Submitting to the Follower Label
Followership, Positive Affect, and Extra-Role Behaviors

Colette Hoption,[1] Amy Christie,[2] and Julian Barling[3]

[1]Albers School of Business and Economics, Seattle University, WA, USA,
[2]School of Business and Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON, Canada,
[3]Queen's School of Business, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada

Abstract. Although the importance of followership has been discussed in organizational literature, negative connotations attached to the follower label persist, including followers' lack of ability and power. In two studies, we found evidence for negative effects of the follower label. Participants who were labeled a follower (Study 1), or self-labeled as followers in their jobs (Study 2), reported lower positive affect, and in turn, fewer extra-role behaviors. These findings suggest that followers might be at risk for reinforcing their negative stereotypes by avoiding opportunities to show their abilities and demonstrate their independence. Recommendations for leaders and opportunities for future research are discussed.

Keywords: followership, leadership, extra-role behaviors, positive affect

Leadership research is often criticized for having neglected the active roles of followership in leadership (e.g., Baker, 2007; Barling, Christie, & Hoption, 2010). For example, it has become popular to focus on leader traits and behaviors, and use follower development (into future leaders; Bass, 1998) as evidence for leader effectiveness. This perspective neglects the power of followers, including the ways in which followers might shape leaders and leadership (Shamir, 2007). In the current research, we argue that one reason for the lack of focus on active followership is the nature of the follower label and position itself. Following is associated with pejorative connotations and so, we predict that being associated with the follower label compromises individuals' positive moods, and thus, discourages their active behaviors like helping others and taking initiative. Consequently, not only might followers be burdened by their label and position, but organizations might also suffer from their lack of motivation and uninspiring performance. More generally then, the challenge for leadership research is to both elevate the notion of followership and help followers overcome the hardships of their label.

Conceptual Development

The Follower Label

Labels serve an important function and yield powerful consequences: Labels facilitate sense-making and guide our interactions by providing cues for how to organize and understand experiences. For example, the label "humanistic" increased the acceptability of an intervention in comparison to the label "behavior modification" (Barling & Wainstein,

1979). Not only do labels help us organize and interpret information, but affect (i.e., how much an individual likes those to whom the label is attributed) is also attached to labels, thus connoting our likes and dislikes. For instance, Jussim and colleagues found that the label "rock star" conjured more positive impressions about an individual than the label "child abuser," even though the background information presented for the "rock star" and the "child abuser" were identical in their experiment (Jussim, Nelson, Manis, & Soffin, 1995); similar results emerged for the labels "heterosexual" and "homosexual" (Jussim et al., 1995). Jussim et al.'s research illustrates the ease with which labels bias perceptions – positive and negative impressions conjured by a label spillover to those to which the label applies. Therefore, labels should be applied cautiously (as an example, see the discussion on the label "psychopath;" Hart, Watt, & Vincent, 2002; Skeem & Cauffman, 2003).

In the current research, we investigate whether the follower label functions similarly to the labels described previously: Do those labeled "follower" react negatively or positively to their label, and do those reactions relate to their role behaviors? The follower label interests us because many have noted that you cannot have leadership without followership (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1991; Shamir, 2007) – meaning that leaders need followers, and that followers are necessary for leadership effectiveness – and yet, in both research and practice, there is a lack of appreciation for followership. Illustrative of this, there are many popular press books about effective leadership but books about followership are scarce (see Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Followership is overshadowed by leadership and as a result, being labeled "follower" might displease individuals and solicit negative reactions. In our research, we did not find one consensual definition of the follower label; however, to inform our

impressions of the label, we rooted ourselves in the ongoing discussions regarding the typical traits and behaviors associated with followership.

In our review of the literature, all perspectives of followership acknowledged that followership and followers are (or were) associated with lackluster qualities. For example, Baker (2007) describes the general belief that followers simply obey orders, and similarly, Frisina (2005) describes the notion that followers are "yes people" who lack ambition and motivation. Alcorn (1992) likens the image of followers to "sheeplike underlings who are unimaginative and forever dull" (p. 9). Followers themselves recognize passivity as a legitimate part of their role (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). Based on these discussions, the follower label reflects passivity, obedience, and submission (e.g., never asking questions of leaders, excessive agreement with leaders).

An alternative to directly labeling followers as passive and obedient is to make a distinction between followers and leaders, thus implying that followers are what leaders are *not*; indeed, in Hollander's (1974) early writing, he defined followers as non-leaders. Vanderslice (1988) argued that leaders and followers differ on the amount of power and status that they have in comparison to one another such that leaders have more power over followers, as a result of which leaders can direct and control follower behaviors. Similarly, Klein and House's (1995) description of charismatic leadership identified leader as the sender/"igniter" and follower as receiver/"flammable material." The comparisons between leaders and followers amount to an unromanticized view of followers and followership, that is, the "subordination of followership" (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). Uhl-Bien and Pillai (2007) explained how the need for direction, heroes, and sense-making, make leaders valuable members of organizational life, and thus promote leadership positions as the most coveted ones in organizations. As a result, followers and followership are seen as less important than leaders and leadership – meaning that they are not as valuable and their positions are not as coveted.

While we expect that negative depictions of followers are salient, we are not advocates of this view, and we acknowledge a burgeoning area of research on active followership that counters those negative depictions. However, as discussed in the proceeding paragraphs, and as argued by Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, and Morris (2006), the term followership is still associated with a robust stigma associated with "demeaning words like passive, weak, and conforming" (p. 304).

The Follower Label and Active Followership

The idea that leadership cannot be accomplished without followers is not new (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1991); but *how* followers contribute to leadership has garnered interest. Contemporary leadership approaches argue that follower involvement best positions followers as partners or collaborators in leadership (e.g., Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Born from this idea is active followership. Active followership emphasizes the ways in which followers encourage and challenge leaders, and demonstrate independent thought and critical thinking (see Chaleff, 1995; Kelley, 1992); essentially, active followership amounts to *effective* followership (Alcorn, 1992; Murphy, 1990). To describe the work and characteristics of effective followers, Sy (2010) asked "What is an effective follower?" His research yielded an 18-item measure of implicit followership theories that included hardworking, happy, and reliable as prototypic traits. These results confirm that followers can be thought of in a positive light. However, Sy's work does not tell us if those positive traits would have emerged if his question had changed from "What is an effective follower?" to "What is a follower?" The former question *requires* individuals to reflect on followers' "effective" traits.

We suspect that if the latter question had been posed, negative traits would have emerged and overshadowed the positive ones. Our suspicions are based on three major arguments. First, it has been noted that scholars and practitioners are unaccustomed to thinking about followership as a skill (Agho, 2009; Crossman & Crossman, 2011). And so, the idea that there are varying qualities of followership upon which we can judge effectiveness is a foreign concept. Second, the devaluation of followers throughout history is entrenched in our belief systems and thus, come to mind easily (Alcorn, 1992). Third, scholarly work to redress those beliefs systems lacks an agreed-upon definition of effective followership. Until that is achieved, rigorous and impactful empirical research on effective followership is hindered. In the absence of such progress, and in the presence of strong, negative beliefs about followers, we maintain that the current state of followership connotations is predominantly negative. Accordingly, we expect that the follower label most often communicates subpar qualities (e.g., submissiveness, lack of independent thought) of those to whom the label is applied.

Furthermore, we believe that the negative qualities associated with the follower label pose a concern for both organizational leaders and scholars because they threaten followers' opportunities to believe in themselves and perform at their full potential. Negative connotations surrounding followers and followership can influence follower behavior like a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby individuals behave in ways consistent with their labels. For example, Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, and Bontrager (2007) found that those labeled "convicted felon" were more likely to recidivate than those who were not labeled as such. Followers might also alter their self-perceptions to confirm those negative qualities (Bartusch & Matsueda, 1996; Matsueda, 1992), or even seek others' feedback to confirm that they are indeed deserving of the negative follower label (North & Swann, 2009). It might seem counterintuitive to seek to confirm negative self-views, however North and Swann (2009) argued that individuals receive gratification (e.g., reduced anxiety, coherence) when their self-views and how others perceive them are consistent, no matter how positive or negative the self-view may be. Ultimately, negative depictions of followership are not only damaging to followers themselves, but also run counter to the supposed mission of neocharismatic leadership: Building followers' confidence and expectations so that they can perform at their best (Bass, 1998).

Given the predominance of negative connotations surrounding followers and followership, and the potential consequences of being associated with those connotations, we investigated the effects of being labeled "follower" either by others (Study 1) or by oneself (Study 2). We expect that irrespective of who does the labeling, the follower label will negatively influence positive affect and in turn, deter extra-role behaviors at work. Overall, we seek to establish the difficulties associated with being a follower, and provide some insight into how individuals might overcome those difficulties.

Study 1

Following, Positive Affect, and Extra-Role Behaviors

We focus on one form of followers' subjective reactions to their label: positive affect. Our first hypothesis is that followership will be associated with lower positive affect. This hypothesis is based on evidence from other labeling studies in which groups are denigrated. For example, Gray (2010) described how the label "addict" was associated with feelings of shame. Similarly, children's self-perceptions were more negative when children were labeled "learning disabled" versus "children with learning disabilities" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2006). It is thought that labels exert these negative effects on subjective well-being because individuals are aware of the connotations associated with the label and internalize those connotations, thus experiencing negative self-views (Link, 1987; Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989). As described previously, the negative connotations surrounding followership are pervasive, hence the subordination of followership (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). Therefore, we expect that being associated with negative followership depresses positive affect.

Speaking of followers' low levels of positive affect calls for a comparison group to understand normal or ideal levels. Therefore, guided by the tradition of using followers and leaders as counterparts, we compared followers' affect to that of leaders. Because of the romance of leadership, leaders are expected to be significantly more enthusiastic and inspired by their roles than followers. These effects should be heightened given the relational nature of leading and following; followers are likely to compare or consider themselves in relation to leaders. A vast literature on naturalistic social comparisons suggests that, generally, individuals feel less positively when they compare themselves to others who are perceived as superior to themselves (e.g., Locke, 2003). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Participants labeled "followers" will report lower positive affect than those labeled "leaders."

This comparison between leaders and followers also permits us to evaluate an alternative perspective: Is it the follower label that depresses affect or the leader label that heightens it? This question is salient given the association between leader charisma and positive affect (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008).

To investigate whether followers take initiative in their work roles, we consider extra-role behaviors. Extra-role behaviors exemplify initiative-taking in the workplace because they are discretionary actions that benefit the organization and its members, and go beyond the formal requirements of one's job (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Accordingly, extra-role behaviors have been associated with employee tenure and promotion, salary, and job performance evaluations (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). We are interested in how following relates to taking initiative in organizations because the notion that followers are passive, obedient, and compliant contrasts the proactivity and responsibility required for extra-role behaviors.

We expect that depressed positive affect plays a role in discouraging extra-role behaviors. An extensive literature links state and trait positive affect to extra-role behaviors (by contrast, negative affect is thought to promote counter productive work behaviors; e.g., Dalal, 2005; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2002). George and Brief (1992) considered a number of theoretical explanations for the relationship, including the notion that individuals' self-reported positive affect predicts individuals' perceptions of their environments, coworkers, organizations, and opportunities to help their coworkers and organizations. There is also a tendency for individuals to seek positive affect, and helping may be viewed as a means to fulfill that desire (e.g., George & Brief, 1992). For example, by performing extra-role behaviors at work, individuals contribute to the organization's success, and in turn, enhance their positive affect and job satisfaction.

While high levels of positive affect promote active behaviors, low levels should not. As one example, feeling enthusiastic may motivate employees to spread goodwill about their organizations, but a lack of enthusiasm should not drive that behavior, or prompt employees to speak poorly of the organization. In other words, low levels of positive affect should predict inaction where an individual avoids or withdraws from a situation (Janssen, Lam, & Huang, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2002). And so, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Compared to participants labeled "leaders," the propensities to enact extra-role behaviors of participants labeled "followers" will be lessened indirectly through their depressed positive affect.

Method

Participants

One hundred fifty-four undergraduate business students (75 males, 79 females; *M* age = 19.18 years, *SD* = 1.17 years) from a Canadian university volunteered to participate in this study. Participants received course credit for their participation.

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	19.16	1.17					
2. Gender	0.52	–	−.07				
3. Perceived accuracy of role	2.66	1.46	−.03	.13			
4. Extra-role behaviors	3.10	0.85	.09	.06	.14	*.73*	
5. Positive affect	3.15	0.86	.04	−.15	.08	.30[†]	*.84*

Notes. $N \geq 137$. Reliabilities are on the diagonal. Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male. [†]$p < .01$.

Experimental Design, Procedure, and Controls

Participants were assigned randomly to one of three conditions: leader ($n = 51$), follower ($n = 51$), and a control group without a label ($n = 52$). To assign participants to conditions, participants were provided with false feedback after completing a bogus scientific test. Before being assigned to their roles, participants were told that the study had two parts. In Part 1, the current study, participants would answer questionnaires (some of which were bogus and others used as control variables; see below) to find out the roles that best suited them in group work. In Part 2 which would take place at a later date, participants would assume their assigned roles. (They were informed that there was no obligation to participate in Part 2. In reality, there was no Part 2.) Thus, because participants were led to believe that their responses to the questionnaires reflected the roles to which they were best suited for group work, there was meaning attached to their assigned conditions. After completing the questionnaires, participants were told that they were best suited to a "leader" or "follower" role (or in the third condition, they were told that their role would be assigned at a later time) at random.

After the manipulation, participants provided ratings of their positive affect, behavioral intentions for Part 2, demographic information, and perceived accuracy of their role assignment, in addition to a manipulation check question.

Measures

Perceived Accuracy of Role

We used participants' perceived accuracy of their role assignment as a control variable because it might influence responding in the experiment. It was assessed with one item, "How accurate do you think our personality measures were at assigning your group role?" rated on a scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate).

Extra-Role Behaviors

We created items to assess participants' propensity to perform extra-role behaviors that were relevant to the group task (i.e., a business case). The items asked participants to report their willingness to (1) meet group members on the weekend, (2) hold early morning meetings on a week day, (3) submit a report of their experience, and (4) create and circulate a list of group members' e-mails. These activities represent extra-role behaviors because they would benefit the group work at the expense of participants' (uncompensated) time and effort. Items 1 and 2 take place outside of usual meeting times and thus, require extra effort of participants, and Items 3 and 4 entail work that goes beyond the obligations to receive course credit for the study (i.e., meeting with group members in the laboratory). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (very unwilling) to 5 (very willing).

Positive Affect

Participants' positive affect was assessed using five randomly-selected items (interested, determined, alert, active, and attentive) from the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This shortened version of the PANAS accommodated for the length of the study and curbed potential fatigue effects given the elaborate bogus questionnaire. Participants rated items on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely so).

Results

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1.

Manipulation Check

A chi-square test with equal expectancies showed that participants correctly identified their role assignments: $\chi^2 (8, N = 153) = 273.39$, $p < .01$. Specifically, 98% of follower-condition participants, 90.20% of leader-condition participants, and 88.46% of control-condition participants identified their role assignments correctly.

Primary Analysis

In all analyses, we controlled statistically for participants' age, gender, and perceived accuracy of their role assignment. We used ordinary least squares regression to test our hypotheses, and dummy variables to code for each of the three conditions (see Table 2 for details). Our first hypothesis

Table 2. Study 1: Regression results

	Positive affect				Extra-role behaviors					
	Primary analyses: follower effect		Secondary analyses: leader effect		Primary & secondary analyses		Secondary analyses: leader effect			
Mediation procedure	Condition 1		Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3		Condition 3	
Variable	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	.03	.06	.03	.06	.10	.06	.10	.06	.10	.06
Gender	−.14	.15	−.14	.15	.09	.14	.09	.14	.09	.14
Perceived accuracy of role	.06	.06	.06	.06	.13	.05	.10	.06	.10	.06
Leader	.28†	.19					.12	.19		
Control	.23*	.18	−.05	.20			.07	.18	−.05	.20
Follower			−.28†	.19					−.12	.18
Positive affect					.32†	.08	.30†	.08	.30†	.08
R^2	.07		.07		.12		.11		.11	

Notes. Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male; Leader: 1 = leader, 0 = follower, 0 = control; Control: 1 = control, 0 = follower, 0 = leader; Follower: 1 = follower, 0 = leader, 0 = control. $*p < .05$. $†p < .01$.

predicted that followers would have lowered positive affect. *Hypothesis 1* was supported; followers had significantly lower positive affect than both leaders and those in the control condition (see Table 2). To test whether positive affect mediated the relationship between follower role assignment and extra-role behaviors (*Hypothesis 2*), three relationships were tested for significance: (1) the independent variable predicting the mediator (see *Hypothesis 1* for results), (2) the mediator predicting the dependent variable, and (3) whether the relationship between the independent and dependent variable was significantly reduced/zero after accounting for the mediator (e.g., Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998).

Conditions 1 and 2 were satisfied and consistent with *Hypothesis 2* (see Table 2). We used Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure to test the indirect relationship between follower role assignment and extra-role behaviors. Bootstrapping has been recommended as a method for testing mediation because it does not assume that the sampling distribution of the indirect effects is normal (an assumption that is typically violated in small samples; e.g., MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). The results of these analyses provided support for Condition 3 and thus, *Hypothesis 2*: The indirect effect was significant (as indicated by the 95% CI excluding zero; Preacher & Hayes, 2008) when comparing followers to both leaders (point estimate = .15, 95% CI [.04, .31]) and the control group (point estimate = .12, 95% CI [.02, .28]). These analyses support a "follower effect" (rather than a "leader effect"); participants assigned the label "follower" received their assignments more negatively than those who received the label "leader" or no label at all.

Secondary Analyses

We were also able to test the effects of being assigned a leadership role on positive affect, and indirectly, extra-role behaviors. Table 2 shows that leaders' positive affect did not differ significantly from that of participants in the control group, and thus, positive affect did not mediate the relationship between leadership assignment and extra-role behaviors (compared to the control group: point estimate = −.03, 95% CI [−.19, .09]). Again these secondary analyses suggest a "follower effect" because the leader label did not drive the outcome.

Discussion

In this first study, we established significant negative effects of being labeled a follower. Followers reported less positive affect than those assigned to be leaders and those who were not given any label. This finding is consistent with our expectation that the follower label conveys negative connotations, hence the lower positive affect reported by individuals who were assigned the label "follower." Furthermore, as a result of their lower positive affect, followers reported fewer intentions to perform extra-role behaviors. We conducted additional analyses to evaluate the rival hypothesis consistent with the romance of leadership – being assigned to a leader role might increase positive affect. However, the analyses revealed that the leader and control conditions were not significantly different from each other in any of our analyses; thus, it was *not* the anticipation of being a "leader" that increased positive affect, but rather, the anticipation of being a "follower" that depressed it.

Although we found support for our hypotheses, the artificial nature of the study warrants caution in interpreting its results and applications. One concern is that we explicitly labeled participants followers; however, in the workplace, employees may not be labeled as followers so distinctly. In fact, according to shared leadership literature, follower and leader roles shift between group members, thus blurring the line between leader and follower labels (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Therefore, future research should investigate

whether the same pattern of results exists under more subtle conditions.

Additionally, while we asked participants to recall their role assignments as a manipulation check, doing so does not confirm that participants perceived themselves as characterizing a leader or follower role. Our findings consequently, are specific to other-imposed follower labels. Likewise, because we did not collect data on how those participants would embody their role assignment, we also cannot comment on whether and/or how the interpretation of the follower assignment might translate into action. As a result, our measure of extra-role behaviors is more about behavioral *intentions* than actual behavior. If we had actual followers and leaders interact, the results might have been even stronger given that leader-follower comparisons would have been more salient. Although the lack of leader-follower interaction could be perceived as a limitation of the study, it is also a positive feature of our experiment's design: Because participants were not able to interact with each other, Study 1 provides an appropriate test of followers' reactions to their label, free of others' (e.g., leaders') influence.

In light of these limitations, we conducted a second study using employed adults to investigate the generalizability of Study 1 and allow for participants to label themselves as followers at work. Using an employed population mitigates concerns that our study is inapplicable to those who have been exposed to the value of followers in the workplace, and by allowing participants to self-label as followers, we are ensured that the label has meaning for the respondents.

Study 2

Consistent with the goals of Study 2, we turn our attention from exploring state positive affect and behavioral intentions to considering employees' job-related positive affect and self-reported extra-role behaviors at work (measured as organizational citizenship behaviors, OCBs). Targeting job-related positive affect and OCBs (i.e., extra-role behaviors specific to one's work; see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) takes advantage of our working sample as we are most interested in reactions to a follower label at work. In addition, to explore employees' self-categorization into the follower role, instead of comparing followers to leaders, we measured the extent to which employees classified themselves as followers in Study 2. The correspondence between self-labels and actual behavior (e.g., Chaney & Piercy, 1988; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2000) speaks to the accuracy of self-labels.

The shift to self-labeled followership builds upon Study 1. In Study 1, participants may have assumed that their role assignment meant that they were bound to one exclusive role (i.e., follower or leader). In reality, organizational members might hold multiple roles. For example, according to the social identity theory of leadership, leader roles are afforded to group members who best represent characteristics of the group (Hogg, 2001). In other words, context matters such that employees might find themselves occupying

follower roles in one group (suggesting that they are not prototypical of the group's characteristics), yet occupying leader roles in another group (suggesting that they are prototypical of the second group's characteristics). As a result, Study 2 does not require participants to choose one label that applies to them; rather, participants are asked to report *the extent* to which the follower label applies to them at work given their role behaviors and functions. Therefore, even those formally labeled "leaders" at work can recognize the degree of followership that is endemic to their (leadership) roles, and indeed, others have proposed that following is a part of effective leadership (e.g., Latour & Rast, 2004). Thus, Study 2 improves the ecological validity of Study 1, accounting for the possibility that the meaning of the follower label can change from one context to another.

While the theoretical rationale for our hypothesized relationships remains unchanged, the differences between Study 1 and Study 2 require modifications to our original hypotheses, thus:

Hypothesis 3: Self-labeled followership will be negatively related to job-related positive affect.

Hypothesis 4: Job-related positive affect will mediate the relationship between self-labeled followership and extra-role behaviors at work.

Method

Sample

Three hundred forty-eight summer students who were also employed participated in the survey in return for course credit (181 males, 167 females; M age = 20 years, SD = 1.79 years). Participants reported working an average of 2.77 days per week. Eighty-six percent of the participants were part-time workers, and 15% of the participants reported supervisory duties as part of their job responsibilities.

Measures

Self-Labeled Followership

To measure the extent to which participants labeled themselves followers at work, we used two items rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): "Overall, I would say that my role in this job is that of a follower" and "Overall, I would call myself a follower at work." In addition, participants were asked, "To what extent would you say you are a follower while performing your job?" They responded to this item on a scale from 1 (to a small extent) to 5 (to a large extent). Participants were allowed to use whatever definition of "follower" that was most meaningful to them when answering those three questions.

Table 3. Study 2: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	20.15	1.79					
2. Gender	0.48	–	−.02				
3. Self-labeled followership	2.84	1.06	.03	.06	*.94*		
4. Extra-role behaviors	5.28	0.67	.14*	.21†	−.24†	*.87*	
5. Job-related positive affect	3.14	0.71	.06	.05	−.33†	.30†	*.93*

Notes. $N \geq 316$. Reliabilities are on the diagonal. Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male. *$p < .05$. $^\dagger p < .01$.

Table 4. Study 2: Regression results

Mediation procedure	Job-related positive affect		Extra-role behaviors			
	Condition 1		Condition 2		Condition 3	
Variable	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	.15†	.02	.12*	.02	.13*	.02
Gender	.21†	.07	.18†	.07	.19†	.07
Self-labeled followership	−.27†	.03			−.19†	.03
Job-related positive affect			.29†	.05	.23†	.05
R^2	.12		.14		.17	

Notes. Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male. *$p < .05$. $^\dagger p < .01$.

Job-Related Positive Affect

We used the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS; Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000) to capture participants' job-related positive affect. For example, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which their job made them feel "enthusiastic" over the past 30 days on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (extremely often or always).

Extra-Role Behaviors

We used a 24-item OCB scale (Podsakoff et al., 1990) to measure extra-role behaviors. An example item is, "I am always ready to lend a helping hand to those around me." Each item was rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Control Variables

We controlled for age and gender.

Results

Descriptive statistics for Study 2 are presented in Table 3. To test *Hypothesis 3*, we regressed job-related positive affect on self-labeled followership and our control variables. A significant negative relationship emerged between self-labeled followership and positive affect, thus supporting *Hypothesis 3* (and Condition 1 of *Hypothesis 4*); see Table 4. We used Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bias-corrected bootstrapping

method to test whether self-labeled followership was indirectly related to extra-role behaviors through job-related positive affect. In support of *Hypothesis 4*, job-related positive affect was significantly related to extra-role behaviors in the predicted direction (Condition 2), and the indirect effect of self-labeled followership on extra-role behaviors was also significant (Condition 3; point estimate = −.04, 95% CI [−.08, −.02]). Parameter estimates are presented in Table 4.

Discussion

Study 2 complements Study 1 by demonstrating that the follower label has negative effects outside of the laboratory and in a sample of employed adults. An important distinction between Study 1 and Study 2 was how the follower label was imposed. In Study 1, participants were assigned the follower label. In Study 2, the label was self-imposed. Despite this difference, the results of Study 2 are similar to those from Study 1; we found a negative relationship between the extent to which participants reported followership at work (i.e., self-labeled followership) and job-related positive affect. Furthermore, job-related positive affect mediated the relationship between self-labeled followership and extra-role behaviors.

While Study 2 extends Study 1 by focusing on external validity, its limitations should be noted. First, data came from a single source, increasing the likelihood that the correlations between the variables were artificially inflated (Doty & Glick, 1998). While the extent to which one self-labels as a follower and job-related affect should be self-reported, extra-role behaviors may be better rated by

external sources (e.g., managers, colleagues) because participants may have been biased in their assessments of their own citizenship (e.g., Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007). Second, our measure of self-labeled followership was created for this study. It remains to be seen whether other measures of the follower label, including implicit measures, could more accurately or differentially capture this construct. Implicit measures might be especially informative for revealing the content of participants' self-labels because in this study, we did not ask participants to elaborate on how they defined the label "follower."

A unique aspect of our study is that the majority of the sample was part-time workers. Part-time workers may view their work as temporary or less critical to their lives (Dekker, Greenberg, & Barling, 1998), and thus be unfettered about their labels at work. If so, then self-labeled followership could be less impactful on overall well-being for part-time workers than for full-time workers. It is also possible that self-labeled followership is more prevalent in a sample of part-time workers because full-time workers have more opportunities to lead at work, and if their work is indeed, more critical to their lives, then being a "leader" on the job would be significant to them. Thus, full-time workers might rarely self-label as followers. For these reasons, drawing generalized conclusions about the follower label should be avoided until our results have been replicated in diverse samples.

General Discussion

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Study 1 and Study 2 tested reactions to the follower label. Irrespective of differences in design, we found that the label was associated with lower positive affect and in turn, fewer intended or reported extra-role behaviors. Our findings regarding lowered positive affect are consistent with others' accounts of negative followership stereotypes (e.g., followers lack motivation; Alcorn, 1992; Baker, 2007; Frisina, 2005), hence the displeasure of being associated with the follower label. Aligned with others (e.g., Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007), we argued that negative followership connotations persist because of the subordination of followership and the romance of leadership. We believe that active and effective followership studies are a promising way to mitigate negative connotations because they encourage and celebrate followers' contributions to leadership. Simply disseminating the results of such research to outlets targeted at professionals may help manifest positive notions of followership in organizations.

Our findings suggest that in practice, followers' lack of (intentions to perform) extra-role behaviors might hinder appreciation for followers in organizations. Withdrawing or withholding extra-role behaviors only perpetuates the stereotype that followers lack initiative and need direction. In interest of weakening that stereotype, it would be valuable for researchers and practitioners to look for ways to foster followers' extra-role behaviors. There is potential for leaders to also elevate the follower label and challenge its negative stereotypes. Inspired by the notion that "all people are capable of being both leaders and followers" (Pearce, Hoch, Jeppesen, & Wegge, 2010, p. 152), leaders could openly describe instances of followership in their work roles to combat the belief that only those who cannot lead or have lowly status occupy follower roles. Doing so may prompt followers to feel more positively about their roles, and thus, encourage their extra-role behaviors. Likewise, organizations can also foster shared leadership (e.g., Pearce & Conger, 2003) to blur the distinction between leaders and followers and thus, alter what it means to be a "follower."

Given the negative connotations surrounding the follower label, one might vouch for eliminating the follower label altogether. However, we caution against this suggestion. Just because the label is not used formally, in no way implies that it does not exist informally; the findings of Study 2 showed that employees could relate to followership activities at work even if they were not overtly labeled followers. Second, the follower label continues to give meaning to the leader label. And so, rather than arguing for a different label or no label at all, we emphasize the importance of understanding how the follower label affects followers' self-perceptions and motivations so that we can work toward counteracting any negative effects, or shaping a more positive perspective of following.

Limitations and Future Research

There is opportunity for future research to build upon these results and further understand the effects of identifying with or being assigned a follower label. For example, our studies only measured positive affect; might negative affect also mediate the relationship between followership and workplace behaviors? Stereotype-threat literature would be helpful in exploring the influence of negative affect; the stress and anxiety of a negative stereotype could hinder performance (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995), and encourage counterproductive work behaviors (e.g., Spector & Fox, 2002). For example, followers might withdraw from their work roles to cope with their stress (see Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010).

Our studies do not comment on how individual differences might interact with the follower label. Individuals who romanticize leadership (e.g., Meindl & Ehrlich, 1988) may be less enthusiastic and excited about their follower roles as they may see themselves as less instrumental to organizational success; however, those who resist romanticizing leadership may perceive themselves as integral to the organization regardless of whether or not the follower label is applied to them. Conversely, romanticizing leadership may enhance followers' positive affect if they see themselves as supporting critical (i.e., leader) roles in the organization. These conflicting questions remain for future research.

We did not test whether organizational context influences followers' impressions of their roles. Negative followership connotations may be bigger burdens in organizations that place great importance on attaining high-level positions than in flat organizations where hierarchy is eschewed. We encourage future research to investigate the role of organizational context, as it likely informs interpretations of the follower label for all organizational members.

Conclusion

In two studies we investigated individuals' responses to the follower label, whether other- or self-imposed. A pattern emerged: Being a follower was associated with reduced positive affect and in turn, fewer reported or intended extra-role behaviors. These negative effects concern followers, leaders, and organizations because *effective* followership is possible and necessary (e.g., Shamir, 2007). Accordingly, we encourage future research to extend our findings, and find ways to mitigate the negative effects of the label. More generally, we see a need to elevate the follower label in both research and practice so as to defeat the predominant negative perceptions of followership that we suspect, underlie our pattern of results.

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Colette Hoption

Albers School of Business and Economics
Seattle University
901 12th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122
USA
E-mail hoptionc@seattleu.edu