, or how a person uses societal or cultural standards to judge themselves; (b) care as self-sacrifice, or how one reinforces relationships by putting the needs and interests of others before themselves; (c) self silencing, which is the propensity to minimize self-expression and actions to evade conflict and preserve relationships or status; and (d) the divided self, which is the internal conflict one may feel between a false persona of silence or acquiescence and their true feelings and desires. Jack and Ali (2010) further expounded on the theory by viewing self silencing in the context of gender and culture and how silencing affects the physical and emotional health of those who choose silence over voice.

Research has shown that the leader's style impacts followers' response (George, 2020). However, when these interactions are viewed in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities, historical and societal factors typically associated with the interactions between Black women and White men—specifically racism, sexism, and misogyny—may also influence leader–

follower relationships in unanticipated ways, yielding unexpected responses (Park et al., 2018). Depending on the type of leadership exhibited, Black women followers may question their value and place in society and the organization (Yasir et al., 2016).

Self Silencing and Silencing the Self Theory

Slavery, racial discrimination and insubordination, sexism, misogyny, and other practices have long been part of the Black experience in the United States, fostering a unique communicative practice among Black Americans, especially Black women (Washington, 2020). According to Washington (2020), the resiliency and strength necessary to survive daily hardships and forge ahead in the face of adversity led to development of a normative linguistic style that protects communications among the Black community, especially women, from outsiders. As Black women transitioned from the fields and plantations to members of elite Black women's organizations and sororities, they gained the contemporary visage of progressive community leaders advocating for economic, social, and political opportunities for their communities. During this process, they adopted indirect speech consisting of discursive language. Such language included features such as talking back and reclamation of slurs with the intent to deliver a message of resistance to the suppression and domination that have plagued Black women and their voices for centuries (Singh, 2021). Davis and Jones (2021) stated this language, along with other practices, became the exemplars of Black women's strength. This voice has enabled Black women to navigate marginalization in various spaces. Moreover, through this type of speech, Black women have erected barriers between the oppressive past and the promise of equality in the future (Davis & Jones, 2021).

For Black women, the power to effectively use voice and navigate microaggressions is akin to generational wealth: They hand down requisite skills from generation to generation like a

coat of armor or shield of protection from a society that frequently discounts their value and worth (Davis & Jones, 2021). To find a place of safety to remove the armor, however, Black women have sought out organizations and sororities that allow them to gather and become one as they effect change in their communities and promote education and access to political and social justice (Brooks, 2018). Brooks (2018) stated that the members of these groups became known as Black Club women. Membership in these organizations, then and now, provides an opportunity for Black women to forge friendships that respond to racial and other microaggressions in a safe and secure space where empathizers can hear their voices (Davis, 2019; Kriz et al., 2021). Davis (2019) maintained that these safe spaces provide a venue that reinforces Black women's self-identity and establishes a sense of well-being and safety from settings where outsiders constantly attempt to weaken these women's self-perceptions. However, in these structured organizations, Black women may also encounter organizational structures and leaders that participate in tactics that inhibit their strong Black voices by engaging in quasi-authoritarian or transactional leadership (Parks & Mutisya, 2019).

Parks and Mutisya (2019) argued these leaders strengthen their influence over the organization through authoritarian transactional leadership, which prompts conformity by silencing those who disagree with the leader's style or tactics. Inarguably, leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities may be diametrically opposed on some subjects, and conflict may result (Morrison, 1990). However, even in groups where the strong Black woman's voice has traditionally been valued, her voice may be silenced if she feels she no longer has the right to speak or she refuses to speak out of fear of retaliation (J. Jiang et al., 2018; Y. Jiang & Yao, 2020). When members feel that they can no longer be their authentic selves, their dissatisfaction with the organization and its leadership may manifest in grievances, resignations,

the inability to recruit new members, and other adverse actions that may harm the organization (Y. Jiang & Yao, 2020; Parks & Mutisya, 2019).

For centuries, public discourse has discounted and minimized the voices of Black women (de Vera, 2018). The marginalization of their voices allows society to discount their value while depriving them of the assistance and respect extended to other social groups (George, 2020). To counter these microaggressions, Black women have found the strength to speak up and speak out through their strong Black voices (Davis, 2018). Davis (2018) declared that communication is an integral weapon Black women use to navigate a patriarchal society and defend against those who use their power to thwart the growth and development of members of their communities. However, in the context of work spaces and social service organizations, the power to use one's voice is closely associated with confidence and a sense of safety in the organization's environment (J. Jiang et al., 2018). J. Jiang et al. (2018) further stated one's ability to activate or moderate their voice relies on their sense of self, how they perceive their role in the leader–follower relationship, and the motivational cues they receive from their organization's leaders. If they are or believe themselves to be in the minority in terms of the leader–follower relationship, they may moderate or silence their voice to avoid relational conflict (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020).

Bruck-Segal et al. (2020) employed the STSS components as a theoretical framework to understand women's perceptions of their roles in promulgating the silencing behavior. Bruck-Segal et al. summarized the critical factors of STSS as follows:

1. Care as self-sacrifice, or placing a high priority on care for others over self-care.
2. Externalized self-perception, or judging oneself according to external standards.
3. Self silencing, or the failure to articulate one's needs when confronted with others' needs and values.

4. Divided self, or outwardly presenting oneself as compliant to align with cultural expectations contradictory to one's inner view or experiences.

For women, interactions and relationships with other women are a pivotal part of their being (Maji & Dixit, 2019). Maji and Dixit (2020) maintained, "Women's definition of self comes from their relationship-networks, and when women are in separation from others, their gender identification gets threatened" (pp. 1505–6). This separation from or conflict with other women gives rise to the divided self, which is used to hide one's true feelings to comply with accepted norms and behaviors (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). Bruck-Segal et al. (2020) further stated that for Black women, this mask of concealment, which is a by-product of the SBW schema, may be detrimental to their physical and mental health even as it fosters a display of strength, resilience, and commitment to others. For Black women in Black social service organizations, self silencing often impacts their interactions at work and in their safe spaces (Abrams et al., 2019; Davidson, 2018).

Application of Silencing the Self Theory to Black Club Women

Jack and Ali (2010) noted that when women feel their voices matter and they exude confidence and a sense of empowerment that is also reflected in other women within their social group, they are less likely to succumb to depression and other stigmas that may harm their mental well-being. However, Black women in the United States, who battle sexism, racism, and misogyny, face stressors that women in some cultures can avoid because of how they are perceived in their communities (Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). For Black women, who often carry the moniker of the SBW, there are additional pressures of being strong, determined, and resilient for their families, communities, and themselves (Abrams et al., 2019). Moreover, for middle-class, upwardly mobile Black women—those who are members of Black Club organizations and

sororities—there is a false perception that their achievement of elevated status compared to other women in the African American community makes them immune to societal pressures such as depression and self silencing (Walton et al, 2021). However, despite all their accomplishments, societal, familial, and other demands still relegate them to a lesser position in their environments, forcing them to succumb to the patriarchal hierarchies that drive their professional careers and the matriarchies that govern their social affiliations and organizational aspirations (Emran et al., 2020).

Although conceived as a theory that governs interpersonal relationships between men and women, silencing the self theory also applies to how leaders use power to control or dominate their followers to the point that the followers are no longer willing to express their thoughts or beliefs (Emran et al., 2020; Joullié et al., 2021). Jack and Ali (2010) contended that when one party exercises an "over-eye" posture to control another, dictating what is morally or socially correct and employing exclusionary practices such as social rejection for violating the defined precepts, then the weaker party (the follower) may choose conformity through actions such as conflict avoidance and self silencing. Joullié et al. (2021) implied that the primary power source resides in the leadership of Black women's organizations and sorority members. Joullié et al. further asserted that these interpersonal power imbalances create a hierarchy, and obedience is expected.

Black Club Women of the Past and Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Today

As a formerly enslaved person who became an educator and activist, prominent Black author Anna Julia Cooper stated, "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special

patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (Cooper, 1892, p. 26). These words echo the sentiments of a Black Club women's movement that would transcend time and leave an indelible mark on the African American community and the soul of the United States as a representation of the only cultural group deprived of opportunity for both their race and gender (DuRocher, 2020). However, DuRocher (2020) proclaimed, despite race and gender defining their existence, Black women have made significant strides to achieve respectability.

Historical Emergence of Black Club Women

Through the actions of women like Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Helen Appo Cook, Black women confronted the racism, sexism, and other adversities that plagued their existence since their arrival on North American soil (Brooks, 2018; DuRocher, 2020; Harper, 2019; Rosser-Mims, 2018). Racial stereotypes of Black women such as "Mammie, angry black women, strong black woman, tragic mulatto, Jezebel, and Sapphire" have diminished their self-worth and value to society (Snider, 2018, p. 13). Black women formed their social organizations and sororities to counter these representations, engaging in scholarly achievements, community advocacy, arts, and activities that focus on their physical, emotional, and mental well-being (Brooks, 2018; Streeter, 2020). Through these social clubs, which provided members with an opportunity for self-determination and social development, Black women created and supported programs for the residents of the communities in which they lived (Madison, 2021). More importantly, these organizations served as an outlet for the Black woman's strong Black voice, creating a space for public and private discourse and activating Black female intellectual thought for decades (M. Carter, 2019; Eibl et al., 2020).

Contemporary Black Club Woman

Like their predecessors, contemporary Black women's organizations and sororities are also subjected to attacks, albeit more subtle but nevertheless rooted in the same derogatory stereotypes associated with racism, sexism, and misogyny once delegated to their ancestors to diminish their value and sense of self-worth (Davis & Jones, 2021; Snider, 2018). In addition to the traditional stereotypes of Black women as members of the middle class, members of contemporary Black women's organizations and sororities are likely to experience discriminatory practices in the workplace, such as assumptions that their race and gender render them double-minority affirmative action hires (Butler-Sweet, 2017). Depictions of Black women as less worthy of their achievements and the undermining of their accomplishments in the workplace increase Black women's awareness of their marginality, prompting resistance strategies that aid them in navigating their professional environments (Davis, 2018; Davis & Afifi, 2019). For Black women, companionship from their sisters serves as a haven where they can seek shelter from discriminatory behaviors, receive psychological support, enhance their group identity, and interact with like-minded individuals who share political, social, and professional interests (Davis, 2019; McLane-Davison et al., 2018). Hence, for Black women, these organizations serve as a place of safety from stereotypes, an opportunity to build camaraderie while serving their community, and, in most instances, a space where their strong Black voices can flourish and be heard. Nevertheless, sometimes those voices are silenced (Davis & Afifi, 2019).

Understanding Voice and the Strong Black Woman's Voice

According to Xia et al. (2020), "Voice is defined as speaking up in ways that challenge the status quo towards someone with the perceived power to act" (p. 200). The use of voice

directly affects organizational effectiveness, influences managerial efficiency, and may shape volunteer retention (Xia et al., 2017). Huang et al. (2018) identified three types of voice that could shape an organization's development. The impact the chosen voice has on the organization directly correlates to how the organization's leaders receive it. Huang et al. defined challenging voice as the constructive presentation of ideas or concerns and promotive voice as new ideas and improvements to aid organizational functioning. Prohibitive voice, which identifies problems or issues, is more likely to result in a negative response. Reception of each voice depends not only on what is said but also on the person speaking and the frequency with which the person employs their voice (Huang et al., 2018). The authors noted that silencing may occur when one's voice is not received favorably or used frequently. As few voice researchers have explored the relationship between gender and ethnicity, the impact of the Black woman's voice in Black women's organizations and sororities represents a new dimension for exploration of voice (Eibl et al., 2020; Washington, 2020).

Black women's language stems from a long history of sexism, racism, misogyny, patriarchy, and subordination that renders their voices a weapon used to counter societal aggressions and vast racial stereotypes (Washington, 2020). Often inaccurate and created by non-Black people, these narratives have become the nomenclature ascribed to Black women in their professional and personal lives (Commodore et al., 2020). Their use has created a divide that separates Black women from the rest of society, labels them as the other, marginalizes their accomplishments, exposes them to an array of mental and physical stressors, and promulgates a need for belonging not readily available in most environments (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Moreover, as victims of regular acts of racism and sexism, Black women are still encumbered with dehumanizing narratives and professional oppression (Rodgers, 2017). To counter these harmful

classifications and reclaim their internal strength and identities, some Black women adopt protective barriers such as dual languages, a form of communication that employs indirect speech in the respectability realm and direct speech that hinges on unquestionable language that is absolute in its meaning (Morgan, 2021).

More importantly, Black women use the strength of their voices to form social service organizations, sororities, and other groups that encourage their social identities, pursuits, and success while providing shelter from business and social institutions that could harm their identity (Lemberger-Truelove, 2018). Hence, Black Club women seek shelter in groups and organizations that counteract the loneliness and isolation prevalent in mainstream America (Hernandez Rivera, 2020). For it is among their Black sisters, who share similar experiences, needs, and interests in the community as well as the commitment to uplift oneself and others, that members of Black women's organizations and sororities are continuously empowered to fight for justice and equality (Hernandez Rivera, 2020; Lemberger-Truelove, 2018).

Understanding the Purpose and Power of Voice

Rooted in self-expression, voice is "speaking up in ways that challenge the status quo towards someone with the perceived power to act" (Xia et al., 2020, p. 200). Opposition to the status quo may be presented in a challenging voice, defined as the conscious verbal expression of one's thoughts, opinions, and point of view to promote change in the current situation, processes, or procedures (Huang et al., 2018). For Black women, who have been subjected to inequality and disparate treatment for generations, voice is a highly valued commodity that serves as a tool to express dissatisfaction or rejection of the status quo, and it can mitigate their standing and power in their lives, communities, and organizations (Davis, 2018). As indicated by Maya (2019), the struggle of Black women in America, who are marginalized and silenced, finds its best analogy

in the Greek myth of Arachne, an exceptional weaver who rebuffs the request to allow the Goddess Athena to take credit for her work. According to Maya, this action is akin to the Black woman's rejection of patriarchy and, in this refusal, her subordination to voiceless, marginalized status. More importantly, this subordination deprives the Black woman of the power she would typically derive from her voice. Contemporary Black women have developed techniques such as signifying and verbal jousting to claim a position of power and authority in personal, professional, and social environments (Washington, 2020). However, this power, derived from communicative resistance, can still be challenged and marginalized in some settings (Davis, 2018).

Innate Strength in the Black Woman's Voice

Generations of Black women have nurtured and strengthened their voices in response to systematic racism, sexism, misogyny, and other discriminatory practices designed to mitigate the significance of Black women in social, corporate, and educational environments (Washington, 2020). In many of these settings, Black women are considered mules, meaning they are responsible for emotionally, mentally, and sometimes financially supporting the needs of others without any consideration for how they will be personally affected (George, 2020). However, despite the muling, microaggressions, and other adverse effects associated with the devaluing of Black women, these women have continued to use their strong voices to address and counter issues that affect them personally and professionally, as well as their families, communities, and the situations and places that are a source of significance and safety in their lives (Davis, 2018).

Black Women as Leaders and Followers: Interpersonal Dynamics in Black Organizations and Sororities

According to Sales et al. (2019), researchers have failed to explore how Black women perceive many aspects of leadership, including their views on the growth of Black women as leaders, their attitudes about the racial and sexist barriers that curtail opportunities for their personal and professional growth, and their insights on the use of power as a tool of leadership. Sales et al. (2019) reiterated the proposition that Black women, burdened by race and gender, are not the targets of mentoring opportunities and leadership training. Hence, for Black women to excel as leaders, they must have the strength to engage in self-teaching methods that promote self-empowerment and community engagement while demonstrating an ability to understand the needs of others and effectively lead (Davis & Afifi, 2019; Sales et al., 2019). More importantly, Black women leaders must overcome perceptions of illegitimacy and validate their status as decision makers and authority figures in their organizations. Hence, they must display strength that demonstrates competence and responsibility (Davis & Afifi, 2019). However, their followers may scrutinize and positively or negatively interpret their manner of leadership and how they use their strength to accomplish their goals (Vial et al., 2016).

Leading Black Women

Resiliency is a critical factor in the success or failure of Black women leaders (Chance, 2021). Rosser-Mims (2018) referenced a statement by Cooper that the position of the Black woman in the United States is neither identifiable nor understandable as she is both a woman and Black, neither of which society knows or acknowledges. Hence, the identity of Black women is inarguably a product of both gender and race (Aaron, 2020). Rosser-Mims (2018) also reiterated that the onus is on the Black woman to elevate other Black women, promote education, and

encourage community, enabling future generations to achieve self-empowerment. In response, Black women unified and supported the Black Club women's movement to address racial and cultural oppression and advance racial, social, and educational opportunities for African American communities (McLane-Davison, 2015).

Although some literature explores the roles of White men and women in the development of leadership education, research on the experiences and expertise of Black women in the leadership field is limited (Breslin et al., 2017; McClellan, 2012; Oikelome, 2017). Contrary to the norm, McClellan's (2012) autoethnography focuses on experiences from the perspective of a Black woman and the interpersonal relationships with other people of African descent. The author noted Black women had adopted activism and leadership as tools necessary to survive countless acts of oppression, discrimination, racism, and sexism. The SBW paradigm has provided the skills necessary to cope with the burdens and responsibilities Black women endure daily (Green, 2019). Green (2019) noted that adopting mothering skills, a belief in self-sufficiency, and emotional modulation allows Black women to survive the microaggressions they routinely encounter. More importantly, these coping skills continue to give rise to the strong Black woman's voice, exemplifying the strength and independence that have served as a foundation for the growth and progress of Black women for generations (A. Richardson, 2019). Through this voice, Black women have elevated themselves to leadership roles in their homes, communities, social organizations, corporations, and government (Barnes, 2016; A. Richardson, 2019).

Like most organizations, Black women's organizations and sororities are miniature versions of the greater society (Showunmi, 2021). Showunmi (2021) asserted that in majority groups and corporations structured similarly to historically Black associations, organizational

dynamics, both the good and the bad, are readily apparent. Like any other group, Black women's organizations and sororities may have hierarchies that associate one's ability to attain status with their social identity. In addition, these groups are subjected to rules, policies, procedures, and protocols that dictate the proper functioning of the organization (Davidson, 2018). These mandates, created by the organization's members, outline the values and culture of the organization, thereby defining the acceptable behaviors and activities expected of members of the group (Pasha & Ur Rehman, 2020; Ye, 2012). As these rules prescribe organizational culture, they also order how the organization's leaders assess and administer social identity (Matta & Van Dyne, 2020). Thus, social identity is not an isolated factor but a critical component in the organizational structure, contributing to leadership practices that may undermine the fundamental tenets upon which the organization was founded (Lee & Tapia, 2021). Researchers should consider the role of social identity in selecting a leader and shaping leadership style as both factors impact an organization's members, potentially marginalizing their voices (Blair & Bligh, 2018; Lee & Tapia, 2021).

Following Black Women

Research has demonstrated that Black women's views about leadership play a significant role in selecting leaders (Steffens et al., 2018). However, Steffens et al. (2018) also stated that the views of an organization's members are shaped by their opinions about followership, which stem from knowledge gained through observation and affiliation with other groups. Studies on followership are limited, as most research in this area has focused on leaders (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019; Ford & Harding, 2018). People labeled as followers are typically perceived as passive, nonaggressive individuals or groups who lack the motivation to fully engage in a group or organization without the prompting of a leader (Ford & Harding, 2018). However, this

representation is not universal, and recent research asserts followers actively develop leaders and are enthusiastic participants in the organizational dynamics of the groups and organizations in which they hold membership (Salas-Vallina, 2020: Zhang et al., 2020). The study of followership is new, and little attention has been given to the importance of followers in the leader–follower relationship and how followers affect the style of leadership (Salas-Vallina, 2020). Thus, research on the relationships between women and other groups guides what is known about followership in the organizational context (Davidson, 2018).

The existence and success of Black women's organizations and sororities depend on a committed base of followers (Gobble, 2017). For these and other organizations, members' desire to adhere to leaders' goals and objectives is of paramount importance; however, members must feel their commitment is the product of free will and not forced or demanded by those in power (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). Followers may also desire leaders to seek and achieve collaboration and support the organization's collective goals without regard for personal wants and desires (Ahmad & Loch, 2020). As contributors to the social identity of an organization that dictates the qualifications and parameters of the leader and leadership, followers also possess power that should be respected by the leaders of the organization (Blair & Bligh, 2018). The leader–follower relationship must be built upon trust and mutual respect, with each group recognizing the significance of the other and the ramifications that may result when followers' contributions are disregarded (Lam et al., 2018; Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Wilkins, 2018).

The Role of Trust in the Leader–Follower Relationship: How and Why Leadership Style Matters

Everyone who becomes a leader was once a follower, and understanding their positionality and the tools necessary to keep followers engaged is critical to a leader's success

(Gobble, 2017). Therefore, in volunteer organizations such as Black women's organizations and sororities, the ability of leaders and members to work together effectively indicates the organization's sustainability (Hameiri, 2019). Hence, the leader's ability to lead is directly connected to the followers' willingness to allow them to lead (Ford & Harding, 2018). According to Ford and Harding (2018), "Rather than being confined to the role of a passive participant under the control of a leader, followers are able to actively construct and shape the leader's perceptions and their self-perceptions through interactions with the leader and each other" (p. 6). Trust is among the many factors that followers use in determining a leader's worthiness; however, trust is mutual in that followers value the ability to affect the leader's decisions. By having an impact on the leader's decisions, they also play a role in organizational decisions (Norman et al., 2019; Shahzadi et al., 2017). As trust is a critical factor in balancing interpersonal and interorganizational relationships in Black women's groups and other organizations, it directly affects the effectiveness and productivity of groups as they seek to manage the nonprofit space (Politis & Politis, 2017). Hence, greater understanding of the role of trust in shaping the leadership styles of those elected to serve as executives in Black women's organizations and sororities will enhance the research on the relationships between leaders and followers in these historical organizations (Politis & Politis, 2017).

Trust Shapes Leader–Follower Relationships

Effective and productive leader–follower relationships in Black women's organizational and sorority settings require trust (Sopko & LaRocco, 2018). In addition, for a leader in these groups to be effective, they must secure their followers' trust (Shahzadi et al., 2017). Caldwell and Ndalamba (2017) suggested that trust is the foundation of successful interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers. According to Sopko and LaRocco (2018), trust is a

mindset where one is secure in the representations and objectives presented, suggesting reliance on the belief that the actions taken will conform to expectations. As an evolutionary component of organizational development, trust is in a constant state of growth or demise depending on the actions the organization's leaders and members take (Norman et al., 2019). More importantly, when trust is subjected to organizational politics, the groups' culture may succumb to negative behaviors such as decreased organizational commitment or turnover, undesirable behaviors, and other actions that may impede the growth and development of the organization (Rawat et al., 2020). Researchers have found that trust is critical in organizational turnover and it is inextricably tied to the type of leadership employed to govern an organization or sorority (Aldarmaki & Kasmin, 2019). How a leader communicates their intentions to their followers directly impacts the followers' perception of their style of leadership (Joullié et al., 2021). Similarly, the relationship that a follower feels with an organization is closely aligned with the type of leadership those in control display, whether transactional or transformational. The style of leadership may affect membership commitment, organizational growth, and development (Delegach et al., 2017; Khattak et al., 2020; Qadir & Yeşilitaş, 2020).

Transformational Leadership

Northouse (2018) described transformational leadership as motivating and encouraging followers to exceed goals and expectations. Other researchers have defined transformational leadership as a tool to enhance followers' commitment and engagement in the goals and objectives of the organization, thereby reinforcing the group's mission and goals for the organization's well-being (Khattak et al., 2020). Through interpersonal relationships, transformational leaders create positive environments where they seek to relate with followers, increasing functionality in assigned and assumed tasks (Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019). The core of

transformational leadership is to encourage followers to look past their interests by demonstrating and presenting opportunities for organizational and member uplift, desired behaviors, and aspirational goals (Tepper et al., 2018).

When followers accept transformational leadership, they typically experience a sense of admiration, which may also be construed as trust in the leader's ideals and visions (Asencio & Sun, 2020; Jung & Avolio, 2000). Thus, to be an effective transformational leader in a Black women's organization or sorority, the leader must not only speak motivational words but also exhibit transformational actions that evidence their vision for the organization, outline the appropriate behaviors of members, and inspire achievement (Joullié et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2018).

Transactional Leadership

Most leadership styles, including transactional leadership, involve a quid pro quo, or exchange, between organizational leaders and followers (Northouse, 2018). Specifically, transactional leadership is premised on the idea that followers must adhere to the leader's directions and expectations in executing tasks and, upon successful completion, they will receive rewards or recognition (Delegach et al., 2017; Hussain et al., 2017). However, failure could result in retribution (Delegach et al., 2017).

Although transactional leadership is considered acceptable, it is best employed as a leadership tool in established organizations (Yasir et al., 2016). Yasir et al. (2016) further stated the current research has not consistently identified transactional leadership as a source of trust in leader–follower relationships; however, in some instances, research has shown that followers regard consistency in transactional leadership as a source of trust. Asencio and Sun (2020) stated that transactional leaders' routine observation, identification of problems, and corrective actions

are a source of calculus-based trust among followers. Additionally, Asencio and Sun asserted that followers' sense of trust stems from the consistency of the leader's actions in rewarding success or reinforcing fears of retaliation for failure. Hence, for members of Black women's groups and sororities, additional research is required to determine whether transactional leadership affects member commitment (Yasir et al., 2016).

When Leadership Style Influences Voice

The power of strong Black women's voices may be observed in various settings, even those burdened with racist, sexist, or misogynistic counter-voices (Washington, 2020). Although researchers have traditionally explored voice in the context of employer-employee relationships, voice behavior and the influence leadership style has on voice in a group environment are also worthy of study (S. Kim et al., 2022; McClean et al., 2018). In the organizational setting, voice refers to unofficial open communications with organizational leaders that may convey interests, suggestions, or concerns about organizational issues and development (Duan et al., 2020). Voice may also be used to participate in the decision-making process of a group or organization (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

As a communication tool, voice aids the organization in identifying organizational deficits and issues while providing insight that can improve productivity and growth (Liu et al, 2017). The expression of voice relies on the culture of the organization and whether followers feel they may freely and safely express their thoughts without repercussions (Duan et al., 2020). Researchers have also noted that voice should be moderated or presented in a manner that does not offend or undermine authority (Lam et al., 2019). As with most communication, the setting is insufficient to evaluate the effect of voice; instead, interpreting voice requires review from the cultural context. For instance, Washington (2020) asserted that Black women use signifying as a

form of communication to employ their intellect and position in society to express more profound meaning in their words. According to Washington (2020), Black women have often been cast as angry Black women, and their use of voice may be subjected to negative interpretation or dismissal in majority and minority settings. When employed in the context of voice behavior, the leader's reception and interpretation of their followers' strong voice may depend on the leadership style in which the receiver is operating (Khan et al., 2021).

Influence of Leadership Style on Membership Growth and Retention

Members of Black women's organizations and sororities are volunteers who seek to protect and improve their lives in their communities (Barnes, 2016). In these organizations, Black women share mutual ambitions for themselves and their organizations, but as a form of self-policing, they also embrace a semiunified cultural aesthetic and definition of womanhood that encourage group members to adhere to organizational culture by strict observation of the group's objectives, goals, rules, policies, and procedures (E. Richardson, 2020). In the context of Black women's organizations and sororities, maintenance of membership, engagement, and volunteerism translates into organizational efficiency and, more importantly, organizational growth and effectiveness (Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Hence, like corporate organizations, Black women's organizations and sororities must meet the needs of members by creating environments that encourage principled actions such as the sharing of information, sensitivity to change and innovation, exhibiting the moral imperatives critical to voice practice, and demonstrating support for the goals and missions of the organization in private and public settings (Ata & Yürür, 2021; Mesdaginia et al., 2022).

Members' ability to perform relies on organizations' ability to identify and retain the resources needed for its survival. For Black women's organizations and sororities, their most

important asset is volunteer members (Boateng et al., 2016). As noted in Thibault (2020), nonprofits and volunteer organizations are finding recruiting and retaining volunteers increasingly difficult due to time constraints, strained relationships between leaders and volunteers, and unfavorable interactions between volunteers and the recipients of their volunteer service and self-expectations. More importantly, recruitment and retention may also be hindered when the perceived environment of trust between leader and follower fails, rendering the leader incapable of motivating followers to excel, exceed their expectations, and operate at a level that benefits the organization (Tepper et al., 2018). As the relationship between leaders and followers is the product of a variety of considerations, including but not limited to personal identity, social identity, education, skill sets, and environment, the interaction and results of the interaction between the groups cannot readily be determined. Regardless, a central component in the retention and growth of membership is the style of leadership employed by those charting the organization's direction (Salas-Vallina, 2020). According to Parks and Mutisya (2019), Black women's organizations and sororities are "benevolent dictatorships" (p. 43), and leadership style, whether transactional or transformational, influences followers' engagement and experience.

Summary

Silencing the self theory, developed by Jack (1991), provides a theoretical framework that allows researchers to analyze the four components of the decision to forego self-interest and withhold thoughts and feelings to maintain favor and avoid conflict and other potentially detrimental actions. The decision to remain silent is closely associated with women. In this literature review, the relationship between silencing the self theory and members of Black women's organizations and sororities is established through the presentation of Black women's experiences of the past and present, Black women's ownership of their voices, and how those

voices are employed in leader–follower relationships in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities. In this review, I explored the role of trust in the context of leadership and how research has shown that transformational and transactional leadership influences a follower's commitment to their relationship, workplace, or organization. As previously indicated, the gap in research related to Black women in the dual roles of leader and follower, coupled with limited research on Black women in social service organizations, creates an opportunity to discover the members' perceptions of silencing and its influence on their actions in this context. I also provided insight into self silencing's influence on self-esteem, self-empowerment, and organizational commitment. In the next chapter, I explore the research methodology that governed the study, providing insight into the selection and application of the qualitative methodology and narrative design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement. Specifically, I investigated how members of these groups respond to different leadership styles. Black women's organizations and sororities historically have served as voices of the Black community, countering racism, sexism, misogyny, and other discriminatory practices that have hindered the growth and development of the Black community (Brooks, 2018). Traditionally, the voices of Black women within these organizations and sororities have promoted unity and advocated for change (Brooks, 2018). However, in the current iteration of Black women's organizations and sororities, these voices may confront leadership styles that promote either communication or silent self-expression (Etowa et al., 2017). As revealed in the literature, little is known about these historical Black women's organizations and sororities and how the leader–follower dynamic influences member recruitment and retention (Brooks, 2018; Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Specifically, I investigated how members of these social service organizations respond to different leadership styles through a qualitative study using a narrative design. The participants were leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities with a minimum of 5 years of active membership. They provided insight on their experiences, perspectives, and responses to different leadership styles.

In this chapter, I outline the methodology of the study. I also provide a detailed explanation of the research design and an explanation of qualitative analysis, the use of the naturalistic narrative methodology, and the procedures that governed the data collection and analysis. I also include information that addresses the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations that governed my research.

I designed this study to qualitatively address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the leadership styles of the leaders?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence members' decisions to speak openly or moderate/restrict their voices in interactions with leaders of the organization?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' responses to leaders who exhibit questionable leadership styles?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' willingness to adhere to practices and protocols and how this decision affects morale and commitment to the organization when they choose self silencing in response to the leader's leadership style?

Research Design and Method

For this qualitative study, I sought to gather, recreate, and document the stories of Black women in Black women's organizations and sororities and record the relationships between leaders and followers from the perspective of the participants. Therefore, narrative inquiry was the ideal vehicle to explore this subject. Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that qualitative research is a helpful tool that aids in understanding an identified problem within a specific group or organization where there is opportunity to give voice to those who are silenced. One of the central foci of this study was to understand how, in certain circumstances, the leadership style Black women employ may adversely influence or silence the voices of their Black women

followers (Webster et al., 2016). The applicability of qualitative research and naturalistic narrative methodology is central to this study and further presented in this section.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is renowned for its vast scope and ability to surpass the constraints of other approaches (Rubel & Okech, 2017). As a method that employs rich descriptions developed from participant narratives, qualitative research concentrates on human interactions and developing their meaning (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). Qualitative research focuses on organic social interactions and allows researchers to identify and understand behaviors and patterns that define multidimensional interactions between individuals or groups (Clandinin, 2007). Aspers and Corte (2019) stated that through accumulation and evaluation of these practical situations and circumstances, researchers can focus on personal moments that constitute the norm or times that create challenges in people's lives. More importantly, qualitative study provides insight that produces understanding that transcends societal barriers (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Because qualitative researchers do not attempt to forecast conclusions (Tomaszewski et al., 2020), qualitative exploration is well suited to research that seeks to explain situations using participants' subjective experiences to create meaning (Leavy, 2017).

Qualitative studies traditionally employ selectively identified participants with similar positionalities and characteristics (Townsend, 2020). Positionalities, also known as contexts, may be micro, or geographic, and may be modified by the researcher. They also may be macro, which refers to the type of social system in which the experience exists, a factor that cannot be changed (Given, 2008; Luciani et al., 2019). Accordingly, the context of a qualitative study is not limited to the participants' physical location; it transcends traditional geographic boundaries, focusing on the macro context, which may consist of shared perceptions, organizational relationships,

ethnicity, and cultural dimensions that unify the population sample (Layder, 2013; Luciani et al., 2019). Luciani et al. (2019) further asserted that what the researcher perceives in the macro context depends on the researcher's understanding of the context and their relationship to the participants—specifically, whether the participants are members or observers within the study setting. As previously asserted, the voices of Black women have been silenced through acts of systematic racism since they first arrived on this continent (Rabelo et al., 2019). Inarguably, social science has also contributed to this silence in that current research is virtually devoid of studies that seek to understand the Black woman's voice, further marginalizing this group (Henson, 2021; Rasheem et al., 2018; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The macro context of Black women's organizations and sororities allows the qualitative researcher to investigate the relationship between these marginalized members of society and the organizational setting (Given, 2008). Furthermore, this study also provides insight into how the interactions between leaders and followers shape the organizational culture and customs (van De Mieroop et al., 2021).

Creswell and Poth (2017) opined that marginalized groups may feel empowered when they present their stories on a level playing field that allows them to offer complex insights into a specific problem and help researchers better understand the issue and the context in which it occurs. Through their narratives, the subjects offered an explanation of the significance of events and how encounters may have affected their self-identity (van de Mieroop et al., 2021). Thus, for these groups, qualitative research allows researchers to focus on the significance of and impetuses for group members' actions and reactions to personal or group interactions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In studying these narratives, researchers can demonstrate the importance of certain actions for a specific population, particularly Black women, with careful curation of information

and proper methodology identification (Ballard, et al., 2021; Socias Salvá et al., 2020). When considered cumulatively, this information also allows the researcher to make assumptions about which theoretical framework is most applicable and assists in developing a research problem that defines and prescribes the significance of a particular situation to members of a group or community regarding specific societal issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). As a framework that employs minimal intervention and advocates for authenticity of voice, the naturalistic narrative provides scholarly awareness of the operations and adopted roles of Black women's organizations and sororities and the interactions between their leaders and members (Beuving & de Vries, 2015).

Narrative Approach: A Theoretical Framework

Researchers use theoretical framework to explain an identifiable event, experience, or situation (Collins & Stockton, 2018). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2021), a theoretical framework is how the researcher observes and contemplates the subject of their research, providing the principles upon which to construct a study. Among the various frameworks within the qualitative approach, narrative inquiry proffers a sense of perspective that may vary depending on one's experience within the research setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2007) asserted that the narrative theoretical framework is the best instrument to understand individual experiences within a defined context. According to Czarniawska (1998), researchers may apply the narrative framework to organizational behavior as the intentions of leaders and followers direct an organization's actions.

Clandinin and Connelly (2007) concluded that experiences are born of narratives, and narrative inquiry is the by-product of the encounters one endures over time, whether daily, weekly, yearly, or over a lifetime. Consistent with this finding, researchers have asserted that

one's behavior shapes these experiences in each context and the intentions attributed to the participants in each encounter (Czarniawska, 1998). Thus, the context, the information one gleans through observation while experiencing the setting, and one's knowledge of the environment provide the basis for the narrative that is the subject of the researcher's study (Stephens & Trahar, 2012). From this position, the researcher uses a naturalistic style to interpret the various intricacies that shape and define the lives of the people observed (J. Kim, 2016). Moreover, according to J. Kim (2016), the researcher must recognize the role that power plays in narrative inquiry and, more precisely, how the subject's recitation of a narrative may also denote a sense of power or lack thereof.

Loseke (2021) argued that power is a significant aspect of narrative methodology. Power underlies all aspects of the narrative and is readily attributed to the author, storyteller, and evaluator of the narrative presented (Loseke, 2021). Loseke further opined that one's ability to understand the foundations and uses of power relies on the narratives of those with power and those without power. Through this understanding, power is strengthened or diminished (Loseke, 2021). Researchers who employ narrative inquiry recognize that the potency of a narrative stems from the logical sequencing of the information conveyed, as the story's veracity is immaterial, with each story subjectively shaped by the interpretation and positionality of the presenter (Czarniawska, 1998). Employing this practice, Loseke (2021) noted that these narratives have the propensity to promote social and value-based hierarchies that may be used to determine the worth and importance of the participants in the narrative conveyed. However, the qualitative researcher accepts the responsibility to clarify the situation by marrying the lived experiences of participants with the researcher's personal beliefs and expectations. Such beliefs and

expectations may stem from reality and acquired knowledge or the vast array of scholarly research, creating a philosophical truth applicable to the subject of inquiry (J. Kim, 2016).

In the context of nonprofit Black women's organizations and sororities, there has been little research on the interplay between leadership styles and how volunteers respond to the leader's actions (Benevene et al., 2020). Moreover, as a historically marginalized group that proffers rich narratives about their experiences in various circumstances, Black women have received little attention from researchers regarding their experiences as leaders or members of Black social service organizations and sororities and the power structures that govern these groups (Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Thus, the stories of the members of these organizations are unheard, and the narratives of both their leaders and their followers remain silent in social research (Loseke, 2021). A research study premised on narrative inquiry that focuses on Black women in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities aids in moving the experience of Black women, as leaders and followers, into the realm of normalcy and acceptance (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Obasi (2022) stated, "The reconstruction of knowledge from a Black perspective involves tapping into Black experiences and allowing Black voices to be heard as legitimate sources for the production of knowledge" (p. 480).

Naturalistic Narrative

Townsend (2020) reinforced the idea that the narrative framework allows researchers to gain invaluable insight through in-depth interviews and focused questioning that yields personalized, perceptive responses. Moreover, using the naturalist narrative methodology, which is based on the study of everyday life in routine situations, where results are presented and accessible to all, the researcher achieves a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, the significance of these practices to the participants, and the obfuscating actions and

assessments these experiences emphasize (McAlpine, 2016; Mirhosseini & Noori, 2019). As a practice that everyone does every day, naturalistic inquiry combines the researcher's basic understanding with the perceptions of identified members of society to paint an unobscured reality, free of researcher interference (Beuving & de Vries, 2015). Thus, the application of diverse research methods, such as the naturalistic narrative method, allows researchers to develop powerful narratives and keen insight into the subjective experiences of participants, rendering qualitative research a helpful tool in exploring marginalized populations (Masenya et al., 2017; Moon et al., 2019).

Qualitative analysis allows for the use of detailed narratives from interviews in analysis of themes and patterns that aid in the understanding the interactions between Black women leaders and followers in sororities and social service organizations (Leavy, 2017). According to Jack-Malik and Kuhnke (2020), narrative examination enriches the information obtained through qualitative research:

> [Narrative] inquiry seeks to "generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world," one that "makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced object, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive." (p. 45)

Narrative inquiry is a tool that allows for consistent advancement and extensive insight into a precise issue in a group (Bruce et al., 2016). I used narrative inquiry as an interpersonal methodology to understand Black women's experiences with leadership and membership in social service organizations and sororities (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020).

Population

According to Benoot et al. (2016), the goal of purposeful sampling is not to be comprehensive or to allow the researcher to formulate generalizations but to inform the researcher on significant issues related to the proposed research, thereby providing information on the dynamics of the research topic. Purposeful sampling allows the qualitative researcher to identify a sample population with limited research subjects (Palinkas et al., 2015). Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that purposeful sampling permits the researcher to deliberately sample a group of the most knowledgeable people about the subject matter being studied. A customary practice in qualitative research, purposeful sampling allows the researcher to recruit the best resources and collect the highest-quality data (Leavy, 2017).

The population of leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities cannot be easily measured (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, 2020). While there are four historically Black sororities—Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated; Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated; and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated—the number of Black women's social organizations, such as the National Council of Negro Women; The Links, Incorporated; The Girl Friends, Incorporated; Mocha Moms, Incorporated; and Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, is unknown. These groups are often created for defined purposes, seeking to meet the needs of a specific demographic of Black women, and membership eligibility may rely on various factors such as professional affiliation, religious association, church group, educational achievement, status as a mother, and so on. Membership in these organizations is estimated to exceed 5 million Black women, though this figure is based on a select listing of groups and is not comprehensive (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, 2020). Identifying all of these organizations and their members is

impossible (Bigsby, 2017). However, researchers can access leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities who can provide diverse perspectives and rich content responsive to the central questions posed in their research (Mathison, 2004).

Study Sample

Many researchers have asserted there is no specific method for determining sample size in qualitative research (J. Kim, 2016; Shaheen et al., 2019; Suri, 2011). However, according to Daniel (2012), a sample should not be so large or small that it inhibits a study's effectiveness, rendering the results of the inquiry worthless. In narrative inquiry, researchers caution against too large a sample, stating that too much data adversely impacts the clarity of the study (Loseke, 2021). To this end, J. Kim (2016) stated that the sample size should be justifiable and defendable. Thus, in naturalistic inquiry, the sampling process is most closely related to theoretical sampling, focusing on issues relevant to the proposed topic and selecting participants who possess an identifiable relationship to the topic of interest (Beuving & de Vries, 2015).

Considering the literature, I premised the study on information-rich interviews of 15 leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities. Through my memberships and relationships with women in various organizations, I invited 15 members of various Black women's organizations and sororities to participate. Applying the standards mentioned previously, I used the following criteria to govern the selection of Black Club women participants:

1. Participants must have a minimum of 5 years of membership in one or more Black women's organizations or sororities.
2. Participants shall reside in various geographical regions of the United States.
3. Participants who have ascended to a leadership position shall have served as a chapter

officer, regional or area leader, or national officer for a minimum of 2 years.

4. To ensure insight into the operations of their organization, all participants shall have attended at least one area/regional or national conference of their organization.
5. Participants are not required to be active members of a Black women's organization or sorority because the reason for cessation of membership may be relevant to the overarching issues this research seeks to address.

Because the ability to become a leader requires prior participation as a member, I screened potential participants to determine their membership status and whether they had served as an elected official in their organization. As the primary objective of this purposeful sample was to achieve quality information and data saturation, I conducted 15 interviews, ensuring there was an adequate amount of information to enable a thorough understanding of the subject matter as it relates to the research questions (J. Kim, 2016).

Materials and Instruments

Semistructured interviews served as the primary form of data collection and continued until I interviewed all of the members of the sample (Shavers & Moore, 2019). Semistructured interviews are the ideal data collection process because they allow the researcher to solicit subjective opinions that are the product of participants' experiences (Evans, 2018). As a qualitative method, semistructured interviews give license to hear the voices of marginalized communities (McGrath et al., 2019). I used the four facets of silencing the self theory to identify data that enriched my understanding of membership in Black women's organizations and sororities (Jack, 1991; Luciano et al., 2019). Each interview question related to a specific facet, providing insight into how the subject matter correlated to self silencing practices among members of Black women's organizations and sororities. As participants recount their narratives,

a bilateral conversation between the researcher and participants develops, allowing the researcher to formulate a detailed understanding of phenomena as perceived by the interviewee (Abualsaud, 2019). This communication exchange allows the researcher to participate in the knowledge development process, ensuring the interview remains focused on the research topic while gaining insight into the participant's perspective and lived experience (Brinkmann, 2013). As such, I used semistructured interviews to allow members of Black women's organizations and sororities to use their voices to shape the knowledge base surrounding their experiences in these groups (Abualsaud, 2019; J. Kim, 2016; McGrath et al., 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout this study, I engaged in a systematic process that allowed for a thorough and logical understanding of the data collection and assessment procedures and the identified findings (Loseke, 2021). Nascimento and Steinbruch (2019) asserted that rigor, reliability, and validation requirements, essential to qualitative research, require the researcher to thoroughly elucidate the details related to the methodological approach. Rose and Johnson (2020) argued that qualitative research demands a detailed methodological presentation and extensive analytical rigor to support this position. These requirements are often implicitly assumed to exist rather than explicitly presented. Through the thorough application of rigor, reliability, and validation standards, researchers can continue to enhance qualitative research's value, significance, and germaneness (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Data Collection and Storage

Data collection occurred in 45–90-minute semistructured interviews conducted through videoconference. The study pool consisted of Black Club women and sorority members located throughout the United States. I relied on Zoom, an encrypted, passcode-protected video tool, as

my videoconferencing software. Beuving and de Vries (2015) reinforced the significance of interviews in narrative research, stating that interviews are the premier research method in the social science setting. More importantly, semistructured interviews are ideal for exploration when the researcher seeks to study a participant's unique perspective (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021), semistructured interviews offer a two-fold benefit in that they permit the interviewer to employ a focused line of questioning while also allowing them to deviate from that focus and explore other germane lines of questioning. Because traditional qualitative research involves the researcher and the participant collectively developing the meaning of their stories through in-person conversations and observations, the movement toward using digital resources such as Zoom for research purposes has become the subject of examination (Schlegel et al., 2021).

In the COVID-19 era, researchers have recounted the value of video interviews such as Zoom. Oliffe et al. (2021) found that these interviews are therapeutic, allowing the interviewee to feel more relaxed, as they often participate from their home. It also minimizes the costs associated with in-person interviews and traditional qualitative information-gathering techniques. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is waning, products such as Zoom continue to allow researchers to ascertain the narratives of subject participants while collecting information-rich data that aid in understanding interpersonal dynamics, such as between leaders and followers in Black Club women's organizations.

Consistent with the conclusions of Schlegel et al. (2021), I completed data collection electronically, ensuring my methods satisfied the requirements for rigor associated with qualitative research. Collection of rich data and insight is an inherent requirement of qualitative research. In accordance with Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board

procedures, I have stored the data for a minimum of 3 years on an external hard drive with the appropriate university official. Upon an audit request, I will make the data available for review (Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, n.d.). I conducted the data analysis immediately following data collection.

Data Analysis

The data analysis allowed me to interpret participants' actions and behaviors and how their narratives reflected their views of leader–follower relationships in Black women's organizations and sororities (Raskind et al., 2019). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2021), coding is just one method used to construe data in qualitative research and is not the sole or absolute method researchers should use. To understand the significance of the information offered in the semistructured interviews, the first cycle of coding followed the in vivo process, which allowed me to explore the participants' accounts of their experiences as members of Black women's organizations and sororities (Elliott, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). The participants' own words served as the descriptors that allowed for development of themes (Miles et al., 2020). Hence, the second step in the coding process entailed the use of thematic analysis to distinguish identifiable and subliminal themes present in the text of the interviews (Bazeley, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018). Researchers typically use thematic analysis as a form of coding to investigate a phenomenon that has not been thoroughly examined (Hawkins, 2017).

Using thematic analysis, I identified unique but repetitive ideas, experiences, and impressions embedded in the transcripts (Raskind et al., 2019). In this process, I examined the raw data gleaned from the transcripts, evaluated them for themes, coded and recoded them as necessary, and sorted them into categories and subcategories, which enabled me to identify

commonalities within the various data sources (J. Kim, 2016; Shavers & Moore, 2019). Thematic analysis allowed me to explore and identify themes across data files (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For narrative researchers analyzing semistructured interviews, thematic analysis contributes to the development of themes that transcend routine data analysis, enabling the identification and understanding of the implicit and explicit messages presented in the participants' stories (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Shavers and Moore (2019) stated that additional reconciliation employing axial coding might aid in identification of secondary themes that could reveal relationships between categories and subcategories and identify developing themes.

Although data interpretation has traditionally been manual, researchers can now use analytical applications and software to evaluate data for themes (Fielding, 2012). For this study, I used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) Dedoose to aid in the data analysis process necessary to interpret the semistructured interviews of the participants (Fielding, 2012). Although researchers may conduct thematic analysis manually, CAQDAS is a valuable tool that aids in increasing the scale, rigor, and methodological complexity of the data that support the study (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018). Upon completing the data analysis process, I presented the results in various formats in tables (see Chapter 4; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Provisions of Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the research's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability and the measures taken to ensure confidence in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Connelly, 2016). Also known as rigor, this standard implies the researcher should strive to establish and employ principles and methods that create confidence in the research data using concise methods that aid in the analysis (Connelly, 2016;

Elo et al., 2014). Trustworthiness requires the qualitative researcher to thoroughly evaluate the impact of their decisions about the structure of the research, the collection of data, the analysis of the data, and their personal views and experiences (Loseke, 2021). The presentation and protection of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are paramount in determining if fellow researchers will accept the study (Connelly, 2016; Elo et al., 2014; Josselson & Hammack, 2021). One of the goals of the qualitative researcher is to identify perceptions within the data that enable the researcher to define the research phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014). In this study, I consistently strived to achieve and maintain trustworthiness through the following processes.

Credibility

Credibility speaks to the truthfulness of a study and is of paramount importance because it determines the acceptability of the study to other researchers within the field (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure the credibility and integrity of the research findings, I employed member-checking techniques to allow the participants to confirm that their experiences are presented accurately and that the work, as presented, reflects the correct tone and intent and is free of researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Although each participant had an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview, all 15 participants declined.

Dependability

Dependability speaks to the reliability of the research data over an extended period and the circumstances governing the study (Connelly, 2016). Nowell et al. (2017) indicated dependability requires the research method to be reasonable, replicable, and thoroughly documented to allow others to analyze the research process and rely upon it. In this study, I have made every effort to reinforce the study's dependability and have had multiple discussions with

my dissertation chair regarding all aspects of the study, including the study design, research questions and development, and alignment. I modified the research questions to ensure they were consistent with the purpose of the research and the theoretical framework selected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To further ensure dependability, I pledged to revisit the study design with my chair if any issues arose during the data collection process, but I did not identify any such issues.

Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined confirmability as the ability of researchers to confirm the study's findings and that the conclusions articulated are consistent with the data collected during the study. Confirmability speaks to the researcher's objectivity, specifically the absence of researcher bias and prejudice (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) argued the researcher must test the data to ensure they are free of bias, prejudice, or other influences that could taint the integrity of the study while also demonstrating the data are consistent with those identified during the research process. As a part of the research development process, my dissertation chair consistently monitored this study to reinforce notions of confirmability and avoid researcher bias. Moreover, in the Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity section, I disclosed my affiliation with Black women's social service organizations and sororities, how this relationship aided in securing a purposeful sample, and how my affiliation would not impact the study or my role as researcher (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021).

Transferability

Transferability and generalizability are similar terms that refer to the ability of other researchers to use the study's findings and the researcher's responsibility to use methods such as thick descriptions providing significant insight into the research subjects, context, and details surrounding the data (Connelly, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability speaks to the external

validity of a study's findings and its applicability to other broad contexts so the findings' significance and richness are not diminished (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This requirement was achieved by providing the detailed processes used in the selection of my purposeful sample, which included how and why participants were selected, and a detailed description of the various aspects of the study, including the context, data, background, and other relevant topics that enable other researchers to gauge and compare to other similarly situated studies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity: I Am a Member of Black Women's Organizations and a Sorority

In this study, a critical component is the researcher's responsibility to protect the identity and dignity of each participant and the Black women's organizations and sororities with which they are affiliated (Josselson, 2007). The onus was on me to ensure compliance with federal requirements governing the protection of human subjects, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Belmont Report, and all mandates and requirements of the institutional review board authorizing the research (CITI Program, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c; White, 2020). Compliance with these requirements is supported by the CITI certificates verifying the requisite training as required by Abilene Christian University (see Appendix A) and the letter of approval issued by the university's institutional review board (see Appendix B).

The next step in the process entailed an electronic invitation to participate in the study being sent each member of the participant pool (see Appendix C). Upon acceptance and as required by federal guidelines, each participant received written and verbal notification of the rules governing the research. Each participant received an informed consent document for their

review and execution before commencement of the study. To preserve confidentiality, each participant received an alias, and their location and roles within their organizations were concealed through generalized language that rendered identification highly unlikely. Moreover, I held the interviews dates, times, and locations in confidence. I conducted the interviews in private to conceal the identity of any participant, and the demographic data collected were sufficiently vague to inhibit identification. Finally, I ensured the data were encrypted and held in a secure location.

According to Leavy (2017), reflexivity refers to how the researcher views their role in the research process. Unlike in the past, today's researchers do not need to distance themselves from their studies, but they should be ethically and politically self-aware of how their positionality may shape or influence their research processes and findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). More importantly, Creswell and Poth (2017) asserted that researchers must be aware of how their experiences affect their status or stance in their research and disclose this information in their studies. To disclose my positionality concerning this study, I am a Black Club woman, or a member of a Black women's organization and sorority. I have been a member of three Black women's clubs—Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated; Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated; and The Links, Incorporated.

I joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, in 1991 and graduated from college in May 1992. Upon graduation, I became an inactive member of the sorority for approximately 20 years, reactivating my membership around 2012. I am a general member, so I am not affiliated with any chapter and have no obligations other than paying annual dues. I have never served as an officer in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and I have no intention of pursuing a position within the organization. I became a member of Jack and Jill of America,

Incorporated, in 1996 and eventually served as chapter corresponding secretary, chapter vice president, and chapter president. I was also appointed regional alumni connection chair and was later elected to the position of regional secretary, where I served one full term and half of a second term. I have not been a member nor have I participated in any activities of Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, since 2018. My affiliation with The Links, Incorporated, began as the president of an interest group in 2010. My chapter was chartered in 2012, and I continued my service as the first president. I will forever hold the title of chapter organizer. Since becoming a member, I have served in several roles within the chapter and am currently serving my second term as a member of the Western Area Nominating Committee.

Being a member of a Black women's organization or sorority provided opportunities to observe and participate in the organization at a level that nonmembers cannot access. This membership also allowed members to develop their perceptions about the leader–follower relationship, interpersonal relationships, leadership styles, and the impact these styles may have on member commitment. However, I did not approach this subject from my perceptions and did not seek to promote an agenda. I selected and studied this subject because it presented a real problem worthy of research and could provide insight and guidance for leaders and followers in these historical organizations.

As a minority group, Black women have been silenced for centuries. Now that their voices are heard and have an impact on society, I selected this topic to understand why some Black women would choose self silencing over self-expression and how they make this decision. I also found the need to understand why Black women are willing to terminate their memberships and forego affiliation with Black women's organizations and sororities, a compelling topic for research. Hence, this study was designed to add to the body of research on

Black women by cultivating a new area of study that allowed members of Black women's social service organizations and sororities to speak their truth in a protected environment without fear of exposure, retaliation, or being silenced.

Assumptions

Simon and Goes (2018) asserted that assumptions are elements of the study outside of the researcher's control that are essential for the relevancy of the study. The following are some of the assumptions I made and incorporated into the research design:

1. The sample size will yield rich content and valuable insight that contribute to understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the leaders and members of Black Club women's organizations and sororities.
2. Participants will honestly participate in the interview process, and their responses will be forthright.
3. Participants will mutually respect the privacy considerations and maintain the confidentiality required for the study to be compelling.

Limitations

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) defined limitations as potential issues or problems outside the researcher's control. These limitations are typically part of the research design and have the propensity to impact the study's findings and conclusions (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). At the heart of this research are Black women, their sororities and organizations, the interactions between leaders and followers, and how their interpersonal dynamics may result in the self silencing of the voices of strong Black women. As these organizations and sororities are private clubs and the organizational culture promotes secrecy, members' willingness to speak about their

experiences, particularly their interactions with elected leaders and other members, may have posed a significant limitation (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019).

Moreover, the literature completely omits exploration of the intraracial relationships and intergroup dynamics among Black women's organizations and sororities. Research focusing on interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities is virtually nonexistent. According to Cohen et al. (2017), researchers have paid little attention to understanding the nature of the sisterhoods that comprise Black Club women's organizations and sororities. There is also a lack of leadership materials that explore relationships between the leadership and followership aspects of nonprofit organizations (Fang et al., 2021). Another limitation was the number of participants. As the study sample was small, the participants' experiences may have skewed or biased the data. A larger sample group could have enhanced the credibility of the study. For this study, I described the leadership styles of Black women leaders and how those styles affect followers. I sought to fill a gap in the research by providing insight into the relationships between Black leaders and followers and how, depending on the leadership style, the voices of followers may be silenced, creating an atmosphere that could undermine the growth and development of the organization.

Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters created by the researcher and tend to restrict the researcher to an achievable goal, limiting the chance of the research becoming overly broad and burdensome (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Among the identified delimitations of the current study was the choice to limit the number of participants to no more than 15. In narrative research, the research pool must be manageable. There are more than 250,000 known Black women's organizations and sororities in the United States, with the total number being even

greater. Therefore, it would be impossible to interview all of the members and leaders of these organizations. Another notable delimitation was the choice of narrative inquiry instead of other qualitative methods such as phenomenological study. I selected narrative inquiry because it focuses on the stories of the participants and allows them to give voice to their experiences and how these relate to Black Club women's organizations and sororities (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Finally, the experiences of members of Black women's organizations and sororities and their roles as leaders in volunteer and nonprofit organizations are underrepresented in the current literature. Therefore, this study was an opportunity to provide insight into the interpersonal relationships between Black women and Black women leaders and their followers.

Summary

In this exploration of Black women's organizations and sororities, I studied members' perceptions of the interpersonal dynamics of leaders and followers using a qualitative methodology implemented through narrative inquiry to gain insight into members' experiences related to their membership in these historical organizations. Semistructured interviews allowed me to attain invaluable insight from the participants while also formulating meaning that explains their relationship and membership commitment to these organizations. I analyzed the text of the semistructured interviews using CAQDAS. In the first cycle of analysis, I focused on narrative coding, while in the second cycle I identified themes across the interviews. I remained mindful of and committed to research integrity as mandated by federal law throughout this process and made every effort to ensure trustworthiness by adhering to the qualitative criteria of dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement. Specifically, I investigated how members of these groups respond to different leadership styles. Narrative study through semistructured interviews allowed for greater understanding of the four research questions presented in this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the leadership styles of the leaders?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence members' decisions to speak openly or moderate/restrict their voices in interactions with leaders of the organization?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' responses to leaders who exhibit questionable leadership styles?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' willingness to adhere to practices and protocols and how this decision affects morale and commitment to the organization when they choose self silencing in response to the leader's leadership style?

This chapter presents the data analysis and results of the 15 semistructured interviews of Black women who are members of Black women's social service organizations or sororities. Beginning with a restatement of the purpose of this study, the chapter provides an overview of the research process, the data analysis, the themes from the interviews, and the relationship between the themes and Jack's (1991) silencing the self theory. This chapter also offers

additional insight into the participant selection process and the applicability of the guided protocols (see Appendix D) to the research questions, followed by a summary of the research findings.

Review and Analysis of the Research Process

Applying a qualitative design and narrative approach, I used semistructured interviews to understand the perceptions of the leader–follower relationship of women in Black organizations and sororities and their perspectives on how the leaders' style impacts membership commitment, engagement, and sustainability. Using purposeful sampling, I invited 15 members of Black women's organizations and sororities from across the United States to participate in this study, exploring the interactions between leaders and followers in historically Black organizations and sororities. I have concealed the name and identity of each participant, selecting an alias that is not affiliated or associated with the identity of the participants.

As shown in Table 1, each participant is currently or has previously been a member of one or more Black women's organizations or sororities and has been a member of their organization for more than 5 years. In this study, 60% of the participants were between the ages of 46 and 55, 27% were over the age of 56, and the remaining 13% were between the ages of 36 and 45. Although 33% of the participants lived in the southwestern United States, the participant pool was representative of the country's various regions, with 20% of participants residing in the eastern, Midwestern, and western regions, respectively. The remaining 7% represented the central United States. Finally, participants may also have been members of a historically Black women's sorority, but membership in a sorority was not a prerequisite for participation in the study. I selected each participant based on her knowledge, membership, and tenure in her organization.

Table 1

Demographic Representation of 15 Participants

Participant	Age range	Geographic location	Sorority member (yes/no)	Sorority member (*n* of years)	*n* of memberships in Black women's organizations and sororities	Approximate tenure in nonsorority or Black women's organizations (*n* of years)
Grace	46–55	West	Yes	30	2	9
Irene	56+	Midwest	Yes	50+	10+	50+
Alexis	46–55	East	No		2	14
Marilyn	46–55	Central	No		2	5
Taylor	56+	Southwest	Yes	12	2	10
Addison	46–55	West	Yes	32	3	15
Rose	56+	Midwest	Yes	37	4	5
Zari	56+	Southwest	Yes	46	4	10
Whitney	46–55	East	Yes	31	2	22
Zoe	46–55	East	No		2	10+
Ella	46–55	Southwest	Yes	31	3	20
Cate	36–45	Southwest	Yes	25	2	
Grayson	36–45	West	Yes	14	2	10
Madison	46–55	Midwest	Yes	22	2	17
Clarice	46–55	Southwest	Yes	21	1	

Procedure

I sent an email invitation to participate in the study to each participant between May 1 and June 15, 2022. Upon confirmation of their willingness to participate, I sent an electronic consent form and requested a digital signature. Upon receipt of the signed electronic consent form, the participant provided a date and time for their semistructured interview. I conducted each interview on the designated date at the requested time unless the participant requested a postponement. I used Zoom to conduct the interviews, which ranged from 41 minutes to 2 hours

and 54 minutes. I recorded a total of 16 hours and 55 minutes of interviews, with the average length of an interview being 1 hour and 10 minutes. I digitally recorded and manually transcribed each interview verbatim. Accuracy of the transcription was paramount, so I reviewed and verified each transcript using the recorded audio when necessary. All participants had an opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews but declined; hence, I did not use member checking.

I manually coded the semistructured interviews using the in vivo coding method. The words and phrases used by the participants during this process served as preliminary codes that allowed me to develop descriptors and assign them to themes and patterns that aligned with one of the four research questions (Miles et al., 2020). I then applied thematic analysis to the entire data set to identify shared perceptions and ideas among the participants that could support findings and conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As an additional step, I plotted the manually gathered data into Dedoose, a research data management application, to assist in development of databases and graphics that further aided the data analysis process.

Presentation of the Findings

Use of narratives in the form of semistructured interviews allowed participants to lend their voices to the discourse on leader–follower relationships in Black women's organizations and sororities while also aiding in the study of how these interactions impact member commitment, engagement, and sustainability. More importantly, participants could express their thoughts and feelings in an environment free of ramifications and fear of retaliation, thus allowing their true selves to be present and understood. According to Jack (1999), an essential component of qualitative research is the narrative approach and how participants' perspective of their life is guided by the stories they tell themselves and the stories they relay to others. Jack

stated, “Her narrative reveals her whole world, her view of herself in relationships, her sense of power, her path through life, and her striving to reach some sort of ideal self” (p. 91). Hence, this qualitative study explores the behaviors women use to sustain their relationships with others while also providing insight into the practices they use to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in relationships and interactions where conflict may be problematic (Arroyo et al., 2020). I used the research questions to gather insight into the application of silencing the self theory and the impact of self silencing on leader–follower relationships among Black women in Black women’s organizations and sororities.

The research questions presented in the study focus on (a) the factors that influence the leadership style of an organization’s leaders; (b) the factors that influence a member’s use of voice, specifically their decision to speak willingly or retrain their speech in interactions with the leaders of their organizations; (c) the factors that influence a member’s responses to leaders who exhibit a questionable leadership style in their interactions with members of the organization; and (d) the factors that shape a member’s decision to adhere to the organization’s practices and protocols and how that decision, when guided by self silencing practices, affects their response to the leader’s leadership style and their commitment to the organization. The following findings are organized by research question, and all data are presented from the participants’ perspective (Jack, 1999).

RQ1: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women’s Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Leadership Styles of the Leaders?

Black women’s roles in their organizations and sororities are often defined by who they are, their relationships with their leaders, and their need for validation in their organizations and sororities. How members see the leader interact with them and others may determine whether

they are willing to actively engage in the organization or choose to remain silent and acquiesce to the leader, thus sacrificing their voice. Cate stated, “Being a leader, you have to be there for everyone, and you have to be present enough to know everybody’s place is not the same. What do you give this person that is asking to be seen?” As a 36–44-year-old professional, Cate had spent her entire adult career serving others. As she sat in her pristine white home office with plaques and other memorabilia celebrating her career, Cate repeatedly tried to stifle the emotion in her voice and wiped the tears from her eyes that reflected her disappointment in the leadership of her sorority. After more than 25 years of commitment and service, she felt the one time she had asked for something in return from her sorority, she was not seen or heard, and her loyalty was not reciprocated. Having joined the sorority under the belief that it was a place that would allow young Black women to demonstrate their pride in their history and celebrate their accomplishments, Cate felt the organization, a reflection of W. E. B. Dubois’s vision of the Talented Tenth, had become elitist, its inner hierarchy demonstrated that all members were not equal, and the leaders responded to the needs of the members depending on who they were. In this single act by her organization’s leadership, Cate realized that though she valued the organization, it did not value her.

Values: Honesty, Trustworthiness, and Integrity Coupled With the Need to Be a Good Communicator. In response to interview questions related to the first research question, “What are the perceptions of members of Black women’s social service organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the leadership styles of leaders?” 14 of the 15 participants discussed one or more of the three most common themes: A leader must be honest and trustworthy, a good communicator, and a person of integrity (Table 2). Participants noted that good communication involves not just speaking and giving speeches but listening to

members and those who elected them to office. These factors were core qualities participants desired in the leaders of Black women's organizations and sororities, and they described how the presence or lack of these perceived values influenced their perceptions of leaders. They also discussed how their impressions of the leader's leadership style might moderate depending on the presence or absence of honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity among leaders, the communication practices of leaders and followers, and the culture of the organization. For these participants, the alignment of their values and the values of their elected leaders was of paramount importance, and failure to align with these core values adversely affected their views of the leader.

Table 2

Factors That Influence Leadership Styles of Black Women Leaders

Recurring remark/theme	*n*
Values: honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity	9
Communication: listening and speaking	5
Organizational culture	11

The Importance of Values. At the foundation of all Black women's organizations and sororities is a set of values that identifies the organization's beliefs, mission, and goals. These values set expectations among members regarding what they should expect from the organization and what the organization or sorority should expect of them. As membership in these historical organizations is by invitation only, understanding and recognizing the mission and values of these organizations is of paramount importance not only for those selected as members but also for those elected to leadership positions.

In discussing values, Irene, an experienced leader in the corporate and Black women's organizational setting, encapsulated the sentiments of many of the participants and how the values the leader exhibited were integral to their ability to lead. With the confidence of a demonstrated leader, Irene asserted that an effective leader is one who

> understand[s] the values and virtues of the organizations and the mission and what you're trying to accomplish and how you're trying to drive business on behalf of who and what you need to perform and optimize the performance and motivate individuals that are part of that construct.

In comparing her experiences in corporate America with those in her Black women's organization, Irene noted that both types of organizations consist of multiple communities, and the leader's understanding of each community must be "nuanced." However, leaders have a duty to focus on the organization, as there is no organization without management and no organization without members. Hence, the ultimate objective of the leader is to do "what is good for the organization."

Consistent with Irene's statement, Taylor and Rose both stated, "A good leader looks at the needs of her constituents." Zari noted that leaders must "listen to the little people before you go forward," a lesson she learned in the corporate space, where she looked to those who had been in the work environment for many years to gain guidance and direction. However, Grayson, a C-Suite executive, connected the development of a leader to experiences she has had throughout her life:

> I've been surprised at the [leadership] skills and values that are imparted to you early on, like what you witnessed in your own homes and what you have exposure to. . . . I have

> attributed some of the things I have been able to successfully navigate through to my time in the Girl Scouts or even my grandmother owning a juke. And that's my hustle skill.

Another participant, Zari, a retired executive from an international corporation and a leader in her Black women's organization, had allowed her corporate knowledge and lessons learned to guide her in her nonprofit organizational endeavors. For Zari, leadership is not just what she does but also a product of what members of her organization think of her. She wanted her members to "respect her" and feel like she "made the right decision for the organization." However, not all leaders in Black women's organizations and sororities stand on the values the organization's foremothers enunciated. In some instances, leaders are reluctant to adhere to the organization's guiding principles or lack knowledge or understanding of the values upon which the organization or sorority is premised.

Rose, a savvy C-Suite executive and former officer in a Black Women's organization, heightened the values discussion by focusing on the accountability inherent in corporate environments but not as prevalent in Black women's organizations and sororities. She noted,

> If you're a CEO of a public company and you [engage in questionable or unethical actions], your stock price will respond, your shareholders will hold you accountable. If you are a manager and somebody forms a complaint to the ombudsman or what have you, there's somebody.

However, in Black women's organizations and sororities, Rose observed,

> There's no accountability mechanism. Our organizations, we self-govern. So we make the rules, we enforce the rules, and, therefore, you are really at the mercy of the integrity of the leader and the leaders that are a part of the leader's team because there is no other

> mechanism. These are private organizations. So you can't go to court and say, "Hey, Court. This president's treating me wrong or badly."

The accountability concerns were not unique to Rose; one-third of the study's participants directly addressed accountability concerns. Zoe, a lifelong advocate for civil rights and member of a Black women's organization, echoed this sentiment, commenting on the lack of accountability in one organization and how a leader of her group disregarded the organization's founding principles and governing documents, choosing to make decisions for her "own personal purposes." In a frustrated response to these actions, Zoe spoke about how leaders violate the governing documents and are not held accountable, contrary to the organization's values. She strongly argued the executive boards of these organizations should take accountability for their actions and that members should be knowledgeable and willing to hold their leaders accountable.

Irene mentioned that as an officer in her organization, she was always outspoken and never intimidated, labeling herself a "truth teller." Noting that she was unclear how she had achieved a national leadership position in her organization while being a vocal advocate for decency, order, and the organization's members, Irene stated that she always could express herself and dared to speak on all issues worthy of discussion, including calling out impropriety and wrongdoing.

Speaking about her perception of the leader of one of her groups, Grayson expressed her concern that a particular leader had achieved the level of national president in her organization:

> There were some—how do I frame this?—behaviors that the national president exhibited that were not in alignment with my values. In my perspective, it makes you question whether this is for you if this person has matriculated all the way up to this level. There

are certain characteristics, values, and things that surely had been exhibited along the way, yet the body has decided that this is the person that represents us.

Comparing the values, knowledge, and leadership style of a president of one of her Black women's organizations to those exhibited by Donald Trump, Alexis, an administrator in the education industry, stated the leadership of the organization's president was similar to "the last president we had. It was very similar: He didn't know politics, he didn't know the rules, he made them up as he went along, and he lied and cheated. And that's exactly how this woman operated."

As members of Black women's organizations and sororities may wear the hats of both leaders and followers at any time in their organizations, their values may change depending upon their circumstances. While the duty to lead brings with it the responsibility to adhere to the core values upon which the organization was founded and some leaders believe and operate consistently with this expectation, others thwart these beliefs and circumvent accountability. For many members of Black women's organizations and sororities, core values are critical to their membership and are considered reasonable expectations. The need for honesty and trust and for leaders to effectively listen, communicate, and consistently demonstrate integrity in their person and in their duties to the organization is central to membership and commitment to the organization. For many members of these groups, their perceptions of their leader's style and actions shape their experiences and, in some cases, determine their responses.

Do a Good Job and Be Honest. Some may argue that honesty and trust are inextricably intertwined. When there is honesty, then trust naturally flows, and honesty is the by-product of trust. However, 75% of the participants indicated this may not always be true in Black women's organizations and sororities and offered insight into their perspectives. A leader's view of

honesty and truth is directly affected by the type of leader they consider themselves to be, but the type of leadership they display dictates the membership's perception of and response to them. In essence, how a leader sees themselves does not always translate into how their followers see them.

Grayson, a 36–45-year-old C-Suite executive who was also a sorority member and member of a Black women's organization, expressed the fundamental purposes of these groups:

> Respect. Just that respect, truth, honesty. The foundation of what we all do is trust. And so, in order for us to make the collective impact we're seeking, we have to start at that place, so coming to individuals in a very respectful way, seeking to understand, sharing my truth even if it is not the most accepted.

Echoing this sentiment, Clarice, an administrator in the human resources industry, stated from her perspective that a great working relationship in Black women's organizations relies on trust, specifically stating, "You have to be able to trust people. You have to be able to feel some level of support." When asked what she was looking for from a leader in her Black women's organization, Addison, a seasoned attorney and community leader, stated, "I'm just looking for someone that can do a good job and be honest."

Rose explained that while serving as a leader, she gave followers a chance to get to know her. As a result, they came to expect fairness and honesty from her, which intensified her desire to live up to their expectations rather than do what was "politically expedient." Although she considered herself an inspirational leader who is vocal when necessary, fair, passionate, and inclusive, commenting from the follower's perspective, Rose contended, "Leaders should trust their stakeholders enough to make decisions and not feel as though they have to be king or queen makers." According to Rose, when leaders engage in dealmaking and other practices that

undermine the proper functioning of the organization's processes, the behavior and message modeled for the membership are incorrect and can destabilize the organization's structure.

Another participant, Alexis, a former organizational leader, expressed disbelief in the actions of leaders in her organization who engaged in practices contrary to expectations of honesty and trust. She stressed the importance of accountability while noting that the organization never addressed the leaders' dishonest actions or revealed those actions to the members. Neither did they make the actions taken by entities outside of the organization available to the members. Finding this type of behavior unfathomable, Alexis argued that leaders

> should have some leadership ability. [Leaders] need to [think] it's okay to say, "I was wrong." It's okay to say, "I didn't mean to," or "I did the wrong thing," or "I was confused." It's okay to do that. To me, that humbles you. And I have respect for people who can say when they're wrong or they did something wrong. But when you try—you cover it up with more and more dishonesty, I lose all respect for you.

Alexis reiterated she had always emphasized trust, stating that she tells her team, "I trust you until you give me a reason not to trust. I will always support you if you are right, and I believe in you. But once you lose my trust, then the relationship changes." For her, being a leader also includes a duty of accountability, whether operating individually or as a team member.

In describing an experience where she attempted to be honest with a leader in her sorority who disregarded the rules and processes governing candidacy and elections, Clarice described her effort to express her concerns and the leader's response, which she perceived as dismissive:

> What I was sharing was not just not important, but . . . my honesty and my integrity were not valued. If I'm a person that's being honest, and if I'm a person of integrity, and I'm

sharing with a person that I think has the same characteristics, but you're telling me, "No. Don't worry about it," then that makes me feel unvalued.

Zoe mentioned a similar instance where she and others learned of allegations of wrongdoings by a member of the national board of her organization, and she joined with other members to request an investigation. Still, contrary to the policies and procedures of the group, the organization disregarded their request and refused to investigate the allegations. Those who persisted in their requests were subject to retaliation. According to Zoe, the board employed a policy of intimidation, stating their mindset was "let's make an example of this person so that other people will be afraid." As a result of her experience, she stated, she did not trust many people in the organization. Specifically, she distrusted people in the group who were not willing to speak up when they saw wrongdoing because she does "not know what they stand for."

Zoe noted a previous national president of her organization was "forthright." When an impropriety occurred, the president stood before the membership body and disclosed what had happened and how it had been addressed. Zoe praised another former national officer who tearfully stood before the membership, disclosed financial improprieties, and detailed the retaliatory acts she had endured following her stance against the dishonest actions. For Zoe, both actions were examples of honest leadership. Grayson best summarized the sentiments she felt, which Clarice, Addison, Rose, and Alexis also shared, when discussing her experiences of the lack of honesty and trust by organizational leaders: "Nobody said, 'This was not right. . . . This is not what we should be doing, and this is not how we should be acting.' Everyone placated and allowed the individual to kind of take them down that path with them."

Integrity: A Blessing to Serve, Not an Opportunity to Elevate. Integrity was also a theme that appeared repeatedly during the interviews with the participants. More than half

expressed the need for integrity, though it took many shapes. Among the most prominent were the concept of servant leadership and the idea that integrity may be undermined through acts of corruption and manipulation. Many detailed incidents and commented on the actions of leaders that ran counter to the founding principles of their organizations. Focusing on why some leaders pursue office and then on specific acts that may be inconsistent with the organization's foundational principles, four of the participants provided detailed descriptions of how they felt some of their leaders acted in a manner that undermined the goals of the organization and the express purposes that motivated members to commit to these organizations.

When speaking about the characteristics she expected in a leader of her organization, Zoe provided the expected basic responses such as not stealing, consistently applying the governing documents, and being a servant leader. However, she ended her comments by stating that anyone pursuing a position in leadership should consider "it a blessing to serve as opposed to an opportunity to elevate." This sentiment was repeated throughout the interviews and was a prevalent theme throughout the discussion on integrity.

Rose noted that a leader needed to be "mission focused." She elaborated on her initial comment, stating,

> You got to have integrity. I mean at the end of the day, you're a volunteer and trusted to sit in these roles on behalf of women who pay dues and, in effect, pay for whatever is needed to support your leadership. So you need to have integrity.

Rose also emphasized her belief that many leaders in Black women's organizations and sororities lack a stewardship mindset that says, "I am here to serve the people who elected me versus I am here to be served by the people who elected me."

Marilyn, a career attorney and education administrator, noted the leaders of her Black women's organization must demonstrate "tremendous integrity, both ethical and financial." Detailing a situation in which she witnessed a leader providing an interpretation of the organization's bylaws inconsistent with the written document, Marilyn added that she placed significance on a leader's ability to use their voice. She mentioned that when a leader is being honest and demonstrating integrity, then they will speak up when confronted with someone saying something that is not true.

Addison, also an attorney, stated, "I think a good leader is honest, has integrity." She elaborated on this statement by saying that a leader who is honest and shows integrity speaks out against misinformation. Grace, a senior executive in the education industry, acknowledged that the motivation to lead in Black women's organizations might vary, but she asserted,

> Sometimes people are in these leadership positions not just because they're there for the altruistic piece of the organization, but sometimes they're there for the recognition, and the level of the position is important to them.

Noting that in those instances where top–down leadership exists, she believed many of these leaders may "forget they could do something inappropriate."

By contrast, Whitney described a former leader's style and how she brought her professional experiences to her leadership style. Describing a prominent leader in the education field who also had attained leadership in one of her organizations, Whitney speculated that the leader's style and integrity may have been the product of her background, where she had to fight for everything she had achieved in her career. She also proclaimed that her leadership style was premised on reaching back and lifting others up, allowing them to feel empowered.

Ella, a dedicated sorority member and corporate executive, recalled how a leader questioned her commitment to the organization, integrity, and sense of empowerment by dismissing her need to practice self-care during a difficult time. Instead of providing the support Ella needed, the leader behaved in a way that led Ella to question the leader's integrity. Describing the leader's actions as insensitive, Ella argued,

> After all of the commitments that I had made and everything that I had done, and when it came to a time where I needed a break and when it came to a time where maybe I couldn't deliver at the same rate that I had in the past, it wasn't that she was mean, but it was just like it was hard for you just to say, "You know what? Okay, let me just be there for you and not try to push me to continue to produce."

Other participants recited instances where leaders undermined, and in some instances disregarded, their integrity by operating in the realm of manipulation and corruption. Alexis detailed a leader who routinely blackmailed, bullied, manipulated, and coerced members of her leadership and members of the organization to achieve her objectives. She further stated that the president was "the worst president in her tenure" and the leader had "lied, cheated, [and] defamed people whom she didn't like." Marilyn noted there "had been instances of gross financial mismanagement within her organization. And only when it reached extreme levels, or extreme public levels, did people who were inclined to support that person speak up." According to Marilyn, the wrongness of the leader's actions remained a well-known secret until it was thrust into the public domain.

Zoe referenced an organization that repeatedly exceeded budgeted amounts for numerous expenses that were never explained to members and even noted instances where expenses were incurred. The organization assessed the members without providing an opportunity for

discussion or feedback. In Zoe's opinion, these actions spoke to the president's integrity in that she was abusing the organization's funds while the other leadership members "looked the other way."

For Madison, an attorney who was also a member of a sorority and a Black women's organization, lack of integrity was a significant issue that she took extremely seriously: "When you intentionally manipulate the rules because you are in a leadership position and can do so, it's almost criminal to me."

Communicating Is Both Listening and Speaking. In organizations of Black women, communication and listening are of paramount importance, a theme 46% of the participants addressed. Each participant emphasized that communication is not just speaking or hearing; it is listening to members and hearing what they have to say. Listening does not necessarily mean the leader must do what they say; it simply means acknowledging their words and, if they agree, taking action.

Ella described communication as one of the biggest challenges she had observed in her organization, noting that the leader of sororities and other Black women's organizations need to be able to effectively participate in multigenerational communication practices, relating to all her sorority sisters regardless of age. She stated that she believed

> one of the biggest areas where a leader can have a downfall is if they are solely trying to make all decisions based on what they think the people want instead of taking the time to understand what it is the people truly want.

So, for Ella, communicating and listening were her highest priority. Ella emphasized that listening is of paramount importance because it lets her members know that "their leader truly understands where they are in their walk and understanding what's needed."

Grace stated that one of the highest priorities of a leader is "being able to communicate well with the membership and listen." While describing an instance where she provided feedback to a leader of one of her organizations, Grace excitedly emphasized that the leader listened. According to Grace, "The leader was appreciative and thankful to hear the feedback. She did not get defensive about the feedback." The leader was not judgmental in hearing the comments, and her response shaped Grace's opinion of her, prompting her to label the leader a "phenomenal person." Grace also noted that with other leaders there were

> times [when] I just felt like we weren't listening to what the member had to say. They already had in their heads what they wanted to do. You know how it is: You want something done, and you want it done a certain way. Sometimes you can't hear what other people are looking to do. And so you kind of ignore that, and you just keep moving forward as a leader.

Grace noted that the response was insufficient and that members of a social organization wanted to be acknowledged and validated:

> If you ignore them or you don't address them, or at least validate something that they say, then it makes it seem as if you're not listening as a leader. Like you don't care what that person has to say, and that's not a good thing.

Zari emphasized the need for a leader to be able to lead at every level and the importance of listening to members before taking action. As a leader with a "listening ear" in her organization, she stated,

> Any time any member calls, I try to make sure I get back with them. And normally a lot of times, I'll listen and then tell them what I can and can't do because sometimes there's

> nothing I can do. That's out of my realm. But I do listen. I think a big piece of the time a lot of people want you to just listen.

Regardless of what she can or cannot do, Zari concurred that leaders should listen to their member's concerns and, when possible, keep them under consideration, as they may be helpful in the future.

Whitney asserted that when an officer listened to her, she felt empowered. She noted she worked with all kinds of leaders such as those "who will ask me your opinion but won't listen." She stated that, in one instance, working with a leader who listened to her, considered her feelings, and implemented her idea made her feel valued. She determined that leader was the type who listens and takes advice and that listening and being open to listening is one of the characteristics a leader must possess. At the same time, Grayson commented that listening is a priority along with vulnerability and empathy. She also insisted that when a leader listens, that listening serves as a source of strategic insight that enables them to understand where the organization needs to go and what is necessary to bring everybody with them. Hence, she felt empowered when listening to the members of her organization.

To Speak or Not to Speak: Voice Practice in Interactions With Leaders. In addressing issues concerning voice practice, Taylor, a Black professional over 56, argued,

> In all of the organizations, all three of them, sisterhood is one of the things that we really promote. And just like in your blood families—I mean your real brothers and sisters or whatever—there are still times you have to call them out and say, "You're wrong. You should have said this," or "You should have done this." . . . You call them out. But it shouldn't stop there. It shouldn't be the end of the world. You love, and you go on.

Having worked for a Fortune 500 business before joining the family business, Taylor was intrigued by the topic but also a little apprehensive about offering her thoughts and experiences. In providing this response, she paused for reflection, carefully gathering her thoughts. Despite her age, her tenure in Black women's organizations and sororities was relatively short. As such, her experiences differed from those of many of the participants. Still, her comments reflected the sentiments of many of the other participants. She contended leaders should be able to receive feedback and members should be able to offer insight, and in the interest of sisterhood, no voice should be stifled. Grayson echoed these thoughts, agreeing that regardless of whether one is a leader of a group or organization or the CEO of a company that employs her, when someone says the wrong thing or takes the wrong action, the leader has a duty to say or do something. A leader misbehaving should not be "placated and allowed . . . to take [their followers] down the path with them."

The concept of organizational culture is prevalent in the discussion of voice usage in Black women's organizations and sororities, as 60% of participants readily discussed the relationship between their organizations, their leaders, and use of voice. Participants provided insight into how their personality, their values, and their determination as to the worthiness of a vocal response for a given situation affected their voice.

The Role of Organizational Culture in Voice Practice. Irene prefaced the discussion of leaders in Black women's organizations and sororities with the idea that "there are so few places where we as women have power that when we get into a place where we think we have power, we don't know how to use it." Although she used this statement in the context of Black women, she explained that this idea should be presented with a "broad stroke" because she believed it "applies to the culture of women." According to Taylor and Irene, Black women's organizations

and sororities are perceived as safe spaces. Taylor believed these safe spaces are places "where you could be around other Black women . . . who are probably going through some of the same things that you're going through." Irene reinforced this idea, stating, "You never know why God puts things together the way He does. Well, that's the essence of these organizations . . . a time for us to connect with each other at the heart level, to know each other." However, Grayson raised a critical point about the development of the culture in Black women's organizations and sororities, asking a fundamental question: "What type of environment or culture is being created under this leadership where people don't feel like they are free to speak up?"

Grace noted that she thinks organizations take on a particular culture that the women in their organization determine. She stated, "They are all working together as servant leadership to the community or to each other, and sometimes you get org[anizations] that are not." Meanwhile, Cate argued,

> Leadership is about setting the tone, providing a culture, establishing a culture, and maintaining a culture. And if that culture is divisive, that's the problem. That's a leadership problem. Everything comes from the top. If the culture [is] inclusive, that's due to leadership.

Grace stated that the leader's reaction "determines whether or not [the] body is engaged or [the] body disengages." She further stated that when people have "a leader that the people are not really behind, they become disengaged." Addison added,

> I do think that it is part of the culture of the organization that once you rise to a certain position, people are not to question you. And people are to go along with whatever you say. And so, when that is challenged, it is not the norm of the organization.

Madison shared, “When you are a regular member, and you’re a dues paying member, it is hard to feel like you have a voice at the highest level, but you do.” However, on the contrary, Rose described her experiences and the culture of one chapter of an organization where she was a member. She expressed concern when members of one chapter made her feel that she did not belong. She explained that for the members of that chapter, she did not

> have the right pedigree by virtue of it is a chapter that has a lot of people [whose] momma and their grand momma was in the chapter. There are multigenerations in the chapter today. Somebody was a founder. So, because I’m not from [that part of the country], I don’t have the roots in [that part of the country].

She asserted it would take 20 years for the members of that chapter to view her as one of them. In the meantime, she argued gaining acceptance meant she would have to adhere to commands such as

> You do what we ask you to do. You be the chair of the [committee] that nobody else wants to do. Don’t even think about nominating a candidate for membership because we don’t know if we’re going to be able to support that [candidate].

Consistent with Rose’s experience, Madison noted, “I didn’t know that it was so political . . . so political and not for the greater good.” Grace shared that when leaders did not listen to her or others and chose to operate “differently,” or without concern for the membership, her response was to “withdraw and not . . . engage in the organization.” She further expounded,

> All of these Black women[’s] organizations collectively have to work together, and we respect each other and value each other’s opinions. And then when you have somebody that comes in and really just wants to set their vision, everything’s about what they want, how they want it. It can get tiring.

Consistent with this statement, Irene argued that as a leader,

> it doesn't do any good if you've got all this stuff that you're doing, and people are disenchanted and unhappy. If you're saying publicly, "Oh, we're the organization of this, and we're the best of that," but your members on the inside are talking about you like a dog and not mirroring that in terms of performance, not optimizing that, you can tell by how many people take leaves of absence [during] your tenure or, worse than that, how many resign, just choose to opt out.

In speaking about her organization's culture, Alexis stated that bullying and manipulation were common and that she had observed these types of actions on different levels within the group. She opined that these behaviors continued because "people don't like confrontation. People don't like having to battle for something that they are volunteering for." She explained that in work environments, there are laws and government agencies that will assist with your grievances and complaints, but in many of the Black women's organizations and sororities, there is no such option "when you give so much power, so much power at the top, and no one is willing to have checks and balances." Alexis further expounded,

> But that's what America is. That people get power—and we saw that with the last president, he thought he [could] change the outcome of the election. And so if those rules are not tight and people are not holding them accountable, it's a free-for-all, and you get someone who's unscrupulous, who lies, cheats, and uses their power for their own benefit.

More importantly, Zoe commented, "If you're an average member, you're thinking, 'Do I have any power if they could do that to her?' It makes it hard for them." While reflecting on the culture of one of her organizations, Rose noted that it was not a good fit for her. As such, each

year, as she wrote her dues check, she asked herself, “Why am I in this organization?” Cate also expressed a similar sentiment and described a heartbreaking experience where she asked another sorority member, unknown to her, for her support in an endeavor. The sorority sister responded negatively, stating that she would not support her because she did not know her and would do whatever another sorority sister with a more prestigious title told her to do. In describing the experience, Cate tearfully declared, “There is a hierarchy inside . . . an organization. You asked about organization, right? There is a hierarchy there, depending on who you are, what you do, as in what is your title. All ‘sorors’ are not equal.” Cate emphasized the experience taught her two different things about the culture of her sorority: that many members will do whatever their perceived leaders in the organization tell them to do and that because she was not known or in the “pecking order,” she did not have the right to ask for or expect support from fellow sorority members when someone with a more prominent name told them what to do.

Ella connected her experiences in the corporate world with those in her Black women’s sorority, acknowledging how her views of the organizations were intertwined:

> So I find myself now, especially with the consulting hat that I wear in working with a lot of Fortune 500 companies, understanding the culture of companies more, understanding kind of where they are and even where they’d like to be, because . . . things are ever-changing. So I wouldn’t say that I ever left it, but now it’s more of a true review, if you will, a very cognitive, conscientious review of the culture that they present and what you’ll be doing with the organization.
>
> I didn’t know how much of a lesson that was going to teach me because I think that part of the culture—and not only with the sorority but in other arms with some other organizations and so forth—is that we’re workhorses. Black women are nurturers. We do

> it all. We take it all on. So no matter what's going on, you just keep going. That's kind of our way of life. So I didn't realize how much I needed to make sure that I understood that it's okay. Not everything's going to be perfect. Sometimes you have to take a step back, and just because you're taking a step back doesn't put you in a bad position if you're aiming to be something bigger in the sorority or you're aiming to do something different with your career, or whatever it may be.

In describing the diversity that creates the culture in Black women's organizations and sororities, Madison provided the following description:

> Women's organizations are like none other, especially Black women's organizations, because you have the frenemy aspect [and] you have the social-climbing aspect. There are so many layers. It's like a big onion. There's so much to peel back with Black women's organizations. And under each layer is a different type of Black woman. We are not all the same.

Zoe sadly declared,

> I do think it's sad that sometimes Black women, because there are not many spaces for us, will compromise themselves to remain in those spaces as opposed to trying to change the spaces so that you can keep up the same way that you would at your job or any other spaces of your life.

However, Irene concluded that despite the diversity, members of Black women's organizations and sororities—leaders and followers—should strive to maintain the culture and the character of their groups, reinforcing the values upon which the organizations were founded. When an organization or sorority consciously makes this decision and adheres to the values of why the organization was created, Irene remarked, "then that's probably good."

RQ2: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence Members' Decisions to Speak Openly or Moderate/Restrict Their Voices in Interactions With Leaders of the Organization?

Participants spoke freely about their decisions to moderate their voice. Throughout the interviews, and as indicated in Table 3, voice moderation was a conscious decision and often occurred after participants considered the ramifications for using their voices, the significance of the situation, and their values in relation to their personality. However, these factors were not seen as silencing but more as personal decisions.

Table 3

Factors That Influence Members' Decisions to Use or Moderate Their Voices

Recurring remark/theme	*n*
Ramifications of using voice	9
Significance of the situation	8
Personality and values	7

Personality and Values. The intersection of personality and values was a core component in the participants' decision to use their voice in Black women's organizations and sororities. All of the participants expressed an opinion on the impact their values had on their decision to use their voice. However, their responses differed depending on their personality. Madison was very forthright and stated,

> Everyone has a different personality, and you have that one that is going to constantly push the envelope no matter what. She's going to open her mouth no matter what. And then you have other ones that tend to go back and forth between that. Yeah, I don't find it's one way or the other with people.

As a demonstration of this, Madison referenced how she modified her voice once she became a leader in her organization. Before attaining a leadership position, she detailed how her perception of her organization's leaders was not favorable and how she was always direct and outspoken. However, once she became a leader, she "tempered" who she was and "became overly bubbly" to make sure no one thought she was mean-spirited. When explaining why she did this, she noted that as a leader, she was more self-aware but also more conscious of others' words and actions. She further expounded, "I think in learning and working with people to see the bigger picture, it's hard for a regular chapter-level member to understand the ins and outs of regional and national leadership." Irene, who is very outspoken, remarked,

> I'm not stupid. I'm not one to call stuff out every time I get an idea or a thought. I'm very selective about that, and I [know] how to choose my points because you can't call it out all of the time because people turn a deaf ear to you. But when I do call out, people pay attention.

Grayson reflected on her upbringing when addressing the importance of her voice. She praised her mother and grandmother for their consistent reminders to "use her voice." She said they told her "to speak on what is happening with [her]. It's okay to feel your feelings. It's how you navigate" to the other side. Grayson asserted that this prompting enabled her to experience good mental health and maintain a positive disposition. Citing courage, Irene commented she had "always been able to express" herself and was amazed at the success she had achieved within her Black women's organizations and sororities. Zoe provided insight into her upbringing, noting that her parents were advocates for equal education and other societal issues that affected people of color in their community. As such, using her voice was a principal component of her

upbringing. Her past experiences and present practices provided her with the tools necessary to speak up for those she represented and against actions and people intent on doing harm.

Throughout her tenure in these groups, Irene emphasized her use of voice to express her disagreement with actions and advocate for members of her organization, whether she was their representative or not. Marilyn concurred with Irene and the others, asserting she had always been a person who was herself and spoke her mind when she felt the need to do so. Addison also defended the idea of speaking freely, stating, "I do not bite my tongue, and if I have something to say on behalf of the people I represent, I will say it."

Pointing out that she is independent and outspoken, Addison shared that she would not be "hushed or quieted," as speaking on behalf of those she represents is her duty as a true leader, whether those in leadership desire to hear what she has to say or not. Addison found comfort in sharing her opinion, and when an organization was not interested in hearing from her, she retorted, it was "probably not the organization for me."

In referencing the use of her voice in her sorority, Ella stressed, "I've always been an outspoken woman." Throughout her tenure in the group, she had the opportunity to take nuggets of wisdom from each leader in the organization with whom she had interactions, thus allowing her to learn and grow. Although Ella asserted she is a person who will ask anyone anything, she also argued that as members of these organizations "it is important that we learn from our history," noting that the ability to move forward is contingent upon knowing where you have come from.

Zoe described her experience in joining her Black women's organization. Before she joined, the person who sponsored her for membership emphasized she was "going to be in leadership right away . . . contribute . . . speak up." As this aligned with her upbringing and

profession, she felt she "knew how to speak up" and believed that the organization's culture and environment would foster these traits among its members. However, she later learned that the environment was "not a safe space [and] there are many [members] who feel it is not a safe space."

Madison summed up the interaction between personality and one's willingness to use their voice by stating, "Making an argument of something to that vein comes natural for me, and it may not come as natural for someone who is not . . . used to being verbose with their opinion." She noted that some people speak up because "that's just who they are and [that's] their personality." She gleefully asserted that she is "very passionate about my truth," so she did not have a problem expressing her voice. But she has seen others with issues. She chuckled that there are people who, when confronted with a problem or conflict, decide to "let it ride." Letting it ride did not sit well with Ella's personality or values. She unabashedly proclaimed, "I have to be true to me before I can be true to anyone else, and so she's going to speak her mind regardless of how others perceive her opinion." Ella concluded that it takes a strong-willed individual to say there is a problem out loud in the face of the multitude who are willing to "let things smooth over," even when they recognize that there is a problem deserving of their attention.

Significance of Situation Versus Voice Usage. Ella discussed the numerous surveys and think tanks she conducted as a leader in her sorority: "Yes! I want them to have a voice." She explained that all Black women's organizations and sororities are structured in a manner that allows for fluidity

> where individuals can definitely speak their mind, but that does not always happen because sometimes members don't feel comfortable talking to leadership, don't feel

> comfortable going to the mic. Sometimes, they are more comfortable voicing their opinions by completing a survey where they can be anonymous.

In addressing her use of voice, Grace opined that in her organizational setting, her willingness to speak depended on her "comfort level and how open the leader is hearing feedback from [the members] of the organization." In speaking generally, she noted, "If you're uncomfortable, sometimes you don't speak out because there are very vocal people in the group. And you're being respectful of everybody's ideas and don't want to go into battle." A short time later, Grace added that when dealing with leadership, she thinks that

> challenging the leader in front of the body sometimes won't get you where you need to go and, so you have to choose your words carefully, you have to communicate, be very clear when you're speaking in front of the group so that you are not getting the ambiguity or the unclearness that you are trying to resolve.

Hence, Grace desired to "go a different route or work behind the scenes" instead of directly addressing leadership in a meeting or other public setting.

In response to a situation where no one spoke up about the actions of their leader, Grayson asked,

> What type of environment or culture is being created under this leadership where people don't feel like they are free to speak up? Is this a psychologically safe environment for people to push back and say something different? How will this impact the more strategic things that we need to do in [this] organization if this very petty thing is happening this way?

Grayson further opined she "would speak the loudest" in situations where someone's actions could adversely impact the communities that her organization or sorority served, such as if there

were financial improprieties, in situations where the actions of the leader conflict with her values, and in instances where the information being presented or the actions taken would hurt or harm one of the organization's members. For Grayson, using voice in any of these situations was "nonnegotiable."

Alexis offered a situation where the organizational culture allowed a leader to progress through the ranks of her organization despite disruptive behavior that adversely affected the organization and the membership. The leader's actions caused her to "sit out" and "say nothing" because the leader had already demonstrated her incompetence and self-interest. Angered by the leader's actions, Alexis argued, "I knew what a leader was, and she wasn't a leader. And she created havoc because no one wanted to stand up, and people always want[ed] to play nice." Regarding the organization's culture, Alexis declared her willingness to stand up to "evil and wrong, but [she] is not an island by herself. And so that didn't work."

Zari stated that she has never felt she could not speak up in her organizations. However, she also indicated that the organization and the significance of what she wanted to say directly affected whether she chose to voice her concerns. Zoe explained that though she may have had strong feelings, if what she had to say was not for the good of the whole and she felt the membership of the organization was not in agreement or the majority did not align with her position, then there was no point raising her concerns.

Irene also indicated that she had never felt intimidated or that her voice was being repressed, as her practice had been to "always call out situations." She attributed her use of voice to personal courage. However, from Taylor's perspective, the environment of her organization was not always conducive to expressing her voice. To support this contention, she offered the conduct of her organization's president as an example: "Sometimes I just don't think she realizes

how her tone and how she speaks to people and the tone or whatever, how she may come off." She expounded on this comment by describing an interaction between the chapter president and a new member who volunteered to chair a committee. While giving a report, the new member's delivery was flawed because she was unfamiliar with the process. Although it was evident to others that the new member was doing her best, the chapter president responded to her in a demeaning and judgmental manner. Taylor reflected on the president's response, noting her tone was not reflective of a person in leadership as she was impatient, her words were curt, and her mannerisms were not sisterly.

After the meeting, Taylor decided to call the chapter president and confront her about her actions, how the membership perceived her treatment of the new member, and how her response resulted in sympathy for the new member and contempt for her as president. Taylor stressed that behaviors like those were part of the reason the chapter was unable to retain new members. She explained that the behavior was a "turnoff" and advised the leader of the correct way to engage the new member and ensure she learned the proper process. Taylor emphasized that since the new member was new to the chapter and the leadership role, the president should have offered "sympathy, empathy, compassion, understanding, and patience."

Just as Taylor privately confronted the leader of her organization about the situation, Alexis and Grace concurred they were opposed to publicly confronting or correcting the leaders of their organizations, as they felt there was no benefit for the organization or the leader–follower relationship in public confrontation. Grace summed up her beliefs on using her voice to correct a leader:

> I am a rule follower. . . . I will say this: I would not put it to the point where I would challenge the person in a way that would degrade that person or anyone else in the

> organization. So I figure being able to challenge another Black woman is not something I'm comfortable doing in these particular organizations because they're not meant for that. They're really not meant for that.

For Alexis, this meant not only could she not publicly oppose a leader in her organization but also she could not privately oppose the leader with whom she disagreed because her ability to run for elected office was contingent on receiving support from the elected officers. She was told she "could not be out there going against what they say." Thus, she was asked to "keep her mouth shut." Although she was allowed to express her frustrations privately, the leaders admonished Alexis that public venting violated "the unwritten rules." Alexis summed up this experience: "In order for you to move ahead, you have to play some of those games."

Fear or No Fear: The Ramifications of Using One's Voice. In recognizing the potential outcomes of the use of voice, Rose stated,

> I certainly have felt like expressing my thoughts and opinions might get me in trouble, but just by the nature of who I am, I never feel like I can't. I feel like there'll be consequences if I do, and it matters to me. I just take the risk.

Although all participants expressed comfort with using their voices, more than half of the participants mentioned the idea that using their voices might result in "trouble" or that there may be ramifications for using their voices.

Rose further commented that she had no difficulty sharing her voice in one of her organizations, where she was well established. However, in an organization where Rose had not fully established herself, she did not "feel like I've necessarily earned the right." From her perspective, "there is an element in Black female organizations of paying your dues, and I

haven't paid enough dues . . . [and do not] really, necessarily have the right to be heard in the same way" as in other organizations.

Zari indicated that she self silenced or moderated her voice by determining "if [what she has to say] is worth the potential response, if it's really going to help the person, or if they are really going to care." Internally, Zari would ask herself if what she had to say was worth it. If she determined it was, she would raise the issue, but if raising the issue was not suitable for the whole organization and most of the leadership or members did not align with her voice, despite her strong feelings, she would not raise the issue. After weighing her religious beliefs and fiduciary responsibilities, Zoe also made this assessment and decided to use her voice, raising concerns about the activities in her group. According to Zoe, using her voice resulted in threats, intimidation, and retaliation. More importantly, Zoe asserted that because of the retaliation she had endured, "there's a fear throughout the organization" of retribution, causing members to remain silent.

Taylor believed "there are some people you really cannot approach in a sense of correction . . . without some type of backlash." However, she also warned that people are accustomed to management and control and are constantly thinking about how they will retaliate if you, as a member, bring attention to their actions. Taylor declared that retaliation and retribution are always top of mind for these people. Hence, the decision whether to speak or not speak depends on the person who is the subject of the statement and how she perceives the person who will take the feedback. She added that if the person is vindicative, she likely will not speak up or speak out.

Irene asserted that she will always speak if there is something she wants or needs to say, but she agreed that there are members of her organizations who, like current members of the

Republican Party, have taken their voices "underground because they are threatened, intimidated." In Irene's opinion, their decision to remain silent and not express their thoughts or opinions, or "operate underground," may be "self-serving for them" as it "may be better to be quiet or silent and go along with the flow and hope that things change."

In reviewing Alexis's interview, I noted that she did not consider the inability to express herself publicly as silencing. Instead, Alexis associated the request to remain quiet with an effort "do the right thing." Alexis detailed how remaining quiet and being "trustworthy" resulted in her appointment to various positions and election to a mid-level officer position within her organization. However, she also detailed a situation within her organization where a member chose to take a stand and use her voice. That choice resulted in a traumatizing experience for that member and others within the organization.

Marilyn conceded that speaking up and using her voice was a common practice for her and she had never been inhibited from using her voice in her professional career. However, she noted that because there may be costs or peril associated with exercising her voice, she chose not to use her voice in her Black women's organization. She dismissed the use of voice in her organization, concluding there was never an issue of sufficient significance to warrant her speaking up. Because the issues that bothered her were minor, she "never felt like it was worth it to say anything."

Addison offered a scenario that occurred in one of her Black women's organizations. While serving in a role that placed her close to the organization's leader, she heard the leader misrepresent the goals of a group she represented. She felt it necessary to offer a comment to correct the record, contradicting the leader's statement. She explained that in a subsequent conversation, she was informed she "should never, ever speak against that person" because

whatever the leader says goes. Addison took this to mean that she was not allowed to have her thoughts; in that instance, she felt she had been silenced and controlled. However, she continued to speak on behalf of those she represented, and despite the "daggers" she felt coming her way, she continued to speak, stating, "I did not bite my tongue."

Addison expounded on the situation, stating that though she was unsure what would make women in these groups claim a leader could not be questioned, she felt it was a follower mentality that made some people believe they wanted to make their leaders happy. Although Addison did not mind being respectful to those in authority, she stated she "will never bow down" to someone because they are in a position of authority. She commented that there are too many people in Black women's organizations and sororities who believe that the way to get appointments and positions is to acquiesce to the leader's demands. For Addison, this experience curtailed her desire for leadership in the organization for many years and ended her desire to serve in that organization on a national level.

Zari further commented that in her numerous organizations, she has observed leaders display inappropriate behaviors, such as disrespecting members and using unacceptable language or threatening behavior. However, her decision to use her voice to bring attention to their actions depended on who was taking action, what the action was, and what was at the foundation of the response. Zari pointed out that an intervention in this situation must be done at the right time, and it could not be effective if the leader was in the process of having what she called a "breakdown." Zari declared that at that moment, "you can't [correct or engage] them because their mind is not there." However, she added that a "one-on-one [is possible] if the person respects you and is willing to talk with you about it."

On the contrary, Whitney presented an interaction with a senior leader in her organization where she felt encouraged to use her voice. According to Whitney, the senior leader sought her insight and suggestions on how the committee should achieve the group's tasks. In this instance, Whitney suggested the committee offer loose guidance to those they were working with and intervene only if there were problems or issues. The senior leader accepted her advice, and as a younger member who was relatively inexperienced in working at this level in the organization, Whitney stated, "It made me feel empowered that she listened because I have worked with people who will ask me [my] opinion but won't listen." More significantly, this experience left Whitney feeling "great." She perceived the leader in a more favorable light, which translated into respect for her and the work she did for the organization. Their leadership enabled Whitney to speak freely, feel like she had a voice, and engage without fearing retaliation.

RQ3: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Members' Responses to Leaders Who Exhibit Questionable Leadership Styles?

Participant responses to questionable leadership were diverse; however, as seen in Table 4, three primary themes emerged: (a) questioning whether the organization is right for them, (b) speaking up and speaking out to protect their interests, the interests of others, and the integrity of the organization, and (c) going along to get along. For each participant, the decision on how to respond was personal and varied according to the situation and their impression of the impropriety of the conduct.

Table 4

Factors That Influence Member's Responses to Questionable Leadership

Recurring remark/theme	*n*
Speaking up and speaking out	9
Questioning membership	5
Going along to get along	5

Questioning Membership: Is This Organization Right for Me? Cate detailed a situation where a current leader and a future leader of her organization disagreed, and they handled the matter in a manner that was detrimental to her. As a result, she questioned her place and membership in the organization. She questioned the decision not to support her, as she believed leaders are there to represent all members and not just those they perceive as important. Cate recounted how the leadership did not support her because of the potential for conflict with another member and the desire to avoid drama within the organization. However, the decision not to support her made her feel that the time she had not been active in a chapter of the organization was "well spent." Still, more significantly, she questioned her belonging within the organization, as she now understood there to be a "pecking order" and that "maybe she should have spent more time trying to be a little more popular . . . more serious about joining" other organizations.

> Alexis provided a detailed assessment of how members responded to leaders' conduct: Depending on the leader, if it's someone who is honest, trustworthy, and someone you want to follow, people will get behind them. If you have someone who's the opposite, then you go to these conferences, you go to these meetings, there's going to be us against them, there's going to be contention, there's going to be

> disagreements, and it's not going to be for the benefit of [the organization] as our guiding principle[s] were when we started. It's just not a happy place.

In describing an experience with a leader in her sorority, Ella, a manager in her company and lifelong member of her sorority, vehemently asserted,

> You lie, you steal, you cheat, then yes. Wait a minute because that's not the foundation that we were founded on. And to mislead, lie, steal, cheat all these women, I mean, that in itself would really make me question who you are—and we voted you in—and some of our values.

Alexis went on to characterize the members' response to questionable leadership as being

> mesmerized, and a lot of them felt that if she's telling us to do this—and you got five or four other leaders from other regions telling you this is what we're going to do—then they do it. So they follow their leader.

Having observed this mentality during a national election of her organization's leadership, which resulted in the election of someone she believed to be an unscrupulous leader, Alexis expressed her disbelief, exclaiming she "felt like a deer with the headlights coming at me." Consequently, Alexis's comments provided a framework for the views many participants expressed.

For Grayson, the issue of how to respond to a leader who demonstrates questionable leadership equated to a values conflict. She indicated that when she observes conduct inconsistent with her values, she questions whether membership in the organization is for her. She noted, "Even in my last organization, one of the reasons I left is because there was a values conflict, and I decided to move on."

Consistent with Grace, Marilyn echoed, "If there were something huge, like if the organization did something that was inconsistent with my values or my beliefs, or I felt they

were behaving improperly, I would probably just leave the organization rather than try to speak up because I just don't imagine it would be very likely to change" their response. Marilyn expressly stated that she would have a values conflict in instances of "gross financial mismanagement . . . anything illegal, or anything against my core personal values, like the autonomy of my body and my decisions." For her, these behaviors would be intolerable. For example, she noted that in one organization with which she was not affiliated, the members did not express concern for the leader's actions until knowledge about those actions "reached . . . extreme levels" and became public. According to Marilyn, it was only then that the members spoke up and expressed their displeasure with the leader's actions. Marilyn further noted,

> There have been situations that I've become aware of in terms of what members to welcome into the organization or invite into the organization, where if a person's clique says, "Okay. No, we don't want that person," that person was shuttered—or trying to force other people out of the organization or out of positions of rightful management or leadership just because of shared opinions of people in their personal friend groups that are not necessarily in alignment with the organization.

Marilyn argued that these efforts by the leader are "bullshit at the highest level." She further asserted that leaders who practice these types of tactics

> impede the objectives and the reputation of the organization. Because if it's a national organization, it's doing more than serving its members. It is also trying to advance that community of members and like-minded people [from] a national perspective. And when we have pettiness like that, that is setting the goals of the national organization back, and it's putting us back into, let's just get together in each other's living room and, just anyway, be some Podunk group of folks.

Barring these types of actions, Marilyn explained that with her current level of disenchantment with her organization,

> I just kind of just sit back, and I go with the flow, and I say, okay, how much do I write this check for? And when is it due? And I just don't. It's just that nothing is big enough for me to feel like I need to or want to say something.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out. Alexis, Madison, Irene, Grayson, Zoe, Grace, Marilyn, Addison, and Ella all spoke about the importance of using their voices and their reluctance to be silenced by the leaders of their organizations. In some instances, these participants equated their voices to lessons learned from their mothers and grandmothers, who advocated for them to express themselves readily.

Alexis vehemently stated that she repeatedly confronted a leader who lied, stole, cheated, and defamed people she did not like. In one instance, Alexis stated that she called the leader a liar to her face; however, the leader's responses when confronted consisted of fake greetings and artificial smiles.

Madison described a situation where the president of one of her organizations did not acknowledge delegates who had questions:

> [She] just flat out did not acknowledge them. There's nowhere in *Robert's Rules of Order* that allows you to ignore the delegation. When *Robert's Rules of Order* and the national organization's constitutional bylaws are being just ignored, or if there are rules that are being broken and no one's being held accountable, accountability is a big thing. If the leaders aren't accountable, then how in the heck do you expect members to be accountable?

Madison commented in response to another incident where the leader refused to let her speak, she was "very vocal in my displeasure. . . . I definitely said everything that I wanted to say." Among the members present for the incident, responses ranged from not knowing she had been muted but understanding why she was adamant in response to the muting to feelings she "should have just let it be."

Grayson described an incident at one of her meetings where a response to a topic became very disruptive. Although she could not recollect the events exactly, she recalled the chair of the meeting saying something to the member and the member's response triggering the leader and others within the room, causing an argument. Grayson believed the incident "was on the edge of just being very inappropriate, and [members] had to intervene." Grayson concluded the leader allowed the member to trigger them, thereby causing them "to act outside of their character, in that very public forum where you are there to exemplify the leadership of the chapter." Grayson asserted that this incident did not

> inform me in my perception of them either way, but I did have a conversation with them about being able to maintain your cool even when you are challenged in that way, and how you can deescalate things by addressing them in other forums rather than the very public forum.

Grace reiterated Marilyn's sentiment and strongly objected to inappropriate behavior by an organization's leadership and how such behavior warranted a response:

> If I feel it is inappropriate, then I'm speaking up. It's important that inappropriate behavior not be a part of these organizations. Because we already are having to pull ourselves together to get the things . . . we need by being a part of the organization. If it does something inappropriate, then you have to speak up because you don't want the

> entire body to suffer from it. Or the name or the legacy of these organizations to suffer for something that's inappropriate. And so you do have to speak up, and whatever the proper mechanism is for speaking up within that organization, me as a member of that, I have done that.

Going Along to Get Along. Irene spoke to those who elected to remain silent in the face of inappropriate or unacceptable behavior. She protested that for those who remain silent, it becomes a question of how long they will go along to get along instead of standing up for what is right. Noting that this is an issue that not only occurs in politics but is also present in Black women's organizations, Irene argued,

> You have some agenda that that silent person has. Now, that agenda could be I just don't need any drama in my life. That could be the agenda, and that's okay. I get that. But another agenda could be "I want her to be my friend because she gives the best parties," "I want to stand with this particular clique because I want to be with what I perceive as the in-group," or "That's the crew I'm trying to be a part of."

Irene argued that this type of subgrouping within groups is prevalent and that this type of action prompts the silencing of voices, as some will choose to be accepted even though the decision will result in them giving up. Irene concluded by saying,

> Ownership [of the objectionable behavior is] not just on the leader, who may be inappropriate, but I put it on those [who have allowed their] voices . . . to be cowered because they have their own agenda, whatever their agenda is. It's their own agenda. It's not that they're without thought because they will get in other settings and say how they really feel, but they won't say it in a certain setting.

Ella responded that when one achieves leadership in Black women's organizations and sororities, the expected level of professionalism is not always maintained, as each leader has their way of addressing issues. According to Ella, leaders must consistently remind others that though decisions may appear personal, they are professional, based on the knowledge and information the leader has. Although a past leader may have responded in a certain way, the current leader may treat the situation differently.

However, Ella also noted that the leader's decision may not always be proper. When she could not perform at the level expected by the leader of her organization, the leader questioned her dedication to the sisterhood. For Ella, this behavior was questionable and raised concerns about the leader's integrity since her decision to withdraw from the position was a personal one and one in which she shared very private details to ensure the leader was aware of the magnitude of the situation that demanded her time and attention.

According to Zoe, some leaders exhibit inappropriate behaviors. In response to this assertion, Zoe offered her thoughts on leaders appropriately disclosing inappropriate behavior. She described three situations where different organization leaders disclosed inappropriate behavior by others in front of the organization's membership. In one instance, she noted how the leader ran the organization with poise, revealing how a former employee had participated in financial misappropriation. Zoe was in awe of how the leader stood before the membership, forthright, revealing what had happened: "I saw that as a vision of a model of leadership." In another reflection, Zoe recalled a situation where corporate funds were stolen. She added that the person responsible for protecting the organization's assets tearfully appeared before the membership, professing the abuse she had endured by those seeking to conceal the inappropriate behavior. Despite these demonstrations of leadership, Zoe speculated that when it comes to these

organizations, “There’s some who just see the social part [of the group]. I think [that in some of these organizations], you just kind of go along to get along.” She added, “I think some [see it differently]. I wouldn’t say they don’t love the organization; I think they have [a different perspective] of what the organization is than I do.”

Madison equated inappropriate behavior with abuse of power, declaring, “Abuse of power is a grate on my nerves.” Emphasizing the importance of integrity and confidentiality and how she takes all these issues seriously, she considered efforts to intentionally manipulate rules while in a leadership position as criminal. She asserted that in one of her organizations, the leaders did not care about the rules or how their actions affected other people. She concluded by vehemently asserting, “I think for me, that is probably the biggest problem that I had—with leaders that just do the shit however they want to do it regardless of the rules.”

For Clarice, the inappropriate behavior was her own. She disclosed she openly professed her dislike for another member of her sorority while sitting as a leader in a chapter meeting. Although her words accidentally slipped from her mouth, she was more shocked by the idea that none of her sorority sisters reprimanded her for doing so. She woefully acknowledged,

> The space of leadership, you are an influencer. I don’t care how you cut that, and as an influencer, you know that people follow behind you. You know that some people do what you do. The reason why as leaders, elected leaders [and] appointed leaders, we have to be very mindful of our influencing and being appropriate [is] because there’s always somebody behind us. If they see you doing it and nothing ever happens to you, they’re going to do it too, and then it’s going to be a ball out of control.

Clarice concluded no one possessed the confidence to say anything to her and that she believed they refused to say anything because of fear of retaliation. However, she also felt that some

members may have justified what she said because it was a common opinion, and others excused her words, saying she did not "really mean it like that."

RQ4: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Members' Willingness to Adhere to Practices and Protocols and How This Decision Affects Morale and Commitment to the Organization When They Choose Self Silencing in Response to the Leader's Leadership Style?

According to Grace, "The leader really does impact how the organization moves." She further stated that how the leader reacts determines whether the organization's membership is engaged or disengaged. While analyzing the data to determine the factors that influence members' willingness to adhere to practices and protocols and how these factors influence morale and member commitment, I identified the three themes in Table 5: (a) the need for a leader to be knowledgeable and responsive to those they lead, (b) the importance of the leader identifying as a member of the group and not just as the head, and (c) the significance of uniformly applying the rules and governing documents to everyone, regardless of their status within the organization.

Table 5

Factors That Influence Adherence to Practices and Protocols and the Impact on Morale, Commitment, and Self Silencing

Recurring remark/theme	*n*
Governance	13
Looks at the needs of constituents	9
Part of the group, not just the head	7
Safe space	6

A Good Leader Looks at the Needs of Her Constituents. Irene detailed a story of how a leader of her organization put her needs and dislikes before the best interests of a member and, ultimately, the group. As a woman with a strong voice and a deep understanding of Black women's organizations and sororities, Irene told how a leader in her organization attempted to thwart her rise within the chapter's organizational structure because she did not like her. Despite a long history of electing the group's vice president as the next president, the sitting president informed Irene, a sitting vice president, that she was not prepared to serve as president. Although Irene had been a hard worker and had excelled in her duties and responsibilities, she was passed over. The group selected a previous president to serve a second term as the group's leader. Although Irene was hurt, she continued her membership in the group. Ironically, shortly after the new president was installed, she tapped Irene to serve in a leadership role in her administration, affirming Irene's value to the chapter and the organization. More importantly, in that appointed role, Irene garnered repeated recognition for the chapter, demonstrating her talents on a larger platform. In speaking about the intricacies of Black women's organizations and sororities and how relationships impact outcomes, Irene concluded, "You have to be so affirmed and solid within your own self that you're not going to walk away."

Like Irene, many other participants expressed their desire to be heard. As Grace passionately conveyed,

> They want their voice heard just like I want my voice heard. And we have a common goal there, and so it's important that you are able to listen and hear what they want. You may not be able to act on it all the time for every single person, but you do the best you can and move forward with the laws and process or whatever is going to impact the most people in a positive way.

Grace noted that the desire to be heard is not singular among the members of Black women's organizations and sororities but is a normal feeling among members as they also want to hear from each other. Grace described how she was appointed to a position where she felt comfortable discussing feedback and insights from the chapter's membership with the leader. She stated that in this role and as a lower-level leader, she could identify what most of the members wanted for their group, solicit the leader's opinion, and aid in formulating plans to address the membership's concerns.

Like Irene, Grace stated that the leader of her organization reinforced her value by asking her to serve in a leadership role. Also, like Irene, Grace saw the role as an opportunity to hear the voice of the members and to be their voice in interactions with the leadership. Ironically, both ladies felt their roles within their organizations were to "speak truth to power."

Consistent with Grace, Alexis echoed, "A good leader looks out [for] what's best for the people that she represents." She further explained that, in her opinion, when a leader fails to do this, she is more likely to focus on herself. In agreement, Addison shared, "A good leader looks out for what's best for the people she represents," noting that the failure to recognize this necessity renders the demonstration of leadership "a show about yourself."

Grayson presented a favorable view of leadership that had a positive impact on her perception of the leader and her Black women's organization:

> The chapter president reached out to me for a conversation about the opportunities that existed in the leadership ranks of the organization. We met. She was able to walk me through how the skill sets and my abilities that she knew of me fit an open role on the executive team. And through that conversation, [she] just created a level of excitement in me about the opportunity that not only the position offered but partnering with like-

> minded professional women and the skills that I could obtain by serving in that way. And . . . I did eventually accept the challenge to come on her leadership team and have not regretted it.

Cate emphasized that being a leader requires the leader "to be there for everyone, and you have to be present enough to know that everybody's place is not the same." For Cate, this means the leader must be the same leader for each member when addressing their concerns. The leader must continue to be direct and make sure the member does not feel less valued or appreciated than any other member and that they are not swayed by hierarchy or money. According to Cate, all members should feel they too are welcome, "that they have a role, and that as their leader, you are there to help them and pour into them. That's leadership."

Rose provided insight into an experience with a leader who did not recognize the need for leaders to treat everyone the same, a sentiment Cate also expressed. Rose described how a leader embedded herself in a process where it would have been in her best interest to remain neutral and follow the proper procedures. Instead, the leader took a stance, adopted a position, and did "everything in her power to ensure an advantage for another participant in the process." Reflecting on this experience, Rose warned, "A good leader should trust the process and let it unfold." She further articulated that she did not think it

> models the right behaviors for leaders to be manipulative, to break the rules, to bend the rules, to [be] biased, be petty, and, frankly, to choose sides because at the end of the day . . . it doesn't feel good when you then feel like you don't have the support of that leader that you had previously supported.

According to Rose, the leader's actions deprived the membership of their opportunity to participate in the process and make their own decisions.

Taylor added that sometimes a leader needs to listen, making sure that their members feel they are being heard. While Marilyn shared sentiments consistent with those of Cate and Alexis, she argued, “What is the point of being in leadership if you do not represent the people you are leading?” She went on to state that “leadership is not for you to floss and push your own agenda. It is for you to actually . . . represent and advance and unify the body of members.”

Responding to whether she felt the leader welcomed her comments or if she felt appreciated, Taylor reluctantly muttered, “Sometimes I feel invisible.” Although she murmured that she does not require attention or being out front, she acknowledged the need of all people to feel appreciated and be recognized for contributing.” As she laughed, Taylor noted a member of one of her organizations always received rewards, joking that when the member does anything, even buying shoes, she wants everyone to know. She concluded that to be a good leader “you have to be able to see everybody even though they are not in your face all the time.”

Ella, a human resources professional and a leader in her organization, provided insight into the needs of her members. Analogizing her experience as a leader in corporate America, where she learned to balance her management responsibilities while also championing individual members of her team, Ella admonished that not everyone has had the same experience, nor do they have the same level of motivation and commitment. Thus, a leader must practice patience and inclusivity while trying to understand that they come from different walks of life. Ella urged that leaders should practice high levels of inclusivity, engage all types of members, and recognize the power of inclusivity.

Be a Part of the Group and Not Just the Head. Recognizing that leaders were once members of the organization, Addison emphasized, “A good leader needs to understand the needs of her constituents,” and a leader should “be a part of the group and not just the head.”

Meanwhile, Taylor warned, “A good leader should be willing to follow sometimes.” She went on to state that leaders must be open to listening to members’ suggestions and recommendations. She implored leaders to understand that just because they serve in a leadership role, they do not know everything, and they can gain insight from the membership. Grace asserted,

> Sometimes people are in leadership positions not just because they’re there for the altruistic piece of the organization, but sometimes they’re there for the recognition. And the level of the position is important to them, and that’s where their thought is. I am at the top of this organization, and this is what we are going to do. And sometimes they forget they could do something that is inappropriate.

When describing the characteristics of a good leader, Irene insisted that selflessness is an essential quality for those seeking to lead. She proclaimed,

> It’s not about you. When the leader thinks it’s about her, then she’s going to be a failure. It really has to be about the organization. It has to be about the members of the organization and what’s best for them. It is not about needing credit for anything. Because when the organization is performing at its optimum, you’re going to get the credit anyway. It’s about motivating others to release their best energies, their discretionary energies, on behalf of advancing the organization. It’s about building bridges and connecting people.

Irene acknowledged that she knew people who walked away from their memberships in some Black women’s organizations because they were not elected to leadership positions. However, her response to their action was that their pursuits were not about the organization but about personal gratification. For Irene, leadership is always about the organization and never

about the individual member's goals or personal validation. She noted she was "self-actualized and affirmed" before pursuing membership in any of her groups.

Grace insisted, "Great leaders are those who are able to lead and function in a group of women. It is about being able to be a part of the group, not just the head of the group." She believed that great leaders in Black women's organizations and sororities should focus on being part of the group, working together for the betterment of all—specifically the members, their families, and their communities. Rose and Grayson agreed and offered insights into two different styles of leadership that align with the idea that an effective leader should identify with and as a member of the group.

In referencing one of her groups, Rose commented that a good leader possesses a servant leader mindset, believing they are "here to serve the people who elected me versus I am here to be served by the people who elected me." Later, she noted that in these cooperative organizations, such as Black women's organizations and sororities, "the organization is only as good as the membership and the leadership." Rose went on to state that in these groups, there must be an understanding that everyone is a volunteer, regardless of whether they are a member or a leader. The organization's success relies on this understanding because everyone must be fully committed to the promise the group personifies.

Grayson expressed that her desired leadership style is best labeled as "human centered," which is a type of leadership where the leader leads from the heart and the primary focus is on human interaction. According to Grayson, this leadership style entails meeting people where they are to understand their perspectives. In this model, the leader creates space for members to ask questions and challenge the status quo, and familiarity is a precursor to action.

Clarice provided insight into the difficulty many leaders face in balancing their roles as leaders and members: “When you’re in leadership, the moment your friend steps in a space, you have to really be able to compartmentalize your level of leadership. You being an elected official with your friends, your family, . . . oftentimes, that can’t be separated.” Clarice noted that the leaders should be fair, but when their friends are involved, they have a difficult time managing the relationship. She explained leaders’ mindset: “I want to lead you, and I want you to serve with me. But I don’t quite know how handle having to tell you that you are slacking on your job.”

Survive, Thrive, or Head Toward Demise: Governance and Member Commitment. In a moment of reflection, Cate remarked, “In this climate . . . frankly, as a people, we look for our leaders.” She went on to state that we search for leaders: “We need people who have the ability, the wherewithal, to stand up and let their voices be heard. We need to operate as a collective. [However,] we are as divided, probably, as ever.” As her mind raced, Cate warned that there has been a shift in Black women’s organizations and sororities where the divisions between the haves and the have-nots have become more obvious. She cautioned,

> Leadership is about setting the tone, providing a culture, establishing a culture, maintaining a culture. And if that culture is divisive, that’s the problem. That’s a leadership problem. Everything comes from the top. [But] if the culture [is] inclusive, that’s [also] due to leadership.

Whether a Black women’s organization or sorority survives, thrives, or suffers the ultimate demise depends on a variety of factors. For the participants, the most prevalent issues were the actions and abilities of leaders, their perception of the organization as a safe space, and the organization’s adherence to and enforcement of their governing documents. Grace noted that

members of Black women's organizations and sororities either work together as servant leaders in the community or they do not. But when an organization and a member are not moving in the same direction, the member is more likely to temporarily or permanently disaffiliate from the organization. She described an experience in one of her organizations where the leaders and members worked together to "collectively move forward" in advancing the group's objectives. For her, this was a positive experience where collaboration among the members allowed the group to achieve its goals. However, she noted that in this same group, a new leader was elected, and the new leader's style made her

> withdraw and not want to engage in the organization, which—I think it's unfortunate. Because all of these Black women[']s organizations collectively have to work together, and we respect each other and value each other's opinions. And then when you have somebody that comes in and really just wants to set their vision, everything's about what they want, how they want it. It can get tiring.

In speaking about the importance of a strong leader in Black women's organizations and sororities, Grace emphasized,

> It's important to have a strong leader in these African American organizations because these organizations are really meant for us because we get left out of [the] mainstream a lot. And so these are organizations [are there] to help us personally make it through all the things that are happening to us as African American women and African American families.
>
> If I'm in an environment where I don't see me, I don't hear me, [then] how do I make it through that? How do I pursue and move forward? And it is seeking out those that look like you, those that have the same background maybe as you, and so that you

> are able to have that support as you move through whatever trauma that we might experience as Black people in America today.

Grace concluded that having a strong leader is of paramount importance for Black women's organizations or sororities because "we [as Black women] are all coming to these organizations for something."

Cate argued, "Members have to feel valued, but they also have to feel like they are receiving something of value." For Cate, leaders and members need to demonstrate "if [they] are a part, or something, how much do [they] believe in it, and are [they] willing to advocate for whatever that is? How hard are [they] willing to work for it? Are [they] willing to bring in others?" Cate argued that is all a part of membership in Black women's organizations and sororities. She asserted, "Members are, in some cases, inactive due to lack of direction sometimes and sometimes lack self-motivation, which can either come from inside of themselves or something wrong with that organization."

Grayson described leaders as needing to have "strategic insight," declaring that "there is an element of [a] kind of strategic insight, something where you understand where the organization needs to go and you have that insight to bring everybody with you." She alluded to an interaction with a leader regarding an organizational requirement, stating that throughout the conversation she felt the leader was not listening to her. She quipped that the leader was patronizing and seemed to be thinking, "I'm going to let you say what you have to say, but I already know what I am going to do." Although the leader's response was undesirable, Grayson concluded that it was not about her, and she left that conversation with her sense of value intact. She also felt this woman, who would ascend the leadership ranks, lacked the critical leadership characteristic of self-awareness.

Grace echoed this opinion and expressed her desire to surround herself with people she felt were aligned with her values and the goals she wished to accomplish in her life. Grace asserted that when she saw something in her organization not going in the proper direction and the leaders bending the rules or their actions not aligning with the bylaws or governing documents, then she saw the organization and its leadership as problematic.

Grace commented that leadership in some Black women's organizations and sororities takes a lot of courage. She specifically argued that assuming the roles of the president or vice president takes a lot of support and a high degree of leadership skills, as the leader must be able to take control, be proactive, and have the desire to create change. She further stated, "If you have someone who is not as strong in a leadership group for one of these Black organizations, it could not be good for them. It could not be good." Under these circumstances, Grace argued, "You could lose membership, and you never want to lose membership because these are your sisters and these sisters have families attached to them." She believed organizations should never want to lose a member due to poor leadership.

Does Membership Guarantee a Safe Space? Like Grace, Cate, Taylor, Irene, and Zoe shared their thoughts on Black women's organizations and sororities as safe spaces. Grace and Cate described their entry into the Black women's organization and sorority setting as the result of attending college in majority White settings with limited access to the minority—specifically, the Black community. Cate, who had chartered two chapters of her sorority, stated that her initial effort was guided by a need for a space where young Black women could be "prideful" in their history and accomplishments while celebrating each other in an environment where they shared a common vision. The second reason stemmed from the need to minimize isolation on their majority campus while connecting to a much more extensive network of Black women, where

they could experience the bonds of sisterhood on a much grander scale. Although Cate considered their sorority a safe space, she explained,

> We needed . . . more than a safe space because I do believe that our friendships provided that. We needed a place where we could come together in pride and be proud of our accomplishments as African Americans and celebrate it.

Taylor explained that as members of a Black women's organization or sorority, the group should present itself in a way that encourages others "to feel you want to be a part of, you want to feel comfortable, you want to feel safe." She further explained that she would not want to "be a part of something [where] I feel like every time I go, I'm getting beat up there, I'm getting negative tones and looks, and all of this. Who wants to pay to be a part of something like that? I don't."

Irene described how Black women face numerous demands such as marriage, family, career, bills, and aging parents. When they enter the meeting room for their group, all of that baggage comes with them, but in that room, for a brief period, they can let it all go. In support of this, she offered the story of a former member of her organization who had served in a high-level position in her city. This woman was the subject of much abuse, and the media constantly swarmed her. Irene said, "It is never a good day in the press for her." Despite this, she never missed any of her organization's meetings. She would always sit quietly in the back of the room with a glass of wine. Although she actively participated when needed and offered assistance with service efforts, being front and center when necessary, she mostly kept to herself. After constant abuse, the woman decided to leave the city, and in her final meeting, she thanked the group and stated, "This is the only place that I could come to in town and just be [me]." However, not everyone shared this sentiment in the same way. In speaking about her Black women's

organization and after detailing many of the improprieties of the organization's leadership, Zoe emphatically exclaimed, "It's not a safe space. There are many who do not feel that it is a safe space."

Does Governance Matter? Whether referring to governance, bylaws, policies and procedures, or rules, 80% of participants mentioned the written and unwritten rules that define various Black women's organizations and sororities. From descriptions of organizations that strictly adhere to governing documents to organizations that adjust their rules to thwart members' rights to push the agendas of their leaders, governance is a significant issue that directly affects the ability of Black women's organizations and sororities to survive and thrive and may ultimately cause their group's demise.

On the subject of following bylaws and governing documents, Zari strongly effused, "You don't change your constitution and bylaws and make those decisions. I disagree with that. So I do believe in following the constitution of bylaws." Zoe also emphasized that "governance matters," and for a leader, "governance experience is huge." When referencing the duties of the members in Black women's organizations and sororities, Grayson stated,

> A member in any organization of this kind [should seek] to understand the core tenets behind the founding of the organization, what we're here to do, get as much into the operations. You need to know, like, what do your bylaws say? What do your policies and procedures say? [And understand] how you're going to impact the community.

She further commented that her organizations did not reference the bylaws, policies, and procedures enough. She surmised that since many of the members were not familiar with the governing documents and did not know what should be occurring, they did not question what

was happening. Moreover, since they had not read the governing documents, they were unaware if the documents were being applied consistently and adequately.

Like Grayson, participants Zoe, Madison, Alexis, Grace, Addison, Rose, Whitney, and Zoe offered their thoughts on their organizations' use of and commitment to their governing documents. Zoe reassured her commitment to governance, referring to herself as a "governance nerd" for her love of bylaws, policies, and procedures. She emphasized her passion for making sure people understand the governing documents and expressed her disdain for those who improvise, noting that knowledge of the bylaws allows members to challenge leaders when they make statements inconsistent with the governing documents, seek to apply the rules inconsistently, allow a benefit for themselves but not others, or take actions that deprive members of due process. Zoe adamantly argued, "People need to read . . . so that they know how to speak up and be willing to fight and do whatever it is to preserve the organization." Zoe's final thoughts on this subject were, "If you don't do what's right for the organization, how does the organization survive?"

Consistent with Zoe, Rose spoke about the reluctance of members of Black women's organizations and sororities to learn their organization's governance and policies. She observed,

> People don't want to learn the governance of the organization. At the end of the day, you should be heard, but you have to be heard within the rules. So, there are times in a meeting if we follow parliamentary procedure and you need to be called on, then you got to wait to be called on. Now, that doesn't mean the presiding officers should play games and ignore you, but it also doesn't mean that you just get to stand up and be disruptive. So, it's a two-way street. I think, for me, I think that it's important for you to be consistent and fair with how you explain the rules and you hold everybody accountable to

> the same rules. And if leaders do that, I think that they are operating appropriately. If they abuse it and get sneaky with it, that's not [appropriate].

Madison also expressed her thoughts on the need for members to know the governance, likening the actions of the leaders in one of her organizations to a game. She stated,

> Well, not necessarily the game, but just even in a meeting, if you look at it like a game, you've got to know the rules in order to play the game. So, in order to [effectively] participate [in] membership, you've got to know your governance. In order to participate in the organization, you've got to know the rules. So it's like, if you don't know the rules, [then] you don't know how to navigate the organization.

Frustrated, Madison also quipped that members must, at minimum, know the rules to know if leaders are manipulating them. Disappointed, she shared, "Most of the people in organizations do not know their governance at all. And those who do, you either are labeled as a rule banger, or you're challenged." She sadly stated,

> If the rules are always being changed and massaged, then how do you know how to play? Sometimes you just got to maneuver around that because I think so long as you . . . I always color within the lines. I can only control [myself]. I can't control anybody else. I can't control what they do. I can't control anything else. But at the end of the day, for me, so long as I color between the lines, I'm comfortable. I'm not going to let someone make me go beyond the box.

Alexis, speaking about her organization and the abuse of the organization's governing documents, declared, "It's [in] our guiding documents that say that the membership gets to vote, and I call it shared governance because we all get a little piece to say what we want." However, she stated that though the organization collectively votes on a set of bylaws, policies, and

procedures, the leaders choose not to follow the approved documents and then terrorize people who say, “Hey, you’re not following the policies and the procedures.”

In response to this scenario, Alexis argued,

> So if we’re going to be spending our money to be in this organization and you say I have a voice, don’t try to shut me down. Don’t say that I’m not listening, and “Oh, this doesn’t make any sense.”

Moreover, Alexis urged that when the policies and procedures and governance are “not tight, and people are not holding their leaders accountable, it’s a free-for-all, and you may get someone who’s unscrupulous, who lies, cheats, and uses their power for their own benefit.”

When speaking about leaders in organizations who may change their actions and deviate from established processes, Grace noted that she has observed leaders consistently applying the rules as written but members disagreeing with those actions and demanding change. However, despite adherence to the rules, the officers make an effort to appease the membership by seeking to reinterpret the bylaws and by using other means of implementing the bylaws and other governing documents. Grace commented that this type of action results when “leaders see that something is not going the direction [they desire] and that they’re bending [the] rules, or they’re not as aligned with whatever those bylaws are, and that’s a problem for me.” In response to this situation, Grace stated that she found herself “trying to raise my voice to say, ‘Hey, this doesn’t feel good, or this isn’t right.’” In these cases, Grace maintained that if the actions that manipulated the bylaws continued, she “could not continue to associate myself with that particular group of people.”

Addison offered another observation relating to the changing and disregarding of bylaws in Black women’s organizations and sororities:

> If there are policies of the organization, even if I don't agree with them, we follow them. But I do know that there are some leaders who pick and choose which policies they want to enforce and follow. And I don't have respect for that. It's like, the documents are the documents. Respect the documents. If you don't like the documents, change them. Submit bylaws, amendments, or procedural amendments—whatever you have to do. But I do believe in following the rules.

Whitney discussed a situation in one of her organizations where the group leader knew of the policies and procedures but chose to disregard them to promote her agenda, which resulted in substantial legal costs to the organization. From the membership perspective, Whitney commented,

> I felt that she knew the policy and procedure and decided to do her own thing, because we went through litigation and all of that and because we ended up having to settle. It was not ruled in her favor, which means that she was not following the policy and the procedure.

Hence, from Whitney's perspective, members need to evaluate their governing documents, specifically the policies and procedures, to ensure the leaders in the organization comply.

Alexis and Rose raised the issue of dealmaking among the leaders of their organizations. Alexis confirmed that dealmaking is common in her Black women's organization. Specifically, she acknowledged the substantial amount of dealmaking provides an opportunity for some leaders to take actions inconsistent with the policies, procedures, bylaws, and other documents that provide the foundation for the organization. Alexis believed that this type of behavior was representative of America. She explained, "People get power—and we saw that with the last president, he thought he [could] change the outcome of the election." She likened Black

women's organizations and sororities to the prior presidential administration, stating, "So if those rules are not tight and people are not holding them accountable, it's a free-for-all."

Rose also commented on what she called "political deals" in her Black women's organization, whereby leaders from different parts of the country support candidates from another part of the country. As an example, Rose stated, "We will support you, and then we want you to support us." She noted that in this particular organization, the presidency had ping-ponged between the same two sections of the country for at least the past 8 years and, as a result, other parts of the country could not effectively influence the organization. Rose noted the practices of the two areas that maintained leadership control of the group were "not reflective" of the experiences of the majority of the members of the organization.

Zoe offered that members of their organizations need to hold their leaders accountable. She added,

> I think that before you have people going to [any event], the members need to be informed so they know what their delegate is going to vote on, what bylaws are you going to support, what policies or procedures are you going to support, what budget allocations are you going to support, and realiz[e] that they are their representatives.

She argued that if members are unhappy with an action being taken, they should demand their officers speak up as their elected representatives. Zoe stated that the leadership should not be able to silence people. She also cautioned members on the need to remain vigilant of "who you are putting into leadership and make sure that they have the right heart, that they have the right spirit, and that they're doing things for the right reason and governance."

Consistent with Zoe, Rose pointed out that she has seen leaders silence members' voices in all three of her Black women's organizations. According to Rose, "If people, for whatever

reason, don't like what you're saying or don't like who's saying it or don't like who you're saying it to, I've certainly seen leadership behavior that finds a way to silence that." She stated that she had seen silencing occur in different settings, providing one example where the group's members felt they were not being heard. In contrast, the group's leaders felt what the members were offering was not constructive. Rose noted,

> People can use various techniques to silence, whether using governance as a weapon or creating sidebars and groups within the groups to move on certain things. Sometimes I think people do it for the right reasons, and sometimes they do it because they're petty.

As Addison reflected on the use of silencing by leaders in her organization, she commented that her "sense of voice [comes] from her mother." She then asserted,

> If I got something to say, I am most definitely saying it. And if you do not want to hear from me, [then it's] probably not the organization for me, although I won't let you run me away. If I want to be in the organization, I will be in the organization. So I might not take the leadership role because sometimes it's when you're in the leadership role that you really see all of the ugly.

While attempting to correct an error impeding her ability to reactivate her membership in one of her organizations, Grayson described how the leader's reaction left her feeling "not heard, not respected, not understood." Grayson stated she entered the conversation expressing "my passion for the organization, my commitment to the vision of the organization, and my desire and intent to—now that I had a job that wasn't as demanding travel-wise—to be fully active and present in the chapter." But she was not able to come to agreement with the leader who was responsible for the system that created the error. Grayson indicated that this experience left her feeling "a certain way," and the leader failed to exemplify any of the characteristics she deemed

essential in a leader. Moreover, the fact that this leader continued to ascend the leadership ladder caused Grayson to question the organization itself.

Madison advised that she too had seen leaders use their authority "to shut other people down, meaning you no longer have the floor, or we've heard enough from you or that kind of thing." Madison noted that in her knowledge of parliamentary procedure, many members do not understand the parliamentary process, how they demand the right to continue to speak since they have the floor, or how to respond. Madison indicated that silencing members is the product of not knowing the rules, which impedes their ability to play the game. She described a leader attempting to silence her voice during a Zoom meeting by muting her mic while she had the floor. Noting that her relationship with the leader had been antagonistic, the information she sought to share during a chapter meeting needed to be disclosed. She stated, "In the middle of me expressing what had happened to the membership, she muted me. Literally stopped my voice from being heard and muted my microphone." Madison was appalled by this action. She used the pertinent rules from *Robert's Rules of Order* to highlight the inappropriateness of the leader's thinking and actions. She concluded that the leader felt she could silence members if she did not like what that member was saying.

In response to a question about leadership not adhering to the organization's policies, procedures, and protocols, Irene raised the issue of leader accountability: "It's horrible on the membership. It's really up to the leadership of that time to call it out, not the past leadership, and for leaders who are sitting on that board to call it out." Zari echoed this opinion, stating that as a leader,

> You need to be who you are and make sure that the membership and organization knows who you are. You need to be knowledgeable, understand the bylaws, the constitution,

> [and] understand everything about that organization so that you can lead the organization well.

She continued by stating that the organization's constitution, bylaws, parliamentary procedures, and protocols are all important and that she will stress the importance of governance in any organization she leads. However, Clarice argued, "I think that the leader should be fair. I think that members should be fair as well. For me, it's the balance between both. It's the standard." Clarice further asserted, "The one thing that brings congruence between the leader and the member are these rules. We got to follow the rules. We put them there for a reason."

Summary

This chapter began with a detailed analysis of the data collected in each of the semistructured interviews, which served as the foundation for the study. The major themes identified in the data focused on the impact that organizational culture, values, and communication have on members of Black women's organizations and sororities and how fear of ramifications and retaliation, the significance of the situation, and members' personalities and values impact the use of voice. Other themes that emerged demonstrated how members respond to questionable leadership by speaking up and speaking out, questioning their affiliation with the group, or acquiescing or withdrawing. I also identified the actions that affect members' commitment to the organization such as adherence to governance, how the leader responds to the needs of the membership and interacts with the group, and whether the members view their organization or sorority as a safe space. In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings and implications as they relate to silencing the self theory, the limitations of the study, and the recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's social service organizations and sororities and identify the influence leadership style has on follower engagement. Specifically, I investigated how followers of these groups respond to different leadership styles. Through a qualitative study using a narrative design, I gained insight from leaders and members with a minimum of 5 years of active membership in Black women's organizations and sororities regarding their experiences, perspectives, and responses to the leadership styles of the elected leaders of their organizations and sororities.

Black women's organizations and sororities are groups that have historically served as voices of the African American community, countering racism, sexism, misogyny, and other discriminatory practices that have thwarted the growth and development of the African American community (Brooks, 2018). Traditionally, the voices of Black women within these groups have promoted unity and have advocated for change (Brooks, 2018). However, in the current iteration of Black women's organizations and sororities, these voices have been subjected to leadership styles that either promote communication or silence self-expression (Etowa et al., 2017). As revealed in the literature, little is known about historical Black women's organizations and sororities and how the leadership–followership dynamic influences membership recruitment and retention in these Black women's organizations (Brooks, 2018; Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Specifically, researchers have not investigated how followers of these social service organizations respond to different leadership styles and determine their chosen response.

Identifying and understanding the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities was a core concern of this study. However, I also sought

insight into the varied circumstances and responses of Black women when they perceived their voices were being silenced. Applying Jack's (1991) silencing the self theory, I investigated the relationship between the leaders' leadership style and the followers' engagement. Each tenet of this research was guided by the four research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the leadership styles of the leaders?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence members' decisions to speak openly or moderate/restrict their voices in interactions with leaders of the organization?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' responses to leaders who exhibit questionable leadership styles?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of members of Black women's organizations and sororities regarding factors that influence the members' willingness to adhere to practices and protocols and how this decision affects morale and commitment to the organization when they choose self silencing in response to the leader's leadership style?

This chapter consists of an interpretation of the findings, a comparison of the findings to those of the literature, a discussion of the limitations identified in the research, and recommendations for future research that enhances understanding in the fields of Black women, Black women in leadership, and application of silencing the self theory to Black women in leader–follower relationships. This chapter also provides insight for leaders and members of Black women's organizations and sororities into maintaining and sustaining the efforts of these historical groups.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature

Using defined guided protocols and semistructured interviews, I gained insight from 15 participants about their experiences and interactions as leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities. Through the interviews, I sought their perspectives on the factors that influence the leadership styles their leaders exhibit, the factors that guide members' decision to speak openly or use their voices in interactions with their leaders, the factors that influence their responses to leaders who exhibit inappropriate or questionable conduct, their willingness to adhere to the organization's protocols and governance, and their commitment to the organization when they choose self silencing in response to the leader's leadership style. Jack (2011) stated that in relationships with a power imbalance or issues of inequality, the beliefs and actions of both parties are often negatively affected.

Black women have historically sought safety in Black women's organizations and sororities from racial stereotypes and other adverse circumstances that have traditionally diminished their value to society and self (Snider, 2018). Because these organizations have served as a venue for self-expression, self-determination, and self-development, their best practices have historically included valuing voice and encouraging challenges to the status quo, as these actions also affect organizational effectiveness, managerial proficiency, and volunteer participation and engagement (Madison, 2021; Xia et al., 2017). Black women's organizations and sororities provide members with a shared space to reinforce their mental and physical well-being while participating in programs founded on scholarly achievement, community advocacy, and service to others (Brooks, 2018; Streeter, 2020). Although the Black woman's voice in Black women's social service organizations and sororities has not been the subject of research, the interactions between leaders and followers in these groups provide an opportunity to explore the

use of voice in a unique context (Eibl et al., 2020; Washington, 2020). In these private groups, which consist primarily and almost exclusively of Black women, Black women traditionally could express their voice without fear or repercussions (M. Carter, 2019). However, as indicated by Huang et al. (2018), the safety afforded to members of Black women's organizations and sororities is inextricably intertwined with how the leaders of their organizations receive members' voices.

As illustrated in Table 1, each member of the study population was a member of a Black women's organization, sorority, or both. All participants had been members of their organizations for a minimum of 5 years. As members of the study population, each participant openly expressed their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their membership in their groups and their interactions with their leaders. As seen in Tables 2–5, many of the participants' voices were unified when addressing factors that affected the leader's style, their decisions about how and when to use their voice, their responses to questionable leadership, and how their group's governance and the leader's actions affected their voices and commitment to their organizations. Many participants expressed how values, integrity, and the organization's culture affected their perceptions of their leaders (Politis & Politis, 2017; Rawat et al., 2020; Shahzadi et al., 2017; Sopko & LaRocco, 2018; Ye, 2012). Some participants provided insight into how their decisions to use or moderate their voices are affected by their personalities and how the leader's responses to the use of voice affected their decisions to use or moderate their voices (Ford & Harding, 2018; J. Jiang & Yao, 2020; Y. Jiang et al., 2018; Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Some participants explored how their commitment had been marginalized and their voices silenced by their leader's actions, specifically noting how some leaders undermined or dismissed the

organization's governance and protocols to achieve their goals (Davidson, 2018; Huang et al., 2018; Maya, 2019).

Researchers have observed that followers view transformational leaders who emphasize learning, delegate authority, and provide opportunities for independence in actions and decision-making more favorably, and followers of transformational leaders are more motivated and committed to the organization's objectives (Wang et al., 2018). As noted by Cohen et al. (2017), the sisterhood that serves as the foundation of Black women's organizations and sororities is a social construct formed from shared experiences, common purposes, and mutual feelings of belonging, encouragement, and supportiveness. Cohen et al. further argued that when leaders feel and reciprocate these feelings, Black women's organizations and sororities can retain members and achieve optimal levels of growth. Hence, when members of Black women's organizations and sororities perceive a threat or some form of unscrupulous behavior, they are more likely to flee or employ some other type of defensive mechanism, allowing them to successfully navigate the group's dynamics (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019).

Most people want leaders who demonstrate ethical and moral behaviors (Emler, 2019; Kabeyi, 2018; Mesdaghinia et al., 2018). The leader–follower relationship may improve when the parties participate in mutual adjustments that increase optimism, trust, compassion, integrity, and forgiveness—all of which can lead to organizational happiness (Salas-Vallina, 2020). Women who embrace high levels of social change are less likely to engage in self silencing practices (Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). Women who perceive high levels of supportive leadership are more likely to use their voices at a level consistent with that of their male counterparts (Eibl et al., 2020). Servant leadership can be a source of trust in organizations plagued by inappropriate actions and unethical behavior (Politis & Politis, 2017).

One's choice to habitually use their voice has both advantages and disadvantages depending on their perceived status within the organization, their assumed motive, how others view their integrity, and the rules and expectations governing interactions within the group (Lam et al., 2018). Women's use of self silencing to preserve relationships (Maji & Dixit, 2019) is associated with feelings of disconnection, unhappiness, and being out of place (Patrick et al., 2019). The choice to use one's voice or to use silence is a by-product of the perception of potential harm and the need for psychological safety (Sherf et al., 2021). According to Mesdaghinia et al. (2021), voice activated by potential harm is often associated with prohibitive voice, which is often linked to the speaker's moral intent and feelings of safety in expressing their thoughts and opinions.

The conclusions identified in this study reinforce many of the findings in past studies regarding leader–follower relationships. Participants reflected on their experiences and offered numerous factors that impact the perceptions of leaders in their organizations. They also explained how those perceptions impact their membership. As Eibl et al. (2020) noted, followers' voices could directly influence organizational life, which depends on individual efforts, group processes, and organizational performance. However, for those voices to be compelling, leaders need to connect with their followers and understand their leadership and its impact from followers' perspective (Ahmad & Loch, 2020). More importantly, leaders must recognize that followers' decision to accept them as their leader is conditional because followers tend to select the right kind of leader for a particular set of conditions (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019; Gobble, 2017).

According to Gobble (2017), followers are as invested in their organization's development and success as their leaders. Gobble further asserted a good follower demonstrates

the qualities traditionally associated with a leader, such as responsibility, skill, courage, and discernment. Followers also determine the level at which they are willing to engage with a leader depending on their agreement with the actions of the leaders, the availability of other leaders, and how much they value their relationships with the leaders and the organization (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). These decisions are examples of the follower's leadership and how their actions and voices, when exercised and used to express conflicting views with leaders, demonstrate the power and influence of followers in the leader–follower relationship (Blair & Bligh, 2018).

Still, more significantly, the findings support the extension of Jack's (2011) silencing the self theory to leader–follower relationships in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities. The follower's power to initiate or repress their voice is closely aligned with their sense of self, their role in the leader–follower relationship, and the signals they receive from leaders in their organizations as to the acceptability or unacceptability of their vocal responses to the leader's actions (J. Jiang et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with the four tenets of silencing the self theory: externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, self silencing, and divided self (Jack & Dill, 1992). Participants referenced a variety of self silencing tactics that they employed in their interactions with the leaders in their Black women's organizations and sororities. However, many did not believe these tactics were forms of self silencing or the act of being silenced. The data show that the participants were unaware of how silencing occurs. Hence, to fully understand how the leader's actions affect their voices as members of Black women's organizations and sororities, Black women must understand their position in the group's social hierarchy and their power as members of the organizations (Davis, 2018).

The willingness of participants to employ voice is intertwined with the participants' perception of the holders of power and their position in the social strata of the organization or sorority (Maji & Dixit, 2020). Although some participants indicated they would use their voice when they perceived something was wrong and needed to be addressed, they also indicated they would not speak on a problematic issue if there was insufficient support from the membership or if they did not believe the issue was significant enough to warrant the use of voice (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Mesdaghinia et al., 2021).

RQ1: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Leadership Styles of the Leaders?

Through semistructured interviews, I asked all 15 participants a series of questions to ascertain the factors that influence the leadership styles of the leaders of their Black women's organizations and sororities. The questions pertained to their interaction with and observations of Black women leaders in their organizations and how those experiences shaped their views of that leader and their views of themselves. Additional questions focused on the characteristics they considered to be essential in a leader, the factors that affect a leader's style, the level of importance they placed on the concerns and interests of the members of their organizations, and how their membership is influenced by the expectations of the members of their organizations. Each participant described an interaction with a leader that affected their view of the leader positively or negatively. Consistent with the externalized self-perception prong of silencing the self theory, I asked them how that external interaction shaped their view of themselves and how the leader felt about them (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). A review of the findings indicated far more negative experiences than positive ones, demonstrating that the negative interactions had a

lasting imprint on their perceptions of the leader. Nevertheless, most maintained a positive self-perception.

Organizational Culture. The most common response among the participants focused on the organizational culture within their groups, with 11 of the 15 commenting on the relationship between power and the organization's culture influencing the leader's actions (Steffens et al., 2021). Although most participants agreed that all members of an organization create the culture, many noted how the dominant culture, which is transferred from one leader to another, often marginalizes the followers and the followers' use of voice (Blair & Bligh, 2018). Black women's organizations and sororities have a unique organizational culture in that the group members define tolerable actions and dictate what is acceptable and what is not (Ye, 2012). The culture, which may be comprised of spoken and unspoken rules, behaviors, beliefs, assumptions, and other processes, is passed down through generations of Black women's organizations and sororities and is entrenched in each organizational structure, quietly outlining the requirements for successful matriculation in the group (Pasha & Ur Rehman, 2020).

Participants believe many leaders, once they obtain a leadership role, especially at the highest levels, think they are above the rules and no longer accountable to their followers, often placing their interests above those of their followers and the organization (Mesdaghinia et al., 2018). Their vision becomes singular in nature, focusing on their goals without regard for the followers' interests. Bullying and manipulation may become more prevalent, and followers may often ignore or disregard these out of fear of retaliation or other adverse consequences or because the member sees the personal benefits that may be bestowed on them by remaining quiet and overlooking leader's actions (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). Some of the participants maintained that regardless of the negatives associated with the organization's culture, Black women's history as

nurturers and workhorses has deeply instilled the value of perseverance and the idea that the safety of the Black women's organizational and sorority space is best sustained by those who bear the responsibility for and reinforce the values and culture on which the organization was founded (Barnes, 2016; Rodgers, 2017).

Values: Honesty, Trustworthiness, and Integrity. The second-most prominent theme centered on values—specifically, honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity (Norman et al., 2019; Politis & Politis, 2017). Nine of the 15 participants discussed the importance of a leader being honest, trustworthy, and a person of integrity. For many, these intrinsic values set the tone and expectations for membership in the organization (Emler, 2019). As one participant stated, the onus is on the leader to "understand the values and virtues of the organization and the mission and what you are trying to accomplish." The needs of followers should be the leader's highest priority, and the leader's success should be determined by their followers' interpretation of their actions and their ability to motivate followers to accept their vision (Ahmad & Loch, 2020; Tepper et al., 2018). Contrary to this expectation, some participants noted how some leaders do not have the requisite understanding of the organization's guiding principles and the values that serve as the organization's foundation (Parks & Mutisya, 2019). Moreover, consistent with Parks and Mutisya (2019), participants expounded on how these leaders may act contrary to the organization's standards and how followers remain silent or sometimes placate a leader behaving in a manner inconsistent with their values and organizational standards.

Participants stated that the type of leadership displayed by a leader is more significant than the words they say or how they perceive themselves. For many, the perception of leadership begins at a place of trust (Emler, 2019; Politis & Politis, 2017). Viewing trust as a mutual obligation between leaders and followers, some participants noted that without trust, the leader–

follower relationship is flawed. More importantly, some participants indicated that trust issues such as illegal activity, unethical behavior, and physical and verbal abuse can cause followers to withdraw from active participation in the organization, question their membership, or even terminate their membership (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Maji & Dixit, 2020, Xia et al., 2017). For these followers, these bottom-line leadership behaviors may adversely affect their views of the leaders in their organizations. However, as previously indicated, some choose to appease the leader and support their unethical behavior, potentially creating a culture of dishonesty that may manifest as bullying, manipulation, or other unscrupulous activities (Mesdaghinia et al., 2018).

Communicating Is Both Listening and Speaking. A lesser theme that still played a significant role in the discourse of this study was the need for leaders to understand that communication is a two-way process that involves both listening and speaking. Members of Black women's organizations and sororities want their voices heard and to know they have been heard (Kriz et al., 2021). For them, hearing entails the leader seeking and listening to their input, ideas, and issues, an approach that demonstrates they are concerned with the wants and needs of their followers. Participants also agreed it is essential for the leader to be receptive to feedback. For members of Black women's organizations and sororities, the ability to speak openly and express their thoughts and opinions to leaders creates a sense of empowerment (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020; Jack & Ali, 2010). Participants who expressed the need for a leader to listen argued that listening gives the leader insight into the members and organization (Wilkinson et al., 2018). However, some participants described instances where the leader was unwilling to listen, acted contrary to the needs and interests of followers, and disregarded the voices of those they were elected to lead.

Participants' perceptions of their leaders affected their views of themselves and their place in their group's hierarchy (Jack & Ali, 2010). Some were willing to sacrifice their voice to fit in with the organization's culture and hierarchy, even when they disagreed with the practices their leaders employed and acceptance required inauthenticity (Patrick et al., 2019). Others moderated their voices or completely silenced themselves to appease a leader and, in some instances, to curry favor with a leader who violated their trust or behaved in a manner inconsistent with their values (Maji & Dixit, 2020). As noted in Maji and Dixit (2020), for many participants, maintaining membership in their groups and the relationships they have forged in these spaces are critical. Hence, their externalized self-perception, how others see them, and how they judge themselves may be a significant part of their self-image, allowing them to acquiescence to the unwritten standards of the organization's culture. These standards may dictate their actions, moderate their voice, and shape their roles and experiences, encouraging them to perform in a manner deemed acceptable by their fellow members and leaders (Abrams et al., 2019; Jack & Ali, 2010; Jack & Dill, 1992; Maji & Dixit, 2020).

RQ2: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence Members' Decisions to Speak Openly or Moderate/Restrict Their Voices in Interactions With Leaders of the Organization?

For many members of Black women's organizations and sororities, the organization's failure to live up to their values and expectations results in a values conflict where they have decided to self-silence. Some demonstrate silencing by withdrawing from their organizations, while others sacrifice their standards to be accepted by the leader or the in-group (Abrams et al., 2019). Members demonstrate this action, labeled as "care as self-sacrifice" in silencing the self theory, when choosing to put the needs of their leaders, other members, or the organization

before their own (Emran et al., 2020; Kaya & Çok, 2021; Jack & Ali, 2010). Care as self-sacrifice (Jack, 1991) may be understood through the questions about interactions in which followers did not feel free to use their voice or express their thoughts or opinions, as well as questions about their level of comfort in speaking out and circumstances in which they would suppress their voices to understand the factors that affect followers' choice of voice. In response to these queries, participants cited three primary reasons they would choose to moderate or silence their voices while interacting with leaders of their group. For them, moderating their voices was contingent on their personality and values, the significance of the situation, or the perceived consequences of using their voice.

Personality and Values. All 15 participants stated that their values influenced their use of voice. Some attributed those values to their mothers and grandmothers, who taught them the power of their voices as Black women in America. However, others indicated that their decision to use or moderate their voices was a product of their personality. Noting that everyone has a different persona, the participants commented on how their character dictates their actions, especially in situations involving voice behavior (J. Jiang et al., 2018). In this study, seven of the 15 participants mentioned their strong personalities, assertively stating that they were outspoken, did not bite their tongues, would not be hushed or quieted, or were committed to speaking truth to power. However, some participants also disclosed how they stifled their voices or policed themselves by not calling everything out and, in some circumstances, were willing to look the other way. As indicated in Kaya and Çok (2021), in these instances, the pressures associated with aligning their views and responses with the leader's goals and objectives and protecting the rules of the organization may be sufficient reason to remain silent in the face of a personal values conflict.

Significance of the Situation. More than half of participants noted that their decision to moderate their voice might also be the product of a particular social situation or circumstance that led them to suppress their voice (Abrams et al., 2019; Davidson, 2018). One participant opined that self silencing occurs because some followers are uncomfortable speaking to their leaders or voicing their concerns in front of others. Others asserted the need to feel comfortable bringing the issues to the leader and considered whether the leader is receptive to feedback in their decision to use their voice. Each perspective entails the participants making a deliberate assessment that may be best described as a cost-benefit analysis in determining whether to speak on situations or issues of concern (Lam et al., 2018). As indicated in Lam et al. (2018), some participants weigh their comfort with the leader, their receptivity, and the organization's culture and speech practices against the potential repercussions of speaking their truth.

In this study, some participants indicated they would not have an issue with voicing their concerns when it involves justice. They noted that actions involving illegal activity, unethical practices, financial improprieties, and other actions would cause them to "speak loudly" to bring attention to the matter. Consistent with Emler (2019), in situations involving fairness, most participants indicated their willingness to forego their self-interest, prompting them to respond altruistically. However, they added that in order to speak up, an issue needed to conflict with their intrinsic values, meaning their decision to use their voice was values based (Pasha & Ur Rehman, 2020).

For Black women in these historical organizations and sororities, the concept of self is a critical factor in the decision to use voice, and though it may vary depending on the circumstance, at the forefront of this decision for women, including Black women, is the desire to maintain relationships (Maji & Dixit, 2019). Maji and Dixit (2019) explained this values

decision as an “over-eye” behavior that is inherent to women’s psyche and that serves as a didactic voice that demands adherence to the duties and responsibilities expected of members of an organizational or social hierarchy. In these instances, the self cannot and should not supersede the well-versed norms of the Black women’s organization or sorority (Pasha & Ur Rehman, 2020). Participants indicated that other factors that are self-oriented may impact their desire to speak on significant issues. However, the repetitive internal conflict to speak or not speak may inhibit the member’s voice, allowing unjust actions to continue without repercussions or accountability by the leader.

Ramifications for Using Voice. In this study, nine of 15 participants acknowledged that their decision to use their voices could be susceptible to silencing through fear of retaliation or repercussions from the leadership of their organization or sorority (Y. Jiang & Yao, 2020). Although many offered scenarios where their voices could be problematic, participants also expressed that they are dues-paying members of these volunteer organizations and, as such, have a right to speak and be heard on topics of interest. Again, some participants stated they engaged in balancing acts weighing the value of what they have to say against the potential repercussions if the information is not received favorably (Y. Jiang & Yao, 2020; Maji & Dixit, 2019). For Black women who choose to speak, there is also a need to consider how fellow members will receive their comments and the possibility of adverse reactions from their peers (McClean et al., 2018). One participant explained how she was reluctant to speak on an issue that she deemed challenging if she did not have sufficient support from her organization’s membership. The reception of voice by leaders and peers can be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on the situation.

The question of whether speaking is advantageous or disadvantageous can also be viewed as a question of whether using voice is selfless or selfish (Duan et al., 2020; J. Jiang et al., 2018). In Black women's organizations and sororities, the members themselves, other members, or the leaders often stifle members' voices. The true beneficiary of this silencing may depend on the situation. One participant commented that when members choose to stay silent and not express their thoughts or opinions, they may have an ulterior motive that benefits them. Another participant remained silent because she was told it was the right thing to do (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). In both instances, the decision to remain silent is associated with a benefit to the member; however, from the member's perspective, she may be placing the needs of the organization, leader, or membership ahead of her own, demonstrating care as self-sacrifice (Jack, 1991; Mesdaghinia et al., 2018). Although self silencing could positively affect either of these entities, its effect is not guaranteed to be identical for each. More importantly, when a member decides to betray her voice by not expressing her thoughts or opinions on a subject with personal significance, she may believe she is benefitting other entities. Through this action, the follower chooses to put the members, leader, or group at the center of her story and elevate them above herself to maintain the relationship (Jack, 1991).

RQ3: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Members' Responses to Leaders Who Exhibit Questionable Leadership Styles?

In this study, I ascertained the factors influencing members' voices when confronted with inappropriate leadership behavior through questions focused on the events that led them to activate their voices in different circumstances. The purpose was to understand what situations warranted the use of voice, how that experience shaped their view of the leader, what actions by

the leader they considered inappropriate, whether they had ever been the perpetrator of inappropriate conduct, and whether they had ever sought to offer feedback or insight to an unreceptive leader. The questions were designed to understand why one's self-expression and needs may be stifled when they conflict with the values and desires of others (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). This silencing is used to preserve a relationship, mitigate injury, or avoid conflict or retaliation (Jack & Ali, 2010). Responses from participants reflected three themes in participants' responses to a questionable leader: speaking up and speaking out, questioning membership, and going along to get along. In this study, nine out of 15 participants expressed their desire to speak up and speak out, while five out of 15 expressed the more passive responses of questioning their membership or going along to get along. Nevertheless, each response category incorporated aspects of the third dimension of the STSS presented by Jack (1991), also known as silencing the self.

In this instance, silencing the self theory takes on a different dimension because the relationships involved at the center of the silencing are not traditional romantic relationships between men and women but relationships between leaders and followers in the context of Black women's organizations and sororities. Hence, gender inequality is not present and has been replaced by inequality in the power structure and hierarchy of the organization (Kaya & Çok, 2021). The decision to activate one's voice or remain silent could be the product of one's definition of what it means to be a woman based upon the knowledge imparted to them by their elders or what they have observed in their households (Jack & Ali, 2010). Although the leaders and followers in this study are women, their identities are unique and are shaped by their backgrounds and experiences. Thus, each woman's identity plays a pivotal role in how she responds to situations involving the leaders of Black women's organizations and sororities.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out. Speaking up and speaking out was a dominant theme for participants in describing their responses to inappropriate leadership and how self silencing could be employed to moderate their voice. Some participants advocated for and employed confrontation when addressing a leader who behaved inappropriately (Eibl et al., 2020). Others felt the onus was on the followers to speak up to prevent harm to members or the organization. A review of the data revealed that some of these respondents associated their sense of voice with their experiences in their upbringing and lessons learned from their mothers and grandmothers (L. Carter & Rossi, 3029; Davis & Afifi, 2019; Green, 2019; Washington, 2020). This group of participants indicated that being vocal was part of who they are and something they did naturally. This does not mean that these participants do not place value on their relationships with the leaders of their organizations; rather they value their organization or sorority and the benefits the group offers more. According to J. Jiang et al. (2018), leaders' behavior impacts followers' voice efficiency and determines whether they will speak when confronted with issues they deem inappropriate or fail to align with their values.

Questioning Membership and Going Along to Get Along. Participants who indicated their response to inappropriate leader behavior would be to question their membership or go along to get along participated in self silencing techniques. Bruck-Segal et al. (2020) asserted silencing the self is a self-internalized strategy that allows women to manage their feelings via suppression while protecting the needs of others and their relationships from potential harm, loss, retaliation, or other abuse. Many participants acknowledged inappropriate behavior would give them pause; however, rather than confront the leader and the behavior, they would opt for more passive responses. As indicated by Huang et al. (2018), whether one's voice is challenging or prohibitive, their perception of the message they intend to deliver and their internal speculation

of how the message will be received affect voice moderation. Members of Black women's organizations who opt for the passive response instinctually consider the interests of the leader and the organization before considering themselves (Huang et al., 2018).

One member considered how a confrontation with a leader would create an "us-against-them" situation. Rather than confront the leader, she would leave the organization. At the same time, another member discussed the desire to save the organization from public discord resulting from the leader's inappropriate conduct by not saying anything, thereby putting the organization ahead of her need for disclosure and resolution. One participant referenced an incident where an organization's membership learned of misbehavior by the leader and manipulation of an election. However, the members did not voice their concerns about the actions, and the organization did nothing. Jack (1991) noted that these actions are conscious decisions. By disregarding the action and selecting a more passive alternative, these followers contorted their needs and internalized their thoughts, allowing the organization's culture or the leaders' transgressions to dominate the narrative (Eibl et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2018).

In this study, silencing the self assumed various forms. Although speaking up and speaking out was the dominant response and the use of voice was closely associated with participants' upbringing and identity, some of those who stated they would use their voices to express concerns about inappropriate behavior also described situations where they would withdraw rather than create conflict. Other participants indicated their response to a leader's inappropriate behavior would be to withdraw or go along to get along. Through this practice, they also evidenced self silencing to avoid conflict with their leader and protect the organization. The use of passive responses indicates self silencing as the third tenet of silencing the self theory.

RQ4: What Are the Perceptions of Members of Black Women's Organizations and Sororities Regarding Factors That Influence the Members' Willingness to Adhere to Practices and Protocols and How This Decision Affects Morale and Commitment to the Organization When They Choose Self Silencing in Response to the Leader's Leadership Style?

An analysis of the fourth dimension of silencing the self theory, the divided self, which occurs when members present an obedient persona that adheres to the organizational culture and expectations of their group rather than offer their true self, is critical to understanding self silencing in Black women's organizations and sororities. Jack (1991) asserted that the divided self is in an internalized voice that mentally chastises the member for considering actions or using voice contrary to what is acceptable or expected in the environment.

To ascertain the impact of divided self on the voices of participants, I focused the questions primarily on how certain actions by leaders influenced the participants' views of themselves, how the leaders' actions or words influenced their response, the value they saw in membership in their organizations, their views on their organization's governing documents and the consistency of the application of those documents, their responses to actions by leaders that were inconsistent with their values, and their thoughts on terminating their membership in their organizations. In the responses to these questions, I identified four themes: the leader looks at the needs of constituents, the leader is part of the group and not just the head, the need for a safe space, and the importance of governance.

Looks at the Needs of Constituents. According to the research, nine of 15 participants emphasized the need for a leader to focus on the needs of her constituents. For these followers, the most important thing a leader can do is hear members' voices and what they have to say, as they are critical to the organization and its goals and objectives (Kriz et al., 2021). Being heard

was of paramount importance to these participants. For one participant, being heard also meant being affirmed by the leadership and recognized for her strengths and talents. Another participant noted how listening to what members have to say does not always require the leader to take action, but the acknowledgment of followers' words and thoughts could reinforce their sense of value to the organization, creating a feeling of empowerment. Several participants described their experiences when a leader listened, with one noting that her experiences provided her with a "level of excitement." However, for another participant, the feeling that the leader did not see her and placed the interests of another member above hers made her feel her membership in the organization was not as valued as the other member's and that there was an unspoken hierarchy within the group where some members were more valued than others for various reasons. From her perspective, the leader used organizational politics to avoid conflict between members' interests, siding with members she perceived brought more value to the organization (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). This perspective led her to question the aspect of sisterhood that provided the structural foundation of the organization and her place within the group.

The participants indicated the need for leaders of Black women's organizations and sororities to recognize and address the needs of constituents. Members of Black women's organizations and sororities are often marginalized in their professional lives and other endeavors. As such, they may evince the divided self in questioning whether they are entitled to have their voices heard, feel empowered, or be viewed as equals and not less than other members within the organization's hierarchy (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). Although they internally question their desires and whether leaders satisfy their needs, these women externally demonstrate acceptance of the leader and her actions (Jack & Dill, 1992). Hence, the divided self is evident

even though their outward façade reflects a strong, confident Black woman secure in her place in the organization's structure.

The Leader Is a Part of the Group, Not Just the Head. According to the participants, leaders need to recognize their dual role as leader and member of their Black women's organization or sorority. Approximately 47% of participants addressed this need. Leaders were viewed as seeing themselves "at the top of the organization," "thinking it's about [them]," or being "here to be served by the people who elected [them]." These statements indicate the widely held perception that leaders of Black women's organizations and sororities put their interest ahead of those of the group.

Participants also expressed the underlying idea that the leaders in these organizations assumed they had superior knowledge as they had attained the highest status available to anyone within their group. As such, they did not feel the need to listen to or receive insight from their followers (Kriz et al., 2021). This belief allowed them to push their agendas and indulge in self-promotion. However, participants argued that leaders should be selfless, cooperative, and willing to learn from others (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). One participant noted that being a leader "is not about needing credit for anything." Another participant simplified this need: "Great leaders are those who can lead and function in a group of women." Although the participants spoke openly about the need for leaders to recognize themselves as members of the group, no participant stated they had made this statement to their leaders. Although followers were challenged with the divided self, they placed the divided self in the realm of the generalized other. According to Jack (1991), "The generalized other, representing dominant community values, stands over [the follower] with a threat of censure if she dares to challenge what [her

leader or organization] thinks is right." Hence, participants were reluctant to speak this truth to their leaders, which may indicate self silencing to preserve the relationship.

Safe Space. Black women's clubs and organizations traditionally are safe spaces that actively engage in preserving Black history and promoting Black culture (Barnes, 2016). Davis and Afifi (2019) reiterated that Black women's organizations and sororities play a critical role in Black women's self-identity. Through these groups, they strengthen their connections to other Black women who share the same ideas and values through communication practices reinforced by the strength of their voices (Cohen et al., 2017). Over one-third of the participants reflected on their perception of Black women's organizations or sororities as safe spaces. Similar to findings by Hernandez Rivera (2020), some participants mentioned that their experiences in majority White colleges and universities led them to seek a place where they could be "prideful in their history," not just as Black people but as Black women. Others offered their desire to feel "comfortable" and "safe" or "just be me." Despite these organizations and sororities being founded and perceived as a space where like-minded women can be their authentic selves without fear of repercussions, one participant vehemently asserted, "It's not a safe space. There are many who do not feel that it is a safe space."

Two participants raised issues about how some organizations did not make members feel safe. One asserted that Black women do not want to be a part of an environment where they are mentally abused or the recipient of negative comments and steely stares. Another participant described toxic behaviors such as bullying, manipulation, intimidation, and other Machiavellian actions (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Webster et al., 2016). In these environments, followers do not feel free to express their thoughts or opinions, and this reluctance to speak can further exacerbate the unscrupulous behavior of leaders and dysfunction within the organization (Erkutlu & Chafra,

2018). Erkutlu and Chafra (2018) attributed follower silence to leaders' mindsets, actions, and behaviors, which can be a source of mental abuse and stress for followers.

Within the Black women's organizational and social hierarchy, followers occupy a lesser position that renders them susceptible to inappropriate behaviors and actions, contempt, and exclusion from critical decisions and processes within the organization (Jack & Ali, 2010). However, many of these women are committed to their organization as their safe space, where they have developed close, intimate friendships with their fellow members and are faithful to the goals and objectives upon which the groups were founded (Cohen et al., 2017; Davis & Afifi, 2019). However, for followers confronted with Machiavellian behaviors as subordinates in the leader–follower relationship, the divided self provides an opportunity for them to repress their feelings related to the unprincipled behaviors and actions leaders exhibit while voicing their commitment and faithfulness to the founding principles of the organization or sorority (Jack & Ali, 2010). Jack and Ali (2010) concluded, "Having a 'divided self' in a relationship is problematic as there is no place for authenticity or expressing conflict, anger, or aspects of personality that conflict with more traditional, selfless expectations" (p. 278). Thus, for Black women followers in these historical organizations, there is an inclination to suppress beliefs and attitudes that they consider improper or that members of the organization may consider unacceptable, giving rise to the divided self and self silencing.

Governance Matters. The 15 participants were members of Black women's organizations, sororities, or both. Each of these organizations was governed by bylaws, rules, policies and procedures, and other governing documents that dictated the proper functioning of the organization at each level of the group's hierarchy. Nevertheless, 13 of the 15 participants reported concerns about the governance of their organizations, explicitly noting leaders'

disregard for, changes to, and abandonment of the written bylaws, policies, procedures, and processes to attain specific goals that deprived members of their rights and voices. According to these participants, accountability for leaders and leadership is critical to the proper functioning of the organization (Cohen et al., 2017).

Participants reported the need for leaders to adhere to the governing documents and processes. They indicated the behaviors they felt were inappropriate and undermined their commitment to their organization through comments such as "you don't change the constitution and bylaws," "governance matters," "knowing what the bylaws say," and "reluctance by members to learn the organization's governance and policies." Participants' frustration was evident in their words and voices as they spoke of what some believed was a betrayal of the guiding principles on which their organization was founded. More significantly, some leaders' efforts to inhibit the voices of followers through bylaw changes and other actions such as probation, suspension, and, in some instances, termination further demonstrated participants' belief that their organization had gone astray. These participants emphasized and advocated for their organizations and leadership to adhere to their governing documents.

Cohen et al. (2017) indicated the adherence to governance and the accountability of leaders correlate to membership retention, organizational sustainability, and the growth and development of organizations. Many participants stressed the need for members to be mindful of whom they elected as leaders, their values, and whether their values align with the foundation of the organization and those of their members. A leader's values should align with those of the membership and organization to create a harmonious relationship that is conducive to membership engagement and retention (Y. Jiang & Yao, 2020).

Collectively, these four themes provide a glimpse of the impact of the actions of leaders of Black women's organizations and sororities on members and how members employ self silencing techniques, specifically the divided self, to conceal their true thoughts and feelings. Moreover, they may adopt a universally accepted posture that affords them acceptance by their leaders and peers while maintaining their commitment to the founding goals and objectives of their organizations (Bruck-Segal et al., 2020). Although some members revealed actions and situations that caused them to withdraw from their organizations, none were contemplating the decision to terminate their membership, especially in sororities.

Limitations

As with most studies, I identified limitations. At the heart of this research were Black women, their organizations and sororities, the interactions between leaders and followers, and how their interpersonal dynamics potentially result in the self silencing of strong Black women. As these organizations and sororities are private clubs and their organizational culture promotes secrecy, followers' willingness to speak about their experiences, particularly interactions with their elected leaders and other followers, may have been limited as they may have been concerned about being identified.

Another limitation related to the age of the sample population. The sample population consisted of women over 36, so the voices of members under 36 were not represented in this study. Although the study represented a cross section of organization and sorority members from across the country, a representative sample specifying a minimum number of participants from each area of the country would have provided deeper insight into the experiences of members and how their experiences vary based on location. Further, participants' stories reflect their

perspectives on various experiences and events; hence, opportunities for response bias cannot be discounted.

Finally, qualitative research allows for deep understanding of an identified problem within an identified group. Although semistructured interviews allow the collection and analysis of rich content, using a survey to support the interviews would have allowed for a more extensive study and a more diverse understanding of the relationships between leaders and followers.

Implications

Black women's organizations and sororities are unique in that their history and foundations are derived from providing Black women with a safe space for members to use their voices and collectively collaborate and advocate on issues affecting their communities. This premise still exists today, but the challenges facing the sustainability of these organizations and their ability to survive and thrive may be attributed to the relationships between leaders and followers. This study reflects a desire for the leaders and followers of these groups to work together to create an environment where members feel free to speak without fear of repercussions. The findings demonstrate that the decision to use voice is based on a large number of factors such as followers' impression of the leader's values, the leader's communication practices, and the organization's culture.

Followers' decision to moderate their voice may vary depending on their personality and values, the significance of the situation, the perceived ramifications of using their voice, and how they perceive the leader's actions and adherence to the group's governing documents. Some members, when confronted with leaders who behave in a manner they deem inappropriate, tend to respond by questioning their membership and commitment to the organization, withdrawing,

and adopting a going-along-to-get-along mentality. Others respond by speaking up and speaking out. Ultimately, these responses impact the leader, the follower, and the organization.

This study shines a light on how leaders' behaviors impact an organization's followers. More importantly, it provides a framework for leaders to reflect on their actions and engage in self-correction while also aiding followers in understanding what self silencing is and how their decisions to look the other way threaten the core of their organizations. Self silencing stems from an unequal power dynamic, and the recognition that power is the source of both the leader's and follower's actions is of paramount importance to these Black women's organizations and sororities.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study represents an extension of silencing the self theory to Black women in the context of Black women's social service organizations and sororities. Because this area of study was not the focus of the researcher who developed the theory, it has not been previously explored. Understanding the impact of self silencing on Black women's voices as members of Black women's organizations and sororities is paramount to maintaining member engagement and commitment. As this qualitative study was limited to 15 participants who provided data through semistructured interviews, it was difficult to grasp the full impact of self silencing techniques on the entire population of members of Black women's organizations and sororities. A broader quantitative study would provide an opportunity to further evaluate leaders' styles and methods and their influence on members' voices and commitment and the growth and sustainability of these historical organizations. Such a study would also allow for quantified results that provide greater insight into the thoughts of followers in Black women's organizations and sororities.

The 15 participants had served or were currently serving as leaders in their organizations. Soliciting the opinions of members who had not served in a leadership capacity within the group could have provided additional insights. Researchers in the future could collect data from college students and young adult women who are new members and have had limited exposure to the leadership and hierarchies of these Black women's groups. The voices of these members may provide significant insight into self silencing and the impact on voice in these historical organizations.

Conclusions

In this qualitative study, I examined the interactions between leaders and followers in Black women's social organizations and sororities and the influence of leadership styles on follower engagement. Through semistructured interviews of 15 members of historically Black organizations and sororities, I elicited participants' experiences with leaders of their groups, their insight as to how those interactions affected them as members, and their commitment to their organizations. I also delved into the impact of the leader's style on members' decisions to moderate their voice, including, but not limited to, self silencing. I intended to expand silencing the self theory to include the relationship between leaders and followers in Black women's organizations and sororities. The guided protocol I used correlated with the four components of silencing the self theory: care as self-sacrifice, externalized self-perception, self silencing, and the divided self.

Silencing the self occurs in many ways, including, but not limited to, withdrawal, suppression of thoughts and feelings, repression of emotions, and personal inhibition. The study results suggest self silencing is a factor in the relationship between leaders and followers. It also suggests that followers' perceptions of their leaders are affected by their leadership style, and

their responses to their leaders align with the tactics identified in the traditional application of silencing the self theory. The findings of this study reflect the delicacy of the relationship between the leaders of these organizations and their followers. They also suggest that leaders must be conscious of how they use their voice and exercise their authority, as their actions may directly affect their ability to develop, sustain, and grow these historically Black organizations.

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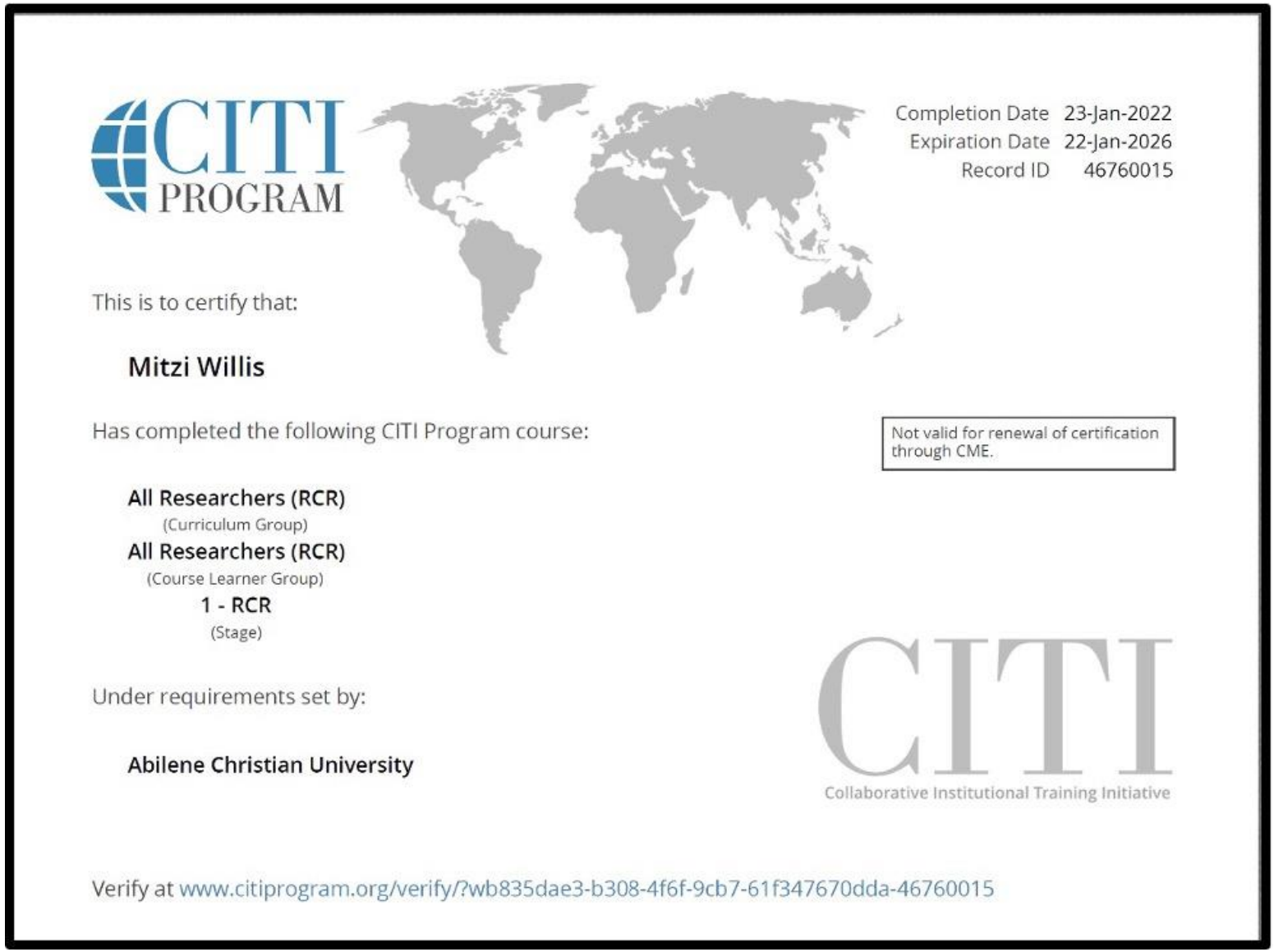
Appendix A: IRB Training Certificates



CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 23-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 22-Jan-2026
Record ID 46760015

This is to certify that:

Mitzi Willis

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

All Researchers (RCR)
(Curriculum Group)
All Researchers (RCR)
(Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Abilene Christian University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wb835dae3-b308-4f6f-9cb7-61f347670dda-46760015

Appendix B: IRB Letter of Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

April 29, 2022

Mitzi S. Willis
Department of Education
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mitzi,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"The Influence of Silencing the Self Theory on Leader-Follower Relationships in Black Women's Organizations and Sororities",

(IRB# 22-054)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C: Participant Invitation

Initial Contact Email for Recruitment of Members of Black Women Organizations and Sororities

Greetings [INSERT NAME],

I pray this letter finds you well. As Black women, we hold a unique position in our society, especially in our communities. We frequently use our voices to advocate for those issues near and dear to us and those that may have a profound impact on our families and those dear to us. However, as members of Black women's organizations, sororities, or both, have you ever thought about how you advocate for yourself in your organization's environment?

As a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University, I will be conducting a study to understand the perceptions of the interpersonal dynamics between leaders and followers of Black women's organizations and sororities. As a member of one or more of these organizations, who has maintained membership for five or more years and attended at least one conference or convention at the various levels offered by your organization, I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you for my study as I believe that you can provide a unique perspective based upon your participation and service in your groups. The semistructured interview will be conducted in person or via Zoom and will last for 45–60 minutes. The interviews will be electronically recorded for accuracy. If an additional interview is warranted, a subsequent request will be made.

Your identifying information and the interview data collected will be kept confidential as required by federal and state guidelines and Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board protocols. Please know that you will not be compensated for participating in this study, but your insight could significantly contribute to and enhance the current understanding of leader–follower relationships between Black women in organizational settings. I would

appreciate the opportunity to complete your interview before June 30, 2022, and I can be available at your convenience. Thank you for considering this request, and I pray I hear from you soon.

With kindest regards,

Mitzi S. Willis, Esq.
Ed.D. Candidate
Abilene Christian University
Email: [redacted]
Phone: [redacted]

Appendix D: Guided Protocol

No.	Research question	Interview question	Correlates to STSS theoretical framework
Background questions			
		Please tell me your age group: 20–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, 55+	
		How do you racially identify?	
		What is your level of education?	
		Since graduating college, in what fields have you worked?	
		Was your work in a majority environment or more multicultural?	
		With whom did you identify most? Your co-workers or your supervisor? Why?	
		In this environment, how did your supervisors and coworkers make you feel?	
		How did you deal with your feelings?	
		Are you a member of a sorority or Black women's organization?	
		How many?	
		For each group, please tell me how long have you been a member?	
		Do you mind telling me about these organizations (name of the group, size, focus of the organization, structure of leadership)?	
		Why did you join your sorority?	
		How long have you been an active member of your sorority? • If an inactive member, then why did you become inactive? • If active, in what roles have you served your sorority? Are you currently a member of leadership?	
		Research questions	
1	RQ1	Can you describe in as much detail as possible a time that you interacted with a leader of your sorority or organization where you expressed your thoughts or opinions and that interaction had an impact on your perspective of the leader?	
2	RQ3	What motivated you to express your thoughts or opinions?	Divided self
3	RQ4	How did that interaction influence your view of yourself?	Externalized self-perception

4	RQ1	As a member of one of these organizations, what do you think are necessary characteristics for elected leaders of these groups?	Externalized self-perception
5	RQ1	Based upon the leader's words or actions, how do you feel the leader felt about the interaction in that moment?	Care as self-sacrifice
6	RQ2	Can you tell me about a time that you did not feel free to express your thoughts or feelings in leadership?	Self silencing
7	RQ3	How did that interaction influence your view of the leader?	Externalized self-perception
8	RQ1	Based upon this interaction, what factors, if any, do you believe were of significance to the leader in their service to the organization's membership?	Care as self-sacrifice
9	RQ1	What factors do you think have the least influence on the leader's style of leadership?	Care as self-sacrifice
10	RQ4	As a member of the organization, how did the leader's response influence your views of leadership within the organization?	Divided self
11	RQ4	When you look at your organization or sorority, is there anything that a leader could do that would make you question the value membership in the groups brings to you or your life?	Externalized self-perception
12	RQ2	When observing the actions of leaders, can you tell me about any other incidents where you felt the need to express your thoughts and opinions? • How did you act on your feelings?	Divided self
13	RQ2	As a member of one of these groups or sororities, how has your comfort with the expression of your thoughts or feelings been influenced by the leaders of your group?	Self silencing
14	RQ3	Can you tell me about a time when you considered the leader's actions inappropriate?	Divided self
15	RQ2	Under what circumstances would you be comfortable expressing your opinions to the leaders of your organization or sorority?	Care as self-sacrifice
16	RQ2	Why would you decide not to express your thoughts or feelings to the leaders of your organization or sorority?	Self silencing
17	RQ3	If you have served as a leader in an organization or sorority, can you describe a time that you interacted with a member who expressed concerns and how you responded to the member and their concerns?	Externalized self-perception

18	RQ4	Please tell me about feelings regarding the policies and protocols of your organization and what is your perception of how the policies and protocols are implemented and enforced throughout the organization?	Divided self
19	RQ4	Can you tell us about a time where, in your opinion, you felt the organization or group's implementation of policies and procedures was not aligned with the articulated goals of the organization? • How did you respond to this concern?	Divided self
20	RQ3	As you reflect on your membership in your organization or sorority, can you tell us about a time where you felt that your ideas, feedback, or opinions were not welcomed or appreciated by the leaders of your organization or sorority?	Externalized self-perception
21	RQ1	As a leader in a Black women's club or sorority, what level of importance do you place on the concerns, interests, or opinions of members when participating in the planning or policies of the group?	Care as self-sacrifice
22	RQ2	As a leader, what do you consider to be the highest priority in your interactions with members of your organization?	Care as self-sacrifice
23	RQ4	As a leader, can you tell us about a time where you witnessed a response to a member of the group with which you did not agree or condone? • What was your response to the action?	Self silencing
24	RQ1	As a leader, how is or how was your leadership style impacted by the expectation of the members of your organization or sorority?	Externalized self-perception
25	RQ4	If you have ever thought about terminating your membership in your Black women's organization or sorority, please tell me why. What did you do and why?	Divided self
		Conclusion questions	
		Do you feel Black women's sororities or organizations are in jeopardy due to membership and growth issues?	
		Do you encourage other Black women to join Black women's sororities or organizations?	
		Do you have any thoughts, questions, or comments that you would like to add that may contribute to this research study?	