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Understanding Servant Leadership through the Lived Experiences of Higher Education Administrative Leaders

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Understanding Servant Leadership through the Lived Experiences of Higher Education

Administrative Leaders

A Dissertation in Education

With a Concentration in Educational Leadership

By

Michael David Roberts

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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We approve the dissertation of Michael David Roberts

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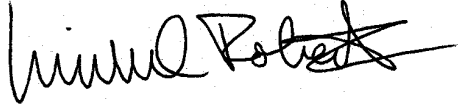Committee Member

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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation

of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized,

including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited.

I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

Author Signature _____ Date December 6, 2022

ABSTRACT

In a global society steeped in increasingly complex environments, immediate modes of communication, flexible work arrangements, rapid advances in technology, and greater competition, the need for sound leadership has never been more important. Progressive, innovative, stronger leaders have the potential to provide organizations with a competitive advantage. A plethora of contemporary leadership frameworks exist, included among them situational leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, relational leadership, and servant leadership. Each framework has its own unique set of characteristics which are embraced by the leaders who identify with them. This qualitative study used narrative inquiry through a postmodern lens to investigate the attributes of servant leadership, such as egalitarianism, empowering others, and demonstrating a strong emphasis on stewardship, to understand the lived experiences of higher education administrative leaders who demonstrate these characteristics. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight leaders at four universities in the Midwest. Findings revealed how leaders used common values as a compass to guide their decision-making. They shared a sense of spirituality, whether secular or non-secular, and it provided meaning to their work. Relationship development was at the heart of their success, and they exhibited a pragmatic approach to lead and support teams to achieve their goals. This research provides higher education institutions and leadership scholars with information on how to enhance a more nurturing and supportive environment for servant leaders. With a better understanding of servant leaders' lived experiences, higher education administrators will have greater insight into how to attract, retain, and enhance environments where they could thrive.

Keywords: administrator, higher education, university, servant leadership, leadership, narrative inquiry, change management, postmodern theory

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DEDICATION

My mother told me when I was a child that my father said how I would become a doctor. He

probably had a different type of doctor in mind, but this is for you, dad. I hope that I made you

proud up there.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

Rising institutional operating expenses, fixed salary expenses, decreasing federal and local funding, tightening competition, and fewer 18-year-olds graduating from high school (i.e. the *enrollment cliff of 2026*) represent some of the extraordinary headwinds that higher education leaders face today (Campion, 2020; Klemencic & Fried, 2007). These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that started in the United States in March 2020, and higher education leaders were forced to confront all of them simultaneously while working in a more disconnected remote environment. As colleges and universities pivoted multiple times to adapt through the pandemic, nimble and strategic leadership became even more important. As universities emerge from the pandemic and loosen restrictions, having a vision for living with COVID-19 while growing and thriving their institutions is vital.

Servant leadership, a popular leadership framework, provides higher education leaders with a practical construct that could help them navigate all of these obstacles in a growingly more challenging and competitive post-secondary education environment (Dean, 2014; Spears, 1998). Leaders who identify or at least demonstrate servant leader and servant leadership characteristics within a professional setting will be well equipped to lead in the more dynamic and challenging higher education landscape. Finley (2012) described, "Servant leadership can be the cause of an organization's enduring success, but lack thereof can lead to extinction. Greenleaf's concept is that not only must the leader be a servant, but the organization as well" (p. 138). To better attract, recruit, select and train the most effective servant leaders, college and universities' human resource departments must first understand their candidates' lived experiences. By better understanding servant leaders, over time they will better empathize, communicate, and collaborate with them. Not only could colleges and universities provide their

servant leaders with the best conditions in which to thrive and be successful, but through empathy, the organizations could, as Finley (2012) stated, become servant leaders, too.

Servant leadership was first described by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, and Greenleaf (1982) wrote, "The servant leader is servant first" (p. 6). He argued that the leader leads by serving their followers and constituents. Greenleaf was inspired by Hermann Hesse's (2018) *Journey to the East* in which the protagonist, Leo, was a simple servant in disguise. Leo was among a group of men who embarked on a *journey to the East* in search of the *ultimate Truth*. Despite his servant status, Leo emerged as the de facto leader. Part way through the pilgrimage, Leo went missing, and the group devolved into disarray. Later, Leo returns, and he reveals he is actually *President of the League*, and the narrator was part of a test of faith. The test of faith resonated with Greenleaf.

Greenleaf sought to find a better way to lead and motivate people who paid homage to how Leo led his fellow pilgrims (Greenleaf, 1982; Hesse, 2018). In 1967, Greenleaf worked for American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) before he left to pursue academia full-time to engage in management research and to teach as a *servant leader* (Greenleaf, 1982). A servant leader first wants to serve, yet they simultaneously desire to lead others (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greasley & Bocarnea, 2013; Greenleaf, 1982; Russell & Stone, 2002). This dichotomy presents a unique set of characteristics for servant leadership and the servant leader.

Servant leadership characteristics include creating a conducive environment for decision-making, fostering group consensus-building, empowering followers and other stakeholders to contribute to decision-making, focusing on shared values, placing a strong emphasis on stewardship, and authentically contributing to the growth of all members of the community (Burch, et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; Russell & Stone, 2002). Some characteristics

of the servant leader include the following: authenticity, humility, increased self-awareness, strong moral courage, and possessing a high degree of empathy (Burch, et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; Russell & Stone, 2002; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011–See Table 1).

Table 1

Servant Leadership Characteristics and Servant Leader Characteristics (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011)

Servant Leadership Characteristics	Servant Leader Characteristics
Conducive environment for decision-making	Altruism
Egalitarianism	Authenticity
Empowering followers	Empathy
Focusing on shared values	Humility
Fostering group consensus-building	Self-awareness
Growth of community members	Interpersonal support
Strong emphasis on stewardship	Cooperation
	Integrity

The characteristics of servant leaders and servant leadership weave through research on the leadership construct, and leaders' identification with them provides the link between and among those who embrace it. This is also important to the community of servant leaders, because it forms a mutual bond with which they could identify with each other and use while mentoring the future servant leaders of tomorrow. Contemporary servant leaders in higher education face myriad challenges in an ever increasing competitive environment, but they navigate them by relying on practicing these characteristics.

Research Problem

A lack of information on the lived experiences of servant leaders represents a gap in the literature. Knowledge on the lived experiences of servant leaders in higher education will contribute to growing and expanding the scholarship on servant leadership. Leadership scholars

will have the opportunity to better understand the lived experiences, motivating factors,

inspiration that led servant leaders down the path of servant leadership, and how the servant

leadership framework impacts their decision-making. From a more practical perspective,

without knowing how lived experiences shape the journey of servant leaders, a void and

disconnect exist between servant leaders and their constituents. Servant leaders' decisions carry

less context and anchoring, and it causes less empathy and understanding felt by the servant

leaders' constituents (De Clercq, et al., 2014). Without greater empathy and understanding,

servant leaders' potential is muted, and it creates an environment and conditions where servant

leaders cannot optimally thrive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to understand how lived experiences shape the journeys of

servant leaders in higher education. The focus of the study is eight servant leaders at four

different universities in the Midwest, who participated in semi-structured interviews using a

narrative inquiry methodology through a constructionist epistemology. The researcher sought to

examine the leaders' lived experiences and develop an understanding of how they shaped their

storied lives.

Research Questions

The collected data represent the lived experiences of servant leaders in higher education,

and how their lived journeys align with the servant leadership construct. More specifically, this

study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What lived experiences shape the journeys of university leaders who exhibit servant

   leadership characteristics?

2. What motivates the university leaders to demonstrate servant leadership characteristics?

3. How do university administrative leaders who possess servant leadership characteristics reflect on their lived experiences when making decisions?

Positionality

The researcher agreed with Merriam (2002) that he cannot attempt to separate himself from the focus of his study and act as an unbiased party; there was no temporary suspension of disbelief of the researcher-as-instrument. He was aware of his social location as a white, cis-gender, heterosexual male who has implicit privileges, and how his identity and privileges impacted his research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). His identity and privileges caused him to make assumptions about participants' experiences as being similar to his own, when in fact some were radically different. He attempted to be aware of this pitfall, and he frequently challenged his own perceptions. As he interviewed his participants, he was aware of the diverse identities of the participants. He was sensitive to their mixed intersectional identities, whether they were known or unknown to him during the research process. He discovered during the methods phase of his research that some of their identities were shared with some and were different from others. This mix of his social location in the context of each semi-structured interview provided a rich and multi-varied set of data, and he reflexively approached the methods and adjusted accordingly during the interviews. Narrative inquiry was well suited for his reflexive approach to the study, because of its ability to elicit evolving stories from participants. As they described their life journey toward their present leadership role, they revealed their various identities and experiences, and how they shaped their lives.

Research Approach

The researcher studied the lived experiences of eight higher education administrative leaders who worked at four different universities in the Midwest by using the narrative inquiry

methodology. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the qualitative data. Before the interviews, an initial quantitative method of using a questionnaire to identify the participants was administered, and it was emailed to a population of 166 administrative leaders. The pre-interview questionnaire asked them to rate to what extent, using a Likert scale, they exhibit servant leader and servant leadership characteristics. Inclusion criteria included that the leaders had at least ten years of higher education leadership experience as an administrator at universities in the Midwest. After sorting the data in descending order based upon the respondents who scored the highest on demonstrating the servant leader and servant leadership characteristics, the researcher emailed the top nine candidates to invite them to interview. Eight of the top nine agreed to participate. To maintain confidentiality, the eight participants were identified with pseudonyms. The eight interviews were recorded over Zoom and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study came from the researcher's interest in understanding how lived experiences shaped the ontology of the life journey that led to leaders' demonstration of servant leadership characteristics. Increased understanding of servant leaders will provide university administrators with greater knowledge and situational context for better recruiting, interviewing, selecting, retaining, and developing them. This will lead to a more conducive environment where servant leaders will thrive, which in turn will lead to servant leaders' improved decision-making. Better decision-making has the potential to cascade to benefit students who attend the institutions and society at large.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduces servant leadership as a popular leadership framework that dates back as far as the Bible and other sacred religious texts (Flaniken, 2006). Leadership scholarship informs today's leaders in the public sector and private sector, including higher education, but it also contributes to the leaders of tomorrow, many of whom are students attending colleges and universities today. The students' lived experiences will include reciprocal interactions with faculty, staff, and peer student mentors, all of whom will shape the students' learning and the development of their own leadership style. Limited research exists that attempts to understand servant leaders through their lived experiences, and the purpose of this study is to understand how lived experiences shape the journeys of leaders in higher education who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership characteristics. The intended audience of this research study is leadership scholars, especially those with an interest in servant leadership, higher education administration scholars, and human resource management scholars and professionals.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Servant leadership is a popular leadership framework that focuses on leaders who put the needs of their followers and other constituents before their own in the interest to serve others (Greenleaf, 1982). The servant leaders' primary consideration is to serve versus to lead, but through the practice of serving first they ironically lead. Servant leaders view themselves as stewards, and they become models to empower and inspire their followers to become servant leaders, too (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leaders' self-concept reveals a keen awareness of their thoughts, beliefs, and values, and they closely align with their behavior and approach to leadership.

Servant leadership characteristics are important to servant leaders because they form the basis of the framework and distinguish it from the other leadership constructs. The characteristics of servant leaders and servant leadership weave through the scholarship about the framework, and they provide the link between and among those who embrace the framework. This link is also important to the community of servant leaders, because it forms a mutual bond-and sense of love in a platonic way in an organizational setting-with which they could identify with each other and use while mentoring the future servant leaders of tomorrow (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010).

Extensive research, books, essays, including Greenleaf's seminal *The Servant as Leader*, and articles exist on servant leadership (see, for example: Burch et al., 2015; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greasley & Bocarnea 2013; Greenleaf, 1982; Mittal & Dorfman, 2012; Murphy, 1998). One of the major tenets of servant leadership is placing a strong emphasis on stewardship for the team and the organization (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982). Stewardship is defined as taking care of something in a meaningful way (Burch et al., 2015;

Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982). A primary characteristic of a servant leader is empathy (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; van Dierendonck & Nuijten 2011). Effective higher education administrators should have a strong degree of empathy and motivation to be sound stewards to recognize their institutions' limitations, and at the same time meet the progressively increasing complex needs of their students (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982). Universities are looking to the servant leadership framework when creating leadership centers and institutes as a way to attract strong candidates for upper administrative positions, such as provosts, deans, and departmental chairs (June, 2017). As the higher education landscape becomes increasingly more complex and competitive, these characteristics form a foundation for sound leadership practice (Page, 2003).

There are multiple leadership frameworks besides servant leadership, such as authentic leadership, transformational leadership, positive leadership, and relational leadership. However, institutions that focus on servant leadership over the others could have an advantage, because at the foundation of its tenets are indispensable virtues, such as trust, willingness to be accountable, a conscious development to attain diversity, respect, and a dedication to service and equity (Page, 2003). Higher education leaders who embody these virtues and universities that employ them will be better positioned to thrive amidst the challenges facing higher education. Examples of such challenges include: rising institutional operating expenses, decreasing federal and local funding, tightening competition, increasing demand for online learning, rising non-traditional student population, increasing percentage of first-generation students and students from marginalized groups, especially those enrolled at urban universities, and anticipated decreasing overall enrollment due to changing demographics of 18-year-olds (Grawe, 2019). Understanding servant leadership and the reasons why some higher education administrators embrace it as their

framework of choice–or at least demonstrate its characteristics–and use it as a filter for their decision-making would benefit colleges and universities in two ways. One is that the findings could benefit university human resource departments and hiring managers on effective methods to recruit, interview, and select future servant leaders at the middle manager and executive ranks. The second is that the scholarship could inform university administrative leadership on more effective methods to retain servant leaders and effectively develop them–and their protégés–in such a way where they could be better situated to thrive as more effective decision-makers. As a result, servant leadership in higher education warrants merit as an area to research.

Methods for Review of Literature

For this study's literature review, myriad variations of search words included: servant leadership, higher education, colleges, universities, higher education administrators, leadership philosophies, leadership types, characteristics of servant leaders, and characteristics of servant leadership. DePaul University's John T. Richardson Library online database was used, and it included the EBSCO and ERIC databases. Google Scholar was utilized to find both primary and secondary sources. ProQuest was additionally used to search dissertations on servant leadership to scope out gaps in scholarship with a focus on servant leadership. The online *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Harvard Business Re*view were referenced as tertiary sources. For context, multiple leadership philosophies were defined, but they were excluded beyond their definitions to keep the focus of the study on the servant leadership framework. This literature review predominantly features quantitative studies on servant leadership, because they were in greater supply than qualitative studies were.

Review of Significant Scholarship

Historical Context of Leadership

The concept of leadership could be divided into two very broad categories: less progressive, old-fashioned leadership and more contemporary, fashionable leadership (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005). Old-fashioned leadership is more I-centric, and it involves more authoritarian command and control characteristics (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005). For instance, an old-fashioned leader wields power in a carrot-stick manner, where the leader uses incentives or punishment to motivate their followers (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005). Formal leadership, by way of sheer position and title in an organization, provides the old-fashioned leader with their personal sense of power and authority. Despite the old-fashioned moniker, this more antiquated leadership concept is surprisingly still rampant throughout all types of organizations today (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005). In contrast, fashionable leadership is more team-centric, and it focuses on empowerment, mentorship, and the development of others as leaders; there is not only one perceived leader on a team, but some who are more experienced leaders and others who are developing their leadership ability (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005; Poon, 2006). A fashionable leader actively includes other members of the team in the decision-making process, and followers are encouraged to speak up, voice concern, and push back on the leader's ideas (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005).

Literature on leadership highlights a notion there is a difference between a manager and a leader. In some respects, the old-fashioned, more traditional view of a leader takes on characteristics of a manager and the more contemporary view of a leader describes characteristics of a more fashionable leader (Glaser & Pilnick, 2005; Nayar, 2013). Effective managers operate in an efficient manner to ensure processes are running smoothly, day to day projects and responsibilities are executed in an orderly fashion, and followers are content and

getting their work done (Nayar, 2013; Northouse, 2015). Nayar (2013) contends that managers tend to rely on circles of power and focus on the work that needs to be done, which aligns with Glaser and Pilnick's (2005) view of the old-fashioned carrot-stick approach to enforcing authoritative power. Knowing this perspective, it is clear that leaders can be managers, but not all managers are leaders. Leaders ensure the team's work is getting done efficiently and on time, but they transcend how managers approach their teams. Leaders emphasize the team's professional growth beyond the day to day work, and they create value for their team rather than just focus on the value of the team's production of goods or services. The notion of the leader's focus on the team aligns with Glaser and Pilnick's (2005) concept of fashionable leadership (Nayar, 2013). On one hand, managers tend to resist change, because they are more comfortable operating in the status quo. On the other hand, leaders embrace and promote change and movement as important characteristics in developing the team and organization (Nayar 2013; Northouse, 2015). With an effective leader, there is much that a team can accomplish, and as a result, strong leadership is key to a successful team and organization. In the case of a particularly successful team, a leader may even be recognized for their accomplishments   Evidence of leaders being recognized for their accomplishments date back centuries.

The history of leadership has been captured on primitive cave drawings and text over thousands of years, and the earliest leadership scholars could be considered among the earliest Homo sapiens (English, 2011). More classical leadership scholars included Greek and Roman philosophers who commented on leadership (English, 2011). For instance, Alexander the Great detailed some of his battles and leadership tactics (English, 2011). Julius Caesar wrote about leading the Roman Empire, and more recently Horatio Nelson chronicled several battles and asked some of his soldiers for feedback and to comment on what he wrote (English, 2011).

Naturally, a caveat must be considered regarding who documented these early expressions of leadership: the winners of battles (English, 2011). Throughout history, winning and leadership have been synonymous, but effectively leading is not always about winning. Fabricating a connection between winning and leading could become counterproductive by creating a less healthy and more toxic form of competition. When competition between leaders in an organization focuses on one-sided winning and not a mutual win-win proposition, especially when stakes are high, creates an outcome of winners and losers; war is a good example.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* was written in the 4th Century B.C., and it still has relevance to many of today's leaders (English, 2011). From Army generals to Fortune 500 CEOs, from non-profit administrators to high school principals, many cite some of the primary tenets from Tzu's *The Art of War* that resonate with them (English, 2011). The text's detail on weaponry, battle strategy, and discipline in combat provided a very early blueprint that has stood the test of time, and it continues to inform some of today's military leaders around the world (English, 2011). Further, the formation of tactics founded on a sound strategy and vision is paramount when leaders set out on a battle mission, develop a new product or service, or reorganize a business unit (English, 2011). Centuries of leaders have followed tenets from *The Art of War*, and it became a significant early touchstone for the evolution of leadership through multiple leadership lenses (English, 2011). *The Art of War* has influenced countless leaders for centuries, but it clearly does not distinguish differences between or among more contemporary leadership frameworks. Defining the more salient leadership constructs helps leaders to understand which one or which ones better fit their identity and predilections. Life circumstances and struggle may determine the leadership framework adopted by the leader. Foucalt (1980) viewed struggle as an opportunity for a subject to rally with allies to rise above it and battle for the common good. On

one hand, some leaders may discover their preferred leadership construct through reflecting on their identity and matching it to a framework. On the other hand, other leaders may endure and overcome a struggle before realizing their successful tactics matched a leadership construct's principles and methods.

Besides servant leadership, some of the more prominent contemporary leadership models include: situational leadership, authentic leadership, relational leadership, positive leadership, and transformational leadership (Northouse, 2015). Situational leadership focuses on the leader adapting their leadership approach, as a result of varying levels of development of the followers involved on the team (Northouse, 2015; Rabarison, et al., 2013). Authentic leadership stresses open and honest discourse and relationships with followers with ethics being paramount, and it stresses a deep awareness of both the leader's and their follower's values and perspectives (George, 2003; Northouse, 2015; Sendjaya, et al., 2008). This framework focuses on one's own identity, and how it could be leveraged to help the leader engender trust and buy-in. Another construct is relational leadership, and it emphasizes the development of interpersonal skills among team members and across an organizations' teams with the goal of all team members learning and developing as individual leaders (Northouse, 2015; Rabarison, et al., 2013). Relational leadership highlights communication, and how it is the bridge to fostering a more effective team. Positive leadership finds a leader modeling and channeling positive emotions to inspire and motivate teams to focus on strengths and positive perspectives on situations or problems to achieve success (Cameron, 2012). Finally, transformational leadership underscores intentional change, and it gains inspiration through collective accountability and collaboration (Burch et al., 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Neale, 2005; Northouse, 2015; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Leaders who embrace this construct stress the importance of anticipating change, being

responsive to change, and embracing change as primary tenets to position the team to be more nimble and flexible in a changing environment. Transformational leadership and servant leadership are the two contemporary leadership constructs that are most closely aligned (Burch et al., 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Northouse, 2015). Both emphasize personal development of followers and empowerment of them (Burch et al., 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Northouse, 2015). However, they differ where transformational leaders more intentionally attempt to motivate and persuade their followers to align with their vision and priorities, but servant leaders emphasize their followers' priorities and at times place them above their own when they collectively establish a vision together (Burch et al., 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Northouse, 2015). Most importantly, servant leadership positions the leader to inspire their followers through empowerment (Greenleaf, 1982).

Servant Leadership and Intersectionality

Leadership is a socially constructed concept, and it is influenced by leaders' and followers' intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. Leaders form their own perspective on leadership through their own constructionist lens and how they view and interact with the world around them. Variables that influence their lens are their own race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class, among others. The same types of characteristics of followers on their team and other constituents with whom they interact also contribute to shaping leaders' constructionist lenses. These lenses are important, because they provide the windows and screens through which leaders see, filter, and interpret large amounts of information on a daily basis. Postindustrial leaders navigate these lenses and the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class in a complex world marked by rapid technological change, globalization, wealth disparity, and social inequalities (Parker, 2005).

A qualitative study on power dynamics of servant leadership in Australia critiques the servant leadership framework and explores how power enables some leaders to be destined to become servant leaders and how power dynamics relegate others to be destined to become followers (Liu, 2019). The study stems from a social constructionist paradigm where a leader becomes one through a negotiated axis of intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Throughout this negotiation by the leader, power informs the leader's rise and their practice (Liu, 2019). The study has one participant, 'Jeff', an early 30s Chinese-born information technology manager in a corporate setting who identifies with both his Chinese heritage and his Australian citizenship. Jeff is tall, has an athletic build, and he identifies as middle-class, cis-male, heterosexual, and able-bodied. The researcher interviewed Jeff four times for a total of five hours and 48 minutes, and he also interviewed each of Jeff's six direct reports to understand their perception of the primary participant as a servant leader (Liu, 2019). The direct reports all identify as white Australian males, who are aged between their 30s and 50s. Findings demonstrate that Jeff viewed his decisions and behavior through the servant leadership framework. Jeff believed that his decision-making involved rumination on empathy, recognition of his followers' emotional well-being, and humility, which, according to literature on servant leaders, are hallmarks of the framework as represented in Table 1 (see page 3). Jeff viewed his leadership as doing the right thing, even when no one was looking (Liu, 2019). In contrast, Jeff's followers rejected the notion that Jeff was a servant leader. Through an intersectional analysis of dialogic data gleaned through a reflexive interview method, all of Jeff's followers agreed that Jeff exhibited some of the servant leadership characteristics on a consistent basis. However, they felt it was his rightful responsibility as a leader, not necessarily as a servant leader. Jeff's followers further believed that he was not viewed as a servant leader, because of

hegemonic dynamics around his race, gender, sexuality, age, and social class (Liu, 2019). In

other words, the data pointed to Jeff's privilege as a relatively young Asian–which tends to

command the most privilege of non-whites–heterosexual, cis-male, professional born in China.

According to his followers, his privileges more so afforded him unique opportunities to become

a leader and negotiate his rise in leadership roles by leveraging the power inherent in his

privileges, and less was it a result of his practice of the servant leadership characteristics (Liu,

2019). A drawback from the study was the followers' perception of power that seemed to

obfuscate Jeff's exhibition of servant leadership characteristics. Power and privilege may have

removed some barriers as Jeff rose in leadership ranks, however the study did not attempt to

separate it from the observations made by the followers that he indeed practiced leadership

characteristics. Therefore, Jeff could still have been viewed as a servant leader by his followers,

but it appears that the researcher did not separate for the followers the 'what' from the 'why',

which would have bolstered the dependability of the collected qualitative data. In other words,

based on what Jeff disclosed and what his followers reported, Jeff may have been a servant

leader. However, the followers could not get past why he was a leader in the first place, and, as a

result, dismissed him as a servant leader. As a result, trust, the most basic prerequisite for sound

leadership was missing, and there was an apparent disconnect between how the leader thought

his followers viewed him versus how they actually did. Without trust and with this form of

disconnect between him and his followers, the leader will not be effective. In this literature

review, trust appeared as a prerequisite for effective teams, and there was a correlation between

it and organization performance. The findings from a study on CEO leadership in the hospitality

industry in China demonstrated that hotels with more trusted CEOs performed financially better

than those with less trusted CEOs (Huang, et al., 2016; Liu, 2019). Having trusted leaders who

recognize their privilege, whether it is based on race, ethnicity, gender, etc., gives organizations a competitive advantage compared to those that lack leaders who possess these characteristics.

In a different study on race, ethnicity and leadership, the researcher conducted it using the narrative inquiry methodology. This study focused on interviewing leaders from six organizations about their views on leadership and social justice and social change (Ospina & Su, 2009). Via narrative inquiry, participants were asked to generate stories to describe and explain their work and their role as leaders at their respective organizations. Two rounds of interviews to elicit meaning-making processes and leadership practices at each organization were conducted among eight to nine leaders at 22 organization (Ospina & Su, 2009). Leaders were interviewed first, and other stakeholders, such as their staff, board members, and local public officials, were interviewed second. To understand race and ethnicity among leaders, emergent themes from the interviews' coded transcripts were categorized as multiple narratives, cultural traditions, and lived experiences (Ospina & Su, 2009). Findings demonstrated a clear subtext of the role race and ethnicity played especially in organizations that explicitly embraced social justice as a value. Findings exhibited an intersection of systems of oppression in leaders who were people of color, and they were exacerbated among those who were also women. Further, findings showed sources of stress among leaders associated with social identity, and how the stress restricts the leaders to act (Ospina & Su, 2009). This study supports other scholarship on leadership and how the intersectionality race, ethnicity, and gender plays a role in the lives of the leaders and those who report to them. Leaders who have more privilege, such as Caucasian men, tend to wield more power than leaders who have less privilege, such as women of color (Liu, 2019; Ospina & Su, 2009). A drawback of this study was a lack of focus on the results of the interviews with the leaders' stakeholders (Seidman, 2006). The leaders' data were understandably the feature of the

study, but the stakeholders' data seemed less important and it lacked any real attention in the results section of the study. Studies on servant leadership and gender and racial dynamics attributed leaders' diversity intelligence as an area to improve to enhance team effectiveness (Hughes, 2016; Sims, 2018). As the United States continues to become more diverse, organizations that intentionally increase their leaders' diversity intelligence will be better positioned for success than those that rest on the status quo.

In a literature review on race and ethnicity and leadership across economic sectors and industries, the authors sought to learn more about the effects of race and ethnicity on perceptions of leadership (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). In particular, the authors focused on studies of how race and ethnicity affect the approaches the leaders take to enact their leadership, how race and ethnicity of leaders and followers impact the perception of leadership, and how leaders navigate the social reality of race and ethnicity. A conclusion drawn from the literature includes an underlying assumption that leaders of color are disadvantaged compare to white leaders, because they are viewed as less legitimate (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Another conclusion is that African American leaders were evaluated more favorably on interpersonal characteristics than on task-related factors. Stereotypes and biases were common threads among several of the studies. For example, men were viewed as being more decisive leaders than their female counterparts. This literature review underscored a theme that surfaced in the Liu (2019) study that focused on how privilege, whether it be the leaders' whiteness or the leader being a heterosexual male, assumes a sense of strength in the leader. Privilege of varying types played a common role in the literature, and it was tied to self-awareness among some leaders who possessed greater levels of diversity intelligence (Sims, 2018). Leaders with advanced diversity intelligence better understand power dynamics, and they more easily modulate their positions of power and transparently

communicate them. Ospina and Su's (2009) study revealed that systemic power dynamics disadvantaged leaders of color, and this notion was matched in the literature review (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). A limitation is that it did not focus on any particular leadership frameworks. As a result, the review lacked any reported findings on possible correlations or common themes between frameworks and how race and ethnicity inform them.

Servant Leadership in the Higher Education Setting

Community College Institution

Existing research on servant leadership in the higher education environment appears to focus on leaders' identification with the primary tenets of the servant leadership framework (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Ingram, 2003; Neale, 2005). For instance, Virginia Boyum (2012) studied in her dissertation research the experiences of higher education leaders and followers, and why followers chose to become protégés of servant leaders. Through social constructivism and grounded theory, Boyum used a qualitative approach to the study in which she used interview and focus group methods at two different universities (Boyum, 2012). One was a Christian-based college that taught servant leadership out of a center designed for it, and the other institution was a large community college in the South. During the interviews and focus groups, she directed her questions at understanding the participants' relationship constructs with their leaders. What Boyum discovered was how followers progress through relational states during their development under a servant leader, and how their progress seemed to correspond with the mentees' individual learning and growth as professionals (Boyum, 2012). Boyum attempted to understand what drew followers to mentors in a servant leadership context. Results supported some motivating factors for the followers, but the researcher's study did not explain the *why*. Understanding greater context about the backgrounds and lived experiences of the

leaders and protégés would have added richer context to the servant leadership phenomenon, especially under a constructionist paradigm.

Four-year Non-secular Institution

A dissertation study of servant leadership in the higher education setting by Osmond Ingram (2003) focused on its role at four-year Christian faith-based colleges and universities. Ingram (2003) studied the observed perceptions of servant leadership by administrators, faculty and students, and the relationships between the perceptions and the conceptualization of servant leadership. Ingram's study was like that of Boyum in that both researchers wanted to understand the perceptions of followers who were involved in servant leadership relationships with mentors (Boyum, 2012; Ingram, 2003). However, Ingram went further than Boyum also to include the perceptions of the leaders who were involved in the same servant leadership relationships. Ingram (2003) did so by using a quantitative method of employing the widely used Servant Leader Questionnaire (SLQ) with Likert questions. The SLQ used in Ingram's study was deemed both a reliable and valid tool. A Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .8774, and it had a high face validity determined by cooperation among participants. Ingram (2003) sent the SLQ to a random sample of 500 administrators, faculty, and students at five out of 21 Christian faith-based colleges; 227 responses were received. All respondents most highly ranked having high moral and ethical standards as paramount for practicing the servant leadership framework. After moral and ethical standards, both faculty and students regarded the need for a more customized form of leadership as the second most important conceptualization (Ingram, 2003). For administrators, developing others was the second most highly regarded conceptualization. These findings appear to support the notion in servant leadership scholarship that having high moral and ethical standards are prerequisite characteristics of the framework. The study's findings lead

one to believe that unique roles in higher education prompt individuals to prioritize different leadership characteristics (Ingram, 2003).

The Boyum and Ingram studies advanced an understanding of the characteristics of both the leaders and followers who prescribe to a servant leadership framework in higher education from qualitative and quantitative methods, respectively. However, they appear to miss motivating factors for what drew them to support the framework. The same comment could be used to describe a dissertation by Lynwood Russell (2016), who attempted to study how followers of a servant leader attempted to describe the characteristics of the leader, how the leader's behaviors demonstrated servant leadership, and how leaders deprioritized their needs over the needs of others (Russell, 2016). Unique to Russell's study, when compared to those of Boyum and Ingram, is he also endeavors to investigate the notion of whether servant leadership could thrive in a traditional university. Like Ingram, Russell (2016) also used the SLQ, but he focused his research on 65 staff members at a Jesuit four-year university in northern California. He sought to identify the leaders' perceptions of their behavior and attitudes, and how they demonstrated the characteristics inherent to servant leadership. Results demonstrated that some of the leaders who completed the survey viewed their own behavior and attitudes in support of servant leadership characteristics (Russell, 2016). For instance, 44% of the respondents felt they often did everything that they could do to support others, 40% were alert of what was happening in the lives of others on the team, and 44% often encouraged team members to dream big (Russell, 2016). This study adds to servant leadership literature by adding another perspective of how servant leaders perceive their own attitudes and behavior in relation to the framework which they behold. However, a limitation of this study–and others in this literature review–is that participants were evaluating their own characteristics and trying to interpret them. This might

induce a self-serving bias, where the participants feel that their perceived behavior and attitudes

in an exaggerated favorable manner to enhance their self-esteem. This potential bias could

diminish the value of this study, because possible conclusions drawn from it could be based on

the distorted self-image of the participants through their self-reporting.

Literature on servant leadership in a non-secular higher education setting extends to how

it is interpreted and applied at DePaul University, a four-year Catholic institution, and how it is

embodied in its identity (Murphy, 1998). DePaul was founded in 1898 in Chicago's Lincoln

Park neighborhood by Vincentian priests. DePaul's ethos was inspired by the work and

leadership of St. Vincent dePaul, who was a 16th and 17th century French priest and early

practitioner of servant leadership (Murphy, 1998). He inspired his followers to serve the poor

and oppressed people of Paris–considering servant leaders have a proclivity to help those who

are more marginalized–by engaging them in service, and he empowered them to take ownership

and accountability for their own actions (Murphy, 1998; Sendjaya et al., 2008). This sense of

service coincides with Ingram's (2003) study and how having high moral and ethical standards

are the most important attribute among leaders at the Christian-faith institutions that comprised

the sample of his study. In the journal article, Murphy (1998) highlights how DePaul's mission

from as early as 1898 and the work of St. Vincent dePaul in the 16th century coincide with

contemporary servant leadership. Murphy's (1998) interpretation of servant leadership and the

founding and mission of DePaul support the mission and faith characteristics of the framework

as practiced by higher education leaders as cited in previous studies in this dissertation (Burch et

al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Ingram, 2003; Russell, 2016). For example, Russell (2016) measured the

extent leaders supported others on their team, Ingram (2003) measured leaders' prioritization of

moral and ethical behavior, and Murphy (1998) posited that high regard of others' needs and

practicing the Vincentian mission of serving others coincides well with servant leadership. Murphy's (1998) article serves as a support to extend the emphasis placed on servant leadership characteristics found in the body of literature on the framework practiced in the higher education setting.

Four-year Public Institution

Servant leadership extends beyond private universities, and the framework appears in practice at four-year public institutions, as well. Kansas State University (KSU) created a short-term residential leadership program for its faculty and staff, and the university found it as an opportunity to study leadership in a more intentional way (Scott & Tolar, 2009). Launched by KSU's James Coffman Leadership Institute, a residential leadership program was studied to measure its success and impact. The institute–forged on the notion that every individual can become a successful leader–created a two-and-a-half day, two-night in-residence immersion program using the servant leadership framework's tenets for both faculty and staff (Scott & Tolar, 2009). Some of the servant leadership characteristics emphasized by the researchers for this study matched other studies in this review, including practicing a caring orientation, being ethical, and embracing diversity (Burch et al., 2015; Dean, 2014). Many of these characteristics were also espoused by St. Vincent, who inspired the mission at DePaul University, as cited in the journal article by Murphy (1998). The KSU participants engaged in workshops, expert panel discussion with KSU leaders, small and large group activities, and review of case studies. Susan Scott and Mary Tolar (2009) used a qualitative approach for the study of servant leadership at KSU, and they used a survey instrument to understand how effective the residency program succeeded in identifying servant leadership characteristics in the participants. Results of the training demonstrated that the KSU community understood how to transfer empathy,

empowerment, and group decision-making into practice (Northouse, 2015; Scott & Tolar, 2009).

The results appeared to reinforce participants' understanding of their professional development

career opportunities through the servant leadership and transformational leadership lenses, which

were long-standing objectives of the institute (Harrison, 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Scott &

Tolar, 2009). The study highlighted how a residency leadership professional development

program for faculty and staff could promote servant leadership, but a downside of the study is

that it only focused on a few of the characteristics of the framework. Further, the study appeared

to be an evaluation of the success, or even just the popularity, of a relatively parochial residency

program at KSU. A drawback of the study is it did not address how faculty and staff would

incorporate and transfer the servant leadership skills to their jobs.

Servant Leadership in the Elementary through High School Setting

To provide a review of literature on servant leadership through a P-20 lens, the researcher

started with research conducted in both the elementary and high school settings. Most of the

research in these settings focused on school principals. A quantitative study conducted in Duzce,

Turkey involved 29 elementary schools and had the purpose of measuring job satisfaction of

teachers who worked for principals who exhibited servant leadership characteristics (Cerit,

2009). Job satisfaction was measured using the Mohrman-Cooke-Mohrman Job Satisfaction

Scale. Servant leadership was defined using the following characteristics: valuing people,

developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and

sharing leadership (Cerit, 2009). A survey was sent to 700 teachers, and the results showed an

85% response rate with 595 teachers participating in the study. From the findings, 56% of the

teachers were female, 44% were male, 21% had been working 1-5 years, 29% had been working

6-10 years, 17% had been working 11-15 years, and 31% had been working 16+ years (Cerit,

2009). Results of the study showed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and principals' exhibition of servant leadership characteristics. For instance, t-test results on the significance of differences in means showed that all measured servant leadership characteristics had an impact on teacher job satisfaction, except sharing leadership. The study supports literature on servant leadership that followers of servant leaders feel more connected to their work when they are led by servant leaders (Burch et al., 2015; Cerit, 2009; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; van Dierendonck & Nuijten 2011). A limitation of the study is that the schools' systemic structure of shared decision-making could have contributed to job satisfaction, not just the principals' demonstration of sharing leadership. This notion is intimated by the authors' disclosure that they were surprised by the regression analysis result that showed no significant effect of principals' sharing leadership on teacher job satisfaction.

A common thread in the literature on servant leadership is a foundation of trust. Pouramiri and Mehdinezhad (2017) focused on measuring trust of servant leader principals. The study involved 103 principals in Zahedan, Iran divided between 52 males and 51 females, and two questionnaires were used: Page Wong's servant leadership questionnaire and Ellonen, Bloomquist and Puumalainen's Organizational Trust questionnaire (Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017). According to Page Wong's servant leadership questionnaire, the following are some of the servant leadership characteristics measured: developing and empowering others, vulnerability and humility, authentic leadership, participatory leadership, and inspiring leadership. The Ellonen, Bloomquist and Puumalainen's Organizational Trust questionnaire focuses on vertical, horizontal, and overall organization trust. For this study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha for reliability measured at .90 for Page Wong's servant leadership questionnaire and .93 for the Ellonen, Bloomquist and Puumalainen's Organizational Trust questionnaire (Pouramiri &

Mehdinezhad, 2017). Both questionnaires were deemed highly reliable. Stepwise regression analysis showed a high level of correlation between the principals' self-analysis of their demonstration of servant leadership characteristics and their perception of organizational trust. Two-tailed correlation is considered significant at .01 alpha level. In this study, r=.479 was recorded for all servant leadership characteristics and institutional trust and r=.577 was recorded for all servant leadership characteristics and vertical trust (Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017). Both of these correlations are considered moderately strong. These correlations suggest that servant leaders who believe they exhibit servant leadership characteristics have a higher degree of trust in their organization and those who work at it. A drawback to the study is that the authors did not comment on the measure of validity in the study. As a result, despite a high reliability and correlations, there is doubt on whether the study measured what was intended to be measured. The true effectiveness of servant leadership could also be questioned, because the study only measured leaders' self-perception of their demonstration of servant leadership characteristics without consideration of others' view of the leaders.

Some of the studies of elementary and high school servant leaders tend to exhibit a higher degree of job satisfaction among them. An implication of greater job satisfaction among elementary and high school servant leaders is that the school districts that champion the servant leadership framework and their more effective servant leaders have the potential to enhance the retention of their talent and reduce turnover expenses (Cerit, 2009; Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017). Job satisfaction among followers and the leaders' interpretation of their level of being trusted were noted as high in the studies. However, there could have been other contributing factors to followers' sense of job satisfaction that were not accounted in the study of the elementary school followers. Further, in the study of high school principals, only the perceptions

of the leaders were measured, and they could have a confirmation bias about their own sense of leadership. Perhaps their followers feel differently about their leaders' demonstration of servant leadership.

Servant Leadership in Non-Education Organizational Setting

Despite this study's focus on servant leadership in the higher education arena, more of the salient literature available on servant leadership has been produced outside the education arena. To be comprehensive with the literature review of servant leadership, some of this study's literature review will feature the framework in non-education organizational settings, including in non-profit and for-profit corporate settings.

In this vein, Sendjaya et al.'s mixed methods study used a two-prong approach to study servant leadership in both non-profit (non-education) and for-profit organizations. The first prong tested the use of a new 35-item measure using a Likert scale intended to measure servant leadership, and it included a sample of 15 executives from Australian non-profit organizations and corporate organizations (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The sample was expanded with a second prong via the snowball method, and it examined 277 graduate students at one of Australia's largest universities (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The researchers developed a new 35-item instrument–that they termed the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS)–built upon the successes of other empirical psychometric tools used to measure leadership, including the Organizational Leadership Assessment, Revised Servant Leadership Profile, Servant Leadership Questionnaire, and the Servant Shepherd Leadership Scale (Sendjaya et al., 2008). What made the new tool unique was it measured six different variables, including covenantal relationships, influence to transform, authentic self, responsible morality, voluntary subordination, and transcendental spirituality (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Results from the first prong of the study from

both non-profit (non-education) and for-profit organizations that intended to measure servant

leadership characteristics in the participants indicated strong reliability, with a range between

.72-.93 for Cronbach's coefficient alpha (at least .70 is recommended) for the measured factors

(Sendjaya et al., 2008). A factor analysis was conducted on the second prong of the study of the

277 graduate students, and it resulted in a more refined, reliable, and user-friendly SLBS

(Sendjaya et al., 2008). Content validity was measured using the Content Validity Ratio, and

results of using the ratio reduced the number of items from 101 to 73, and it was later reduced

again to 35 (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Therefore, an implication from the first study was

confirmation that the tool needed to be more refined, and it was supported by the outcomes

found in the second study of graduate students. As a result of this study, there was a new tool

created to measure six different servant leadership characteristics. A benefit of the tool was how

easily it could be administered and maintained (Sendjaya et al., 2008). One could argue that the

differences in outcomes may not be explained by improvements, or revisions, to the tool, but

they could point to differences among members of the second sample group. Further, the six

attributes did not align well with the primary characteristics of servant leaders nor servant

leadership as found in the literature that represents Table 1 (see page 3).

Expanding upon literature from various organizational settings, a qualitative study of

three non-secular Midwest Catholic parishes investigated how the servant leadership construct

transferred to work in practice (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). This case study of the parishes

explored three direct servant leadership mechanisms: invitation, inspiration, and affection

(Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). These mechanisms rely on trust, and it is the bedrock for

leadership; "without trust, you can't accomplish extraordinary things" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017,

p. 198). The researchers also studied two indirect mechanisms: culture building and structural

initiatives (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). The mechanisms served to focus the study within the

servant leadership domain. In the mixed methods study, tools included a self-assessment

response to a 43-question survey, direct observation, one on one interviews, and a review of

archival records (i.e., bulletins and newsletters–Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). Findings

demonstrated that the direct mechanisms were practiced by individuals who were fully engaged

in the mission of the institution (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). Consistent with Murphy's (1998)

findings, faculty who were in support of the mission of the university were more fully to engage

in service learning. Servant leaders who identify with the institution's mission and reflect on its

sustainability as an organization are intentional about these considerations, and they report that

they inform their decision-making (Peterlin, et al., 2015). Church leaders sought to engage

followers to become fully human (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greenleaf, 1982), and humanistic

tendencies are a hallmark of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1982). From a Christian perspective,

to become fully human means following the example of Christ, but that people ought to embrace

the notion of sin and human imperfection for which forgiveness is sought (Ebener & O'Connell,

2010). Thus, Christian values have been cited as informing servant leadership. This notion led

to Murphy's (1998) study that reinforces the breadth of servant leadership scholarship

emphasizing the importance of characteristics endemic to those who subscribe to the framework.

Additionally, it aligns with the notion that servant leaders feel most effective when work at an

organization where they embrace its mission (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greenleaf, 1982). A

drawback found in the Sendjaya, et al. (2008) study mirrors one that was found in the Ebener and

O'Connell (2010) study where the researchers take their interpretation of characteristics of

servant leadership beyond the primary attributes found in most of the other literature cited in this

paper, as found in Table 1 (see page 3). However, Sendjaya et al. (2008) temper their

reinterpretation of the instrument by categorizing it as either a direct effect on servant leadership or an indirect effect on servant leadership. Another limitation of the study is it does not address the underlying motivation that inspires servant leaders to choose to identify with the characteristics of servant leadership–what led them to feel, embrace, and practice it.

Servant leadership has its origins in the western hemisphere, but the framework is embraced all over the globe. A number of the reviewed studies originate from around the world, and servant leadership is clearly not concentrated in one country. Servant leadership could be considered as an intersection of servant leadership characteristics, embraced by leaders with similar values, and demonstrated through various cultural lenses.

Mittal and Dorfman (2012) conducted a quantitative study to examine how servant leadership is interpreted by different cultures. The investigators sought to enhance the understanding of the perception of servant leadership across myriad cultures and learn how cross-cultural leadership perceptions align with universally endorsed preferred leadership behaviors. The researchers unpacked social dynamics across cultures that might impact endorsement of leadership characteristics and provided insight to leadership practitioners to help design culturally appropriate leadership development programs (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). There were six hypotheses: Germanic and Nordic countries would have a propensity to endorse the servant leadership characteristic of egalitarianism; moral integrity would be universally embraced; empowerment would be less embraced by Asian cultures, as categorized by two clusters, Confucian Asia and Southern Asia; power would be negatively correlated with servant leadership expression; performance orientation would not be strongly correlated to servant leadership; and a humanistic orientation would be positively correlated in a universal way to servant leadership (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). The method involved a questionnaire developed

by the researchers who created a global team of 180 social scientists who collected quantitative

data from the survey from approximately 17,000 middle managers across 951 organizations that

represented 62 different societies and three different industries. A confirmatory factor analysis

used Amos 16.0 to test the fit (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012).

     Results from the study showed a good fit for the five factors (egalitarianism, moral

integrity, empowering, empathy, and humility) studied, and the findings demonstrated that in

general, servant leadership was perceived as meaningful in all societies studied (Mittal &

Dorfman, 2012). The five studied factors support the work of Dean (2014) who conducted a

study on defining servant leadership principles and practices. Mittal and Dorfman's (2012) first

four hypotheses were all relatively supported after averages were computed and tested for

variance with ANOVA, including the third hypothesis. Confucian Asia had the lowest average

in terms of empowerment, in line with the hypothesis, and Southern Asia's average for the same

attribute was near the middle. However, the fifth and sixth hypotheses were not supported, and

results revealed that servant leadership was tied to a performance-forward orientation; there was

no correlation between it and humanistic tendencies (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). The findings

from the study demonstrated how servant leaders respect and validate people's emotions and

feelings, but they primarily focused on performance and results.

     Another study examined how servant leaders in India approached conflict resolution (Jit,

et al., 2016). Using a qualitative approach, researchers utilized the narrative inquiry

methodology to conduct interviews to capture the lived experiences of self-identified leaders in

three different economic sectors: education, corporate, and public (Seidman, 2006). The

researchers used a snowball sampling method to identify 15 participants who had an orientation

for servant leadership, per the Executive Servant Leadership Scale: interpersonal support,

building community, altruism, egalitarianism, and moral integrity (Jit et al., 2016). These

servant leadership characteristics match some of those from other sources of literature that

appear in Table 1 (see page 3). Jit et al. (2016) discovered that servant leaders used a more

participative and persuasive approach when confronted with conflict, whether they were in a

mediator role or in a subordinate role with their supervisor. Their discovery meshed with the

work of Heifetz and Linsky (2002) that focused on the greater level of effectiveness of leaders

who actively involved their teams in the decision-making process when conflict or crisis arose.

After Jit et al. (2016) coded the data, they learned ten of the 15 leaders used key words,

such as listening, active listening, or empathic listening during their interviews, which are

characteristics of servant leadership, when describing their approach to conflict management.

The use of keywords that involved listening demonstrated that the leaders chose not to use more

authoritative words when describing pressure to resolve a conflict (Florian, 2018; Heifetz &

Linsky, 2002; Jit et al., 2016). However, results showed that leaders resorted to a more

authoritarian leadership framework as a last resort when nothing else seemed to work (Jit et al.,

2016). This contrasts with other literature that describes effective approaches to more

compassionately lead as a servant leader, regardless of how complex or challenging a situation

might be (Burch et al., 2015; Glaser & Pilnick, 2005; Greenleaf, 1982; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

A benefit of reviewing challenging situations in myriad international contexts, such as

some of the studies presented in this section, is they add a cultural dimension to understanding

servant leadership, and they add another lens through which to view the framework. A drawback

of reviewing the international studies is that they neglected to include more distinct cultures,

discuss intersectionality of some subcultures within a region or multiple regions, or at least

include more varied cultures across the continents from where the studies were focused.

Counter Narrative to Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a popular leadership framework, and it has been successfully interpreted and adapted by leaders in various settings from the public sector to the private sector, from non-profits to for-profit settings, and it has been cited in scholarship across the world. However, the framework has its critics, some of whom cite the fluidity of the characteristics of servant leadership and its sense of Pollyanna as contributing to the framework's drawbacks.

Another criticism of servant leadership is that the servant leader is a servant first appears as a common theme across scholarship on servant leadership (Ebener & O'Connell 2010; Greasley & Bocarnea 2013; Greenleaf, 1982). The idea that the servant leader *leads from the middle* is also a perspective appearing in scholarship on servant leadership (Burch, et al., 2015; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982). Despite these common refrains, a lack of consensus among scholars to define servant leadership characteristics is a drawback for the framework (Liu, 2019). The servant leadership and servant leader characteristics in Table 1 (see page 3) are not exhaustive, but they represent more salient examples that recur across scholarship on the framework.

Pragmatism of servant leadership comes into question by critics, and the framework appears to carry an unrealistic, almost sanctimonious ideal that makes it appear almost power-neutral (Cerit, 2009; Liu, 2019; Ospina & Su, 2009). However, literature on the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, age, and class demonstrates that they influence and inform the servant leadership construct (Cerit, 2009; Liu, 2019; Ospina & Su, 2009). Therefore, servant leadership is neither practiced in a vacuum, nor is it power-neutral; hegemonic influences impact all leadership frameworks, and servant leadership is not immune to it (Crotty, 1998; Glaser & Pilnick, 2005).

Servant leadership is also criticized for encouraging passivity or subservience with the focus on the leader as *servant* (Cerit, 2009; Liu, 2019). This criticism targets the core of the leadership model, because the basic identity of servant leadership is the leader's focus on those whom they *serve*. Some critics take it a step further and criticize servant leadership for focusing more on virtuous causes than on concrete results, but results from quantitative and qualitative studies refute this notion (Cerit, 2009; Liu, 2019). For instance, a qualitative study on the restaurant industry involved 961 employees across 71 restaurants (Liden, et al., 2014). The authors sought to hypothesize how servant leaders who engender a service culture at restaurants in the service industry will have more engaged employees, and it will lead to more engaged employees with greater store performance and lower turnover intentions (Liden, et al., 2014). Survey results–using an author derived servant leadership scale–demonstrated that leaders who identified more with the servant leadership model had stronger restaurant performance as measured through positive customer service behaviors, and their respective restaurant experienced lower turnover among staff (Liden, et al., 2014). These results reflect other studies' positive team outcomes when servant leadership is authentically practiced (Cerit, 2009; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Jit et al., 2016; Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017).

Conclusion

Chapter 2 highlights a review of the literature and reveals how individuals who deem themselves as servant leaders or servant leaders' followers rate themselves on characteristics and practices of servant leadership. Some of the scholarship described in this review focused on the effectiveness of myriad tools, both existing and newly developed ones, used to define and assess servant leadership. Other research in the review highlighted how cultural differences impacted leaders' interpretation and practice of servant leadership characteristics. Most of the literature in

this review covers servant leadership in a higher education setting, because academia is the centerpiece for this study. However, this leads to the primary problem with the existing literature on servant leadership in that most of it falls within the for-profit and non-profit business sectors, regardless of its setting. There is much less literature on servant leadership found in the P-20 education setting. Further, there is an even more limited amount of literature on servant leadership in the P-20 domain in the United States. Of the literature that does exist in this domain, most of it focuses on servant leadership characteristics and the characteristics of the leaders themselves. Therefore, a gap in the research is why some leaders in higher education exhibit servant leadership and servant leader characteristics. An extension of this gap presents two important questions. What academic, professional, and life experiences led the servant leaders to identify with servant leader and servant leadership characteristics? How might they reflect on their lived experiences when making decisions? These gaps provide an opportunity for scholars to study new frontiers of understanding the motivations, experiences, and identities of servant leaders in higher education, and how they impact the human development of servant leaders over time. From a human development lens, future research in this area could shed light on how servant leaders' predilection for the framework and its leadership characteristics will develop over time and how it could influence their decision-making.

Literature on servant leadership points to limited information on the lived experiences of servant leaders. Without understanding the lived experiences of servant leaders, organizations have a more difficult time knowing what shaped their leaders' journey, which could create a disconnect between and among them, their stakeholders, and their organization. The disconnect creates an environment where servant leaders' decisions carry less context and meaning than they would in a setting where their life experiences would be understood and greater empathy

would be engendered. Ultimately, the servant leaders' potential is not optimized without their organization and constituents understanding their lived experiences and why they exhibit characteristics from the servant leadership framework. When servant leaders' potential is restrained, it lessens the potential of the organization where the leader works.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding the lived experiences of higher education administrative leaders who identify with the servant leadership construct or at least exhibit its characteristics formed the basis of this study. In this chapter, the study's research methods will be described, including rationales for the use of a qualitative research paradigm, narrative inquiry as the methodology, the population selected, the sampling method, data collection methods, data analyses, ethical considerations, assessment of its quality, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Researcher's Perspective

The researcher is a senior assistant dean for student success at DePaul University in Chicago. For the past 16 years, he worked at the same institution where led student success initiatives for the third largest college at the university. He taught a course on Chicago blues at the same institution for 15 years. He worked in an administrative capacity in higher education for a total of 20 years. Outside of his professional role, he held several leadership positions, including president of his condominium association.

Ever since serving as a vice president for his college fraternity–his first formal leadership role–as an undergraduate student, he was fascinated by the concept of leadership. His first recollection of witnessing a servant leader started at an early age was his mother. She was the leader of a single parent household. He and his older brother were raised by her in blue-collar neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago. His mother modeled several servant leader characteristics, including authenticity, empathy, humility, and interpersonal supportiveness. Upon reflection, these servant leadership characteristics exhibited by her influenced his axiology on leadership, because he recognized these characteristics developing in himself. He believed that they first emerged when he taught at an elementary school during completion of his MEd.

They more fully developed when he worked in his first formal leadership role as a higher

education professional. Like many leaders, though, he did not formally learn about leadership

and its myriad frameworks until he pursued his MBA.

Postmodern Theoretical Lens

The researcher approached the study of servant leadership by grounding it in a

postmodern theoretical framework. Postmodernism avows to distance itself from the absolute

truths and clarity and wholeness of modernity that were fostered by the philosophers, scientists,

and aristocracy from the Enlightenment period (Crotty, 1998). Postmodernists decenter the

subject, or the leader in the case of this study, and placed emphasis either on the dispersal of

identity and traditional self-conceptions or how leaders are expected to behave (Dallmayr, 1997).

Using a postmodern lens, the traditional leadership framework of command and control by the

more authoritative leader is turned upside down. The traditional leadership framework is

limited, because it focuses on the leader and their formal authority. By primarily relying upon

formal authority, the traditional leader has limited means of genuine influence and fewer levers

of motivation. Formal authority focuses on the leader instead of the follower, but within the

servant leadership construct, the leader focuses on the follower. Servant leaders actively seek

input from followers, and intentionally use their feedback and consult with them regularly during

the decision-making process (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010).

Postmodernism theory grew out of French structuralism in the 1950s, and it espouses the

notion that multiple perspectives create a mix of lenses through which to view the world and its

truths (Alvesson & Deetz, 1995; Tierney, 1996). A hallmark of servant leadership is collecting

multiple, diverse views of followers and stakeholders and incorporating them during the

decision-making process (Greenleaf, 1982). Postmodernists do not believe that absolutes exist,

and they value multiple interpretations of the world. By studying servant leadership through a grounding in postmodernism, the researcher collected qualitative data from participants with multiple, diverse views on how they interpret their truths and their lives.

Rationale of Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research paradigm through a constructionist lens was used in this study, because the researcher intended to understand what lived experiences shaped the leaders over time to impact their identification with servant leader and servant leadership characteristics. Unlike using a positivist approach, the researcher was not attempting to prove anything with his study. Instead he was more interested in understanding the lives of the participants than proving why they approached leadership in the manner they did. Constructionists make sense of their world and their place in it by engaging with and drawing meaning from their interaction with it (Crotty, 1998). Through this epistemology, leaders who either embraced the servant leadership construct or at least demonstrated its characteristics, arrived at this identity based upon their lived experiences, including their interactions with their family, friends, teachers, coaches, managers, mentors, community, environment, religion, and other institutions.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry Methodology

The purpose of using the narrative inquiry methodology, first cited in scholarly work in the *Educational Researcher* in 1990, is to elicit stories from the participants that include a beginning, middle, and end (McAlpine, 2016). "People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The researcher placed the focus on the subject's lived experiences, which are their reflections and accounts of events, as they are constructed through the participants' interaction with people, the

environment, and myriad institutions. Narrative inquiry as a methodology is well suited to draw out the lived experiences from the servant leader participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; McAlpine, 2016). He used narrative inquiry over other qualitative approaches, such as life history interviewing or phenomenology, because of the methodology's advantages, including his freedom to empower participants to elicit stories with greater richness and sense of emotion and vulnerability (Seidman, 2006). Further, narrative inquiry inspired participants not only to describe their life stories but to reflect and draw powerful meaning from them (Clandinin, et al., 2007). Another advantage of narrative inquiry was it channeled John Dewey's notion that life itself is education, and people are learners who are encouraged to connect meaning from their stories to what they have learned from them. Narrative inquiry has its critics who cite some of the methodology's limitations, which are primarily based on its reputation fueled by misperceptions. One limitation is that it is disregarded by some as a methodology that just creates stories, which might or might not be truthful (Clandinin, et al., 2007; McAlpine, 2016). However, the researcher's pairing of narrative inquiry with a postmodern theoretical lens took this negative stereotype and turned it into an advantage. He was not concerned about judging what is truthful and what is not, but he was focused on how the participant lived their own truth, and how they made sense of it. Another limitation is its perception by some as an easier methodology to deploy (Clandinin, et al., 2007). This misperception contrasts with the methodology's complex emphasis on wakefulness. The researcher was purposefully self-aware of his positionality and channeled his emotional intelligence to achieve this wakefulness throughout the duration of the study.

Paramount to his study is narrative inquiry's focus on learning how the participants ascribed meaning to their storied lives. Narrative inquiry's historical underpinnings are in

literature, but the methodology has been successfully used across disciplines, including the social sciences, management science, history, and economics (McAlpine, 2016). For instance, narrative inquiry has been successfully used in education scholarship, given its emphasis on stories' temporality, sociality, and place to produce rich, meaningful accounts of participants' lived experiences (Clandinin, et al., 2007).

Population

The population for this study was 166 higher education administrative leaders with at least ten years of leadership experience, who were selected from universities in the Midwest. The population was emailed and invited to complete a pre-interview Qualtrics (software) questionnaire designed by the researcher. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify a sample that exhibited a high degree of servant leader and servant leadership characteristics. The sample participated in individual semi-structured interviews for the study, because the qualitative data from interviewing participants provided a rich and varied number of detailed stories about the participants' lived experiences in an attempt to reach saturation. For the researcher's study, he was more interested in the depth and richness of fewer participants' lived experiences than he was in the breadth of having a larger number of participants' stories.

Research Sample

The researcher identified a sample of eight higher education administrative leaders, who were selected from four different universities in the Midwest. He conducted 60-90 minute semi-structured interviews them. He defined higher education administrative leaders as those who worked in academic affairs, student affairs, enrollment management, and the president's cabinet at universities. Participants from universities were selected, because his research interests lay in studying servant leadership in a more diverse and complex environment, such as a larger

university over a smaller college. He selected Midwestern university settings as opposed to conducting his study at universities nationwide or in other regions of the country, because he was a lifelong Midwesterner and it was part of his identity as a researcher. The Midwest shaped his life journey, including his leadership development. He chose participants at four institutions over one institution, because he sought varied perspectives from leaders at different categories of institutions with different characteristics. By having a mix of participants who worked in four different higher education settings, he had an opportunity to gather and analyze more diversified perspectives on the lived experiences of leaders within each unique domain that has its own unique mission. Further, he chose four universities versus five or more institutions, because of other rigorous, well-grounded, and effective qualitative studies using interview methods conducted in other settings citing three to four organizations in their sample sizes (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Mittal & Dorfman, 2012).

A sample size of fewer than ten participants provided him with a strong mix of diverse stories of lived experiences of leaders. Eight participants also aligned with some other similar qualitative dissertations that study participants' lived experiences with the use of an interviewing method (Heard, 2014). For example, Neely (2019) conducted a qualitative study on the identities and experiences of transgender athletes by using the portraiture methodology, and she interviewed five participants for her dissertation. In another qualitative study, Warner (2020) interviewed five participants by using the motherwork methodology to explore the lived experiences of the participants as single mothers raising male sons in an urban environment and to share their stories for her dissertation. Having eight participants provided the researcher with a greater level of saturation than interviewing five participants, and it enabled him to still benefit by focusing more in depth on the stories of fewer than ten participants. The researcher used at

least ten years of higher education administrative experience as a criterion for selecting participants, because it demonstrated that they possessed at least a moderate amount of leadership experience.

The leaders were selected via a purposive sampling method. An advantage of purposive sampling is it provided him with a sample that was representative of the population of higher education leaders with ten years of experience at four institutions in the Midwest. A limitation of purposive sampling is it is subjective, because it is based on the criteria he set for evaluating his sample. Further, his approach to selecting it might be different from the approach another researcher would use to select a similar sample (Battaglia, 2011).

He identified leaders by title via online directories at the four different universities. This included searching for titles such as, presidents, provosts, associate and assistant provosts, vice presidents, associate vice presidents, assistant vice presidents, deans, associate deans, assistant deans, and directors of centers and support offices. These titles were used, because they represented higher education administrators with at least a moderate amount of leadership experience. After identifying his study's population, he emailed them and introduced himself, described his intentions and the purpose of his study, and he explained the questionnaire that he asked them to take. Limitations of this sampling method were he had less control over identifying his sample from the population, and there was a higher likelihood that the sample was less representative of the population than he sought (Chromy, 2011).

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Data Collection Methods

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Questionnaire

The population of 166 candidates were sent a pre-interview questionnaire in the recruitment email, and he designed the instrument via Qualtrics. The purpose of the

questionnaire was to ask candidates to self-identify as to their level of agreement with embodying servant leadership and servant leader characteristics, and who possess at least ten years of higher education leadership experience as administrators who presently work at universities in the Midwest. In the questionnaire, the researcher defined servant leadership as a popular leadership framework that focuses on leaders who put the needs of their followers and other constituents before their own in the interest to serve others (Greenleaf, 1982). The servant leaders' primary motive is to serve versus to lead, but through the practice of serving first they ironically lead. Servant leaders become models to empower and inspire their followers to become servant leaders themselves (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The first two required questions were open-ended, and they asked the respondent for their first and last name and current administrative title. The third required question asked the respondent for their number of years working as a higher education administrative leader, and it had the following ranges: 0-5 years, 6-9 years, 10-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21+ years. The fourth required question asked the respondent for their gender, the fifth required question asked them for their race or ethnicity, and the sixth required question asked them for their sexual orientation; each of these questions had multiple choice options. The seventh and eight required questions were open-ended, and they asked the respondent for their phone number and email address, respectively. Using a Likert scale, the questionnaire's ninth required question asked the respondents to what level of agreement do they strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree or disagree (3), disagree (2), or strongly disagree (1) that they possess the eight servant leader characteristics found in Table 1 (see page 3). Using the same Likert scale, the questionnaire's tenth required question asked the respondent to what level of agreement they exhibit the seven servant leadership characteristics found in Table 1 (see page 3). The questionnaire screened participants who self-identified as

possessing the servant leader and exhibiting the servant leadership characteristics with the highest level of agreement.

After potential participants completed the Qualtrics questionnaire, the researcher selected the nine individuals with the highest scores from the combined Likert scales across four institutions. All but one agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, the final count of participants in the sample was eight. The researcher emailed the others who completed the Qualtrics questionnaire but who were not selected to participate to thank them for their time in completing it.

Interviews

Eight participants were interviewed in one-on-one settings. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to have an in-depth conversation with each participant for approximately a single 60-90 minute period. The researcher chose one 60-90 minute time interval, because it provided him with enough time to ascertain rich data from the participants, and it was similar in length to other semi-structured interview-based studies. It should also be a realistic commitment to expect from busy higher education administrators. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded. The researcher used his interview protocol by asking questions from the interview guide (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). Interview topics spanned each participant's life story from childhood to present as they relate to their recollection of people, events, settings, and circumstances that influenced their approach to leadership. The interview was organized by first understanding each participant's life history, and the questions were intended to elicit a participant's formative journey as a leader. The interview shifted to questions about lived experiences as a leader in a professional context. The interview concluded by asking participants to reflect on their life

history as leaders and to draw meaning from them. Interviewing through a postmodern lens, allowed the researcher to prove to learn more about possible hierarchical structures that influenced the participants' life journeys, and how they navigated those structures to create and live their own truth as leaders.

Interviewing is a recursive process, and the researcher asked follow-up and clarifying questions as needed over the 60-90 minute period. After the 60-90 minute period, the interviews concluded. He explained during the interview that he would follow-up with each participant after coding emerged from the data, because he wanted to deploy a member-checking process to help to ensure the quality of the data. Shortly after each interview, he sent each participant a handwritten thank you note as a gesture of gratitude.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Following the interviews, the researcher organized the eight recorded conversations by date, time, and participant, and he transcribed the data word for word on his own. Next, he used open coding via Excel, through which he identified typologies and taxonomies that emerged from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In line with the use of a postmodern theoretical lens, he deconstructed the typologies and taxonomies in such a way to tease out possible hierarchies, inconsistencies, and contradictions from each participant's set of data (Creswell, 2003). The researcher highlighted instances of storytelling, which are touchstones of the narrative inquiry methodology. In line with narrative inquiry, the stories were portrayed with a beginning, middle, and end, and they formed the foundation of the findings. From this preliminary level of coding, the researcher advanced to axial coding, which manifested patterns and more organized thematic codes from the findings. During this process he continued to analyze the data through a postmodern lens to arrange and organize the participants' individual truths that emerged from the

data. He used them to identify connections between and among the themes and participants. He further arranged and distilled the themes in Excel. From these data, he further detailed the patterns and subthemes within the themes. Lastly, he used selective coding to bring the interconnected patterns and themes together in a Word document. Selective coding enabled the researcher to further analyze and refine the findings.

After the interviews, the researcher contacted the eight participants to invite them to participate in member-checking process. Six of the participants participated. During the member-checking process, the researcher asked the participants–the experts of their own lived experiences–to respond to his interpretive accounts as the data analysis emerged. He asked them to provide feedback on whether the meaning of their stories was captured in the emerging analysis. All six participants reported that the meaning of their stories was captured, and the interviews gave them an opportunity to reflect on their own lived experiences as leaders. Member-checking not only enhanced the quality of the analysis, but it gave the participants a second opportunity to reflect on their experiences with expanded context and possibly lead to their self-improvement as leaders (Motulsky, 2021). The approximately 30 minute individual member-checking conversation took place via Zoom, and they were not recorded. Despite the benefits of member-checking, a limitation of it is that participants might not recall or regret what they said during the interview (Sandelowski, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Risk

This study created minimal risk to the participants, and the researcher limited it as much as possible. At times the participants felt uncomfortable to discuss sensitive experiences. The researcher ensured that each participant was okay, and he used it as a signal to move on to the

next question. The interview conversation was audio recorded via Zoom (camera off) to help

participants feel more comfortable to be as expressive as they wanted to be during the session.

Care and dignity were paid to each of the eight participants at every stage of the study. The

participants signed a consent form before the study was conducted, and its nature, rationale, and

approach were described to them.

Participants willingly volunteered to be part of the study, and they were able to

discontinue their participation at any point in time. None of the eight participants elected to

discontinue their participation. Digital audio recordings of the interviews were secured on a

password protected device that was stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office, because

confidentiality was of upmost importance. Participants' privacy was protected using

pseudonyms in the coding of transcribed interview data.

Quality

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The researcher based the standard of quality for his study on the concept of

trustworthiness. The quality of a quantitative study focuses on ensuring its validity and

reliability. For his qualitative study, he strove for trustworthiness and authenticity, both of which

were considered through a naturalistic point of view versus a more positivist, rationalistic

standpoint (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was sought through credibility,

dependability, transferability, transparency, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Authenticity through a constructionist lens was

highlighted as participants described their lives and realities through the stories of their lived

experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transparency was critically important, because it explicitly

demonstrated thoroughness and clarity of the findings. Further, transparency ensured that the

findings and their data analysis followed from the data with clear representation of the participants' stories (Hiles, 2012).

Tactics

Credibility was considered through the member-checking process. As a form of transferability and transparency, the researcher quoted liberally using thick description, which is a common tactic for qualitative researchers. It was demonstrated in the findings to provide significant detail about and the richness of the conversations with the participants (see Chapter 4 for findings). Thick description provided the opportunity to detail not only the participants' stories, but it portrayed contextual detail from the circumstances surrounding the conversations. Themes and critical events were reported in the findings. The researcher felt that he achieved saturation through the collection of data from interviewing eight participants, because the themes of the participants' lived experiences started to strike a resemblance during the coding process.

As a form of authenticity, during the analysis phase a draft of the coded data were shared with two peers from the researcher's doctoral program for a dialogic review of the content. The researcher emailed the emerging analysis to them, and he asked for their feedback on the categorization of codes, themes, and how they related to each other. They provided their positive and constructive feedback and recommendations on the presentation of the emerging analysis's clarity, cohesiveness, and organization. Their input helped the researcher to further shape his analysis of the data to arrive at a more comprehensive interpretation and representation of it.

To ensure dependability and confirmability, an audit trail of notes that details the dates, communication with the participants, logistics related to scheduling the interviews, and log with reasons for the interview questions were kept on file in the event someone questions the

researcher's process for communicating with the participants leading up to and following their interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

A limitation of the study is inherent to using the narrative inquiry methodological approach, which is not knowing whether the participants' stories are embellished, let alone true. The researcher mitigated this limitation by grounding the study through a postmodern theoretical lens, because it presupposes that truth is relative and is up to individuals to determine it themselves (Dallmayr, 1997; Tierney, 1996). As such, after collecting the data, the researcher approached the data analysis and interpretation and discussion of the findings through a postmodernism lens. Further, when using narrative inquiry with a postmodern underpinning, the pairing helped the researcher guide the participants to make meaning out of their stories with an emphasis and importance placed on their own sense of truth versus how true they are (Dallmayr, 1997; Tierney, 1996). Another potential limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher is a higher education administrative leader who conducted a study on fellow higher education administrators. On one hand, he was aware of this bias, and he disclosed to the participants that he, too, was a higher education administrator during the interview protocol. On the other hand, being a higher education administrator questioning fellow administrators from a place of understanding the context of some of their experiences added to the researcher's credibility, which enhanced his rapport and trust with the participants.

A delimitation of the study is that only higher education administrators from the Midwest participated in the study. Involving participants from higher education institutions in more cities or regions across the United States, including rural communities, would have provided a triangulation of the data and provide a richer collection of leaders' chronicled lived experiences.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. By understanding how lived experiences inform the journey of higher education leaders who demonstrate servant leader and servant leadership characteristics, a greater connection will transpire between and among servant leaders, people on their teams, and other constituents in their professional environment. Growing a greater appreciation for servant leaders' decisions, the servant leaders' constituents will understand and empathize with their leaders, and the leaders will feel more empowered to have a greater impact. In absence of this greater understanding and empathy, servant leaders' potential is underutilized, and it creates suboptimal conditions in which to thrive; the result is an organization where its servant leaders may feel stifled.

Using narrative inquiry through a postmodern theoretical lens enabled the researcher to provide space to eight higher education administrators who work at universities in the Midwest to uncover stories from unique angles and interpretations of them that shaped their storied lives as leaders. This study helps to fill a gap in servant leadership scholarship where limited information exists on how lived experiences shaped the journey of leaders who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership characteristics, how they reflect on and draw meaning from them, and how they inform their decision-making.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter addresses findings from the study of understanding the lived experiences of higher education administrative leaders who exhibit servant leadership characteristics. A gap in the existing literature is how higher education administrative leaders' lived experiences shape their identification with servant leadership characteristics (see Chapter 2 for a review). This study attempts to fill that gap and to provide higher education administrative leaders and the institutions where they work with insight into how to understand and support their leaders who exhibit servant leadership characteristics. The findings from this study focus on the lived experiences of eight participants.

Participants

A total of eight higher education administrative leaders from four universities participated in this study:

- A Vice President and member of the President's cabinet

- An Academic Dean of a college

- An Academic Dean of a school

- An Associate Dean and Director of Clinical Affairs

- An Associate Dean of an academic advising unit

- An Assistant Dean of an academic advising and admissions unit

- An Assistant Dean of an academic advising unit

- A Director of a student affairs advising unit.

Inclusion criteria were the leaders had to have at least ten years of leadership experience, and they had to be working at universities in the Midwest. Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between the participant and researcher via Zoom, and each session

lasted between 60-90 minutes. The researcher asked the participants questions about their lived

experiences with leaders and as leaders both within professional and non-professional settings

that spanned the arc of their storied lives (see Appendix A for the interview protocol).

The researcher identified a diverse group of eight higher education administrative leaders

from four different Midwestern universities, and they reflected on and discussed experiences

from their storied lives. The participants worked in various leadership capacities and in different

units at their respective institutions. Each participant expressed how their lived experiences

shaped their individual leadership journeys. They all shared how formative values–grounded in

characteristics of servant leaders and servant leadership–and experiences guided their own

visions on leadership. Each participant differed in how and when they reflected on their lived

experiences, and whether those reflections played a role in their decision-making. Pseudonyms

were selected for the participants and people highlighted in the stories they shared. An overview

of their demographics appears in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years as leader	Current institution type	Gender	Race	Sexual Orientation
Suzanne	16-20 years	Selective–Large Private	Female	White	Lesbian
A. J.	10-15 years	Most Selective–Large Private R-1	Male	White	Heterosexual
Carlos	10-15 years	Selective–Large Private	Male	Hispanic or Latinx	Heterosexual
Veronica	21+ years	More Selective–Large Private	Female	Multi-racial: Native American, Latina, and African American	Heterosexual
Rebecca	21+ years	Selective–Large Private	Female	White	Heterosexual
Alexis	21+ years	Selective–Large Private	Female	White	Heterosexual
Carolyn	21+ years	Selective–Large Public R-1	Female	White	Heterosexual
Albert	21+ years	Selective–Large Private	Male	White	Heterosexual

Participant Profiles

Suzanne

Suzanne worked at a large private institution, and she possessed between 16-20 years of leadership experience. Suzanne expressed how her approach to leadership today was shaped by various leaders whom she encountered in settings as early as high school. In high school, Suzanne recounted a teacher who exhibited servant leadership characteristics, including serving as a positive role model, taking a genuine interest in their students, and helping their students to develop to reach their goals. Her teacher was also strict and held students accountable. Not all of the leaders Suzanne encountered early in her life made a positive impression. In Suzanne's first professional job out of college, she worked for a manager who belittled her and members of the sales team. He was disrespectful, crude, and demotivating. Later in Suzanne's career, she worked with a leader in a health care setting who was intelligent, compassionate, and values-forward. Suzanne was struck by her active listening, adeptness at optimizing her team's sense of

autonomy; the leader was notably empathetic. When Suzanne reflected on her own approach to leadership, she described how she modeled herself after the positive leaders who played a role in her leadership development, and she intentionally tried to behave in the opposite manner compared to those who were negative role models of leadership.

Suzanne recalled the first time when she felt like a leader when she worked in a health care setting after she completed her master's degree. When she reflected on the experience, she described a story of how she took the initiative to volunteer to design a complicated work protocol. She knew she was leading when her colleagues at different levels looked to her to move the protocol forward. She was keen to actively listen to them, not patronize them, and provide them with a safe space where they could trust her judgment. Suzanne shared:

> Over time, I realized that the way I was with people could help lead things forward. Even though I knew that they knew boatloads more than me technically. And so we had a few kids come in with burns. They were upper extremity burns…the team, more much seasoned than me, they really didn't have the stomach for it. So I volunteered, I organized all of it, I designed the protocol…it was at that moment that I realized people were looking to me. I could help people understand the importance of it. I could teach others how to do it. And we could move forward together. So it was really during that time that it became more apparent to me that I could lead people.

Suzanne described how from time to time she reflected on servant leadership and its characteristics: selflessness, taking a genuine interest in the lives of members of her team, and how the impact of her decisions impacted individuals on the team. She explained how her reflections occurred when she encountered a challenging situation at work and times of stress.

When confronted with a challenging decision, Suzanne reflected on her experiences as a leader and channeled her leadership role models.

A. J.

A. J. worked at a large private R-1 institution, and he possessed between 10-15 years of leadership experience. A. J. described how he identified with the servant leadership framework, and his identification with it was shaped through lived experiences. A. J. commented how he felt greater satisfaction out of helping others achieve their own goals and objectives than what he might get out of one of his recent personal accomplishments. He described how early in his life, his grandmother was a formative servant leader model for him. Her values-forward approach to life made an early impression on him. A. J. explained how she valued compassion, empathy, improving the lives of other people, finding meaning in her life, and looking for the good in others. When people who worked for her made errors, she focused on their positive characteristics and viewed them as learning experiences versus finding a punitive means to attempt to prevent the mistakes in the future. Over the arc of A. J.'s professional life, he described positive and negative experiences with leaders, and both types impacted his approach to leadership. Among A. J.'s positive experiences with leaders was an experience with one who created the conditions and team atmosphere under which the members could achieve not only the team's objective but their individual ones. A. J. described how the leader possessed creativity, sought collective wisdom from the team before making decisions, and helped the team members to feel empowered and respected. A. J. noted that he attempted to model these servant leadership characteristics, and he tried to do so with a sense of humility and self-awareness. A hallmark of the negative experiences with a leader was their rigid and controlling nature, and how it caused A. J. to seem like the leader already made up their mind before disingenuously asking for his

input or feedback. A. J. felt this was disempowering for him and the team. The leader did not describe honestly and accurately what the parameters of work were, nor did they create a genuine sense of agency and autonomy. When reflecting on the positive and negative experiences with leaders, A. J. theorized how 90% of leadership comes down to two factors: following the *Golden Rule* and recognizing the expertise of others. A. J. said when leaders were adept at both, they realized more successful outcomes.

A. J. was drawn to the servant leadership framework, because it places value on meaning-making, humility, self-awareness and moderating the ego, and prioritizing the needs of others before one's own needs. Whether a student, a junior colleague, the team, or a family member, A. J. recognized the value in putting their needs before his needs. A. J. recalled a story about when he first felt like a leader, and it was when he started building a family while pursuing tenure as a professor. He described how servant leadership to him was recognizing there is something bigger than himself, and how he strove to help that person or unit bigger than himself to be better. A. J. commented:

> I was an assistant professor chasing tenure. I was basically at that point…I was about to get tenure; it was pretty clear. But I was still an assistant professor. I was still untenured at that point, although the writing was on the wall. I was trying to manage this family. I was trying to balance all of these types of things. I was increasingly realizing how many people were dependent upon me. I was getting more and more grad students I was supervising…and, I actually realized–even as I felt overwhelmed by it all–how competent I actually was at helping to meet the needs of all these disparate humans. And, I think for the first time I was actually starting to grasp the range of people who looked up to me. They were both my…these very young people whom I was responsible for every aspect

of their lives, but also grad students and I guess was becoming more aware of undergraduates. I think that's probably when I first started to feel like a leader.

A. J. was intentional in his reflections as a leader. He meditated daily with purpose. He focused part of his meditation on gratitude for things in his personal life and the other part on what he was grateful for in his professional life. He followed this by meditating what he could have done differently that day, and lastly he concentrated on what went well that day.

Carlos

Carlos worked at a large private institution, and he possessed between 10-15 years of leadership experience. Carlos explained how his lived experiences from childhood to present had a profound effect on shaping his approach to decision-making as a self-described servant leader. Carlos spoke fondly of a professor at his seminary who was a visionary and served as an early formative model for him. The professor exhibited compassion, intentional modeling, integrity, and sought collective wisdom from others before making decisions. Carlos noted how his action consistently aligned with his words. Further, the professor had integrity and was not afraid to be transparent with his feelings. About the professor, Carlos shared, "He was vulnerable. And that vulnerability was also visible, because he was not afraid of being vulnerable."

Carlos regularly meditated, and his meditations included reflections on his lived experiences. For example, Carlos meditated on a female servant leader whom he met while working with her impoverished community. They were attempting to build a neighborhood on abandoned land near a river when a man confronted them and claimed it was his. He went so far as to involve police and demolition crews, but not before he physically and brutally assaulted the

women. Carlos explained how she was a courageous servant leader, because she put her community's needs before her personal needs to the extent of sacrificing her personal safety.

Carlos shared stories about leaders with whom he had positive and negative experiences. Among the positive experiences were with leaders who trusted him, made him feel respected and valued, put others' needs ahead of their own, were courageous, and moderated their egos. The leaders also attempted to pursue and preserve the common good, which included the institutional and personal elements of all involved. Carlos commented on the negative experiences he had with some leaders. He shared a story about a leader who reported to him, and how they were controlling. They attempted not only to control down to the minutiae, but they also tried to control the narrative and how he led them as their manager. At the core of the control was lack of trust, subsidiarity, and co-responsibility in the team and its decision-making.

Carlos explained how his lived experiences and interactions with past leaders, both positive and negative, helped him identify with servant leadership. However, he felt he also identified with the situational leadership construct, and he attempted to combine the two frameworks as a guide. Carlos identified with servant leadership characteristics, such as active listening, serving others, respecting others and oneself, practicing dignity for all, and practicing humility. Carols described how he customized his approach to leadership and decision-making based on particular dynamics of the unique situation. As an example of this approach, Carlos described an early story from when he was eight years old in elementary school. He and his class had an oppressive teacher who hit the inside of their hands, sometimes for no reason except to be abusive, with a piece of wood. Carlos motivated and inspired the class to join and collaborate with him to expose the teacher to the principal and other teachers, and it led the teacher to get terminated from his job.

Veronica

Veronica worked at a large private institution, and she had 21+ years of leadership experience. Veronica's earliest memory of a leader was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whom she saw speak when she was a child, and it set an early example of how religious influence could be used as a transformative tool for change. She recollected how Dr. King was charismatic, but his authenticity was more inspiring to her. He talked the talk, and he walked the walk. Veronica said that many lived experiences with leaders helped to shape her approach to leadership. She commented how some of the negative experiences involved leaders who were controlling, lacked humility, and were disrespectful. Veronica had positive experiences with other leaders, and she explained how they understood how either the team or the project at hand was bigger than themselves. As a leader, Veronica explained how she actively modeled the positive characteristics of strong leaders with whom she collaborated, and she intentionally did the opposite of what leaders did with whom she had negative experiences. Veronica was aware how she was a leadership model for colleagues on her team, and she purposefully reflected on it.

Veronica was asked when she first felt like a leader. She shared a story of when she led a group in class as a sophomore in high school. She recalled taking initiative to organize a project, and she determined with her fellow group members the priorities and division of responsibilities. She empowered her group mates to make decisions on their own, and she ensured that at least one idea from each student made it into the final project. At an early age, she exhibited a strong sense of teamwork and empowerment in an egalitarian manner. Veronica described how her religious faith shaped her approach to leadership, and she connected the serving nature of servant leadership to how she served God.

Veronica highlighted how following the *Golden Rule*, empowering others, and trusting her team helped her to achieve success as a leader. She expressed the importance of gratitude–in terms of her team and the work they did together that positively impacted the lives of students– and how it served as a means to help her remain optimistic and motivated. When Veronica reflected on her decision-making as a leader at a recent retreat, she spoke of the importance of integrity and talking the talk and walking the walk. She emphasized how reflecting in this manner about her leadership helped her to recognize the importance of being empathetic, grounded, and self-aware of her actions. She remarked how she learned about servant leadership through seminars and retreats associated with her church and work over time. She explained how she viewed herself as a *wounded healer*. Overcoming obstacles taught her to open up, be vulnerable, and get to know her colleagues on a personal level. The vulnerability was reciprocated, and Veronica spent extra time out of her day–even if she had to stay late–to provide them with guidance and share her wisdom. Veronica explained:

> I was talking to our HR coordinator, and she's kind of going through the same thing with her parents as I went through. And I was able to say, 'Joan, I want to talk to you about this.' We did the HR stuff, and after that I started talking to her about…'You must take care of yourself'. You have to do some things. Here are some ideas. Here's some links. Try this and try that. Be sure you eat right. Get the hell away sometimes. I know you love them, but if you're not okay, they're not going to be okay.' You know?

Veronica valued diversity, and she partly attributed it to her early lived experiences in school when she attended primarily white schools from first grade through high school, and she shared how she was ostracized and discriminated against as a multi-racial (Native American, Latina, and African American) child and young woman. She commented how her schooling was

not an inclusive environment, and she did not fit in. Veronica believed there was a blessing

found in the suffering, and a negative experience was not meaningless. She found meaning in

the suffering. Veronica shared a story of how one of her team member was reluctant to come out

as gay to her. She decided to let him know that she knew he was gay, and she shared how she

appreciated it and how it was a strength and added diversity to the team. Based on how she felt

ostracized and discriminated against in elementary school and high school as a multi-racial girl,

she wanted to ensure that her colleague did not feel the same way. She intentionally tried to

create an inclusive environment on her team.

Rebecca

Rebecca worked at a large private institution, and she had 21+ years of leadership

experience. Rebecca shared how she had few strong professional leadership models over her

career in higher education. She described some of these leaders as uncaring, lacking empathy,

just going through the motions, controlling, and in some instances not creating a safe

environment for their teams. Rebecca explained how one of the leaders did not take into account

the feelings of people on her team when she made decisions. Another leader lacked the courage

to back her decisions on student cases when the students or their parents escalated them. Even

when there was precedence and policy and guidelines were followed, the leader chose the path of

least resistance and caved to the demands of the students or their parents rather than stand behind

Rebecca's thoughtful decisions that she empowered her team to make. Outcomes such as these

made Rebecca feel disempowered, patronized, and demotivated. Rebecca expounded:

> …it was clear that the student had made the mistake. What the problem is with that is
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> that it's not just me making the decision. I've worked closely…you try to establish
>
> policy and procedures, you work with your team to train them, you work with your team

to train them so that they understand what those policies and procedures are. You have lengthy conversations about what happened, how it happened…it just doesn't affect me…it rolls downhill. Then I have to go back to say to the (team member), who more likely was on the receiving end of working with the student or delivering the information…I mean it's problematic. I have to lead or manage people who are on the front lines, putting themselves out there, to say this is the policy, we have to abide by that. Then the person either comes to me or someone above me, and it's just…hard enough to personally deal when you're not backed up, but then have to go back and be the same type of person, and say to the (team member) for instance, 'Oh, by the way, yeah, just make this happen, this exception is going to happen, or put through the late withdrawal, because we're going to give their money back, because they complained.'

Among the few who made a positive impression on Rebecca was a leader who was hired to implement change management at her previous institution. He assessed the environment, took calculated risks, and laid out a unique vision. He also seemed to enjoy his work, and he liked to have fun with colleagues on the team, whether it was joking around with them or participating in planned happy hours and social events. Rebecca described a positive experience with another leader, because he had her back. The leader consistently supported Rebecca's decision when a student or their parent escalated a case. Rebecca felt empowered to make decisions with her team, because he trusted her. Rebecca described how this leader created a safe space where she and her team felt safe and supported to do their best work.

Rebecca explained how she did not intentionally or consciously reflect on her lived experiences as a leader who identified with characteristics of the servant leadership construct, but when she did–like when she is directly asked about it–she described how she intentionally led by

doing the opposite of what some of the leaders with whom she had negative experiences did. In this manner, she identified with servant leadership characteristics not exhibited by most leaders with whom she worked. When considering her lived experiences, Rebecca described how she was a fierce advocate for her team, and she defended and protected them; she wanted them to feel like she had their back. She remarked how it was important to feel safe and cared for on a team, and she explained how servant leaders take turns leading with those on the team who report to them. Rebecca viewed herself more as a facilitator than an expert, and she tried to identify team members' individual strengths and expertise to encourage them to focus on and lead from them. She commented how servant leaders focus more on vision than details. Rebecca valued integrity, empathy, holding oneself and others accountable, and genuinely developing others to support them reach their professional goals.

Alexis

Alexis worked at a large private institution, and she possessed 21+ years of leadership experience. Alexis recounted how her earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on her was a high school calculus teacher. Alexis commented how her teacher provided a formative leadership modeling experience for her. The teacher was caring, taught life lessons to the class outside of the mathematics material, developed a genuine personal connection with the students, and went the extra mile to support and guide them. Alexis relayed a story when the teacher caught her cheating on an exam. Instead of sending Alexis to the principal's office, the teacher used it as a teachable moment. She used the natural consequence of failing the test coupled with an explanation of how shortcuts did not always pay off. Instead of leading with formal authority as a teacher, she exhibited respect, empathy, and modeling. Alexis remarked how her teacher probably would not have pulled her aside for the life lesson had she not enjoyed her work.

Alexis tried to practice these same servant leadership characteristics when she led her team, and she was motivated by a similar tenet as her calculus teacher: she enjoyed her work.

When Alexis described a positive experience with a leader in her unit, she highlighted the effect she had on her and the rest of the team. Alexis shared how the leader met people where they were, focused on her vision for the unit, and took the high road, despite periods of intense criticism. The leader embraced the mission of the institution, she practiced its values, and she talked the talk and walked the walk. Alexis highlighted a direct link between the leader's values and those of the institution. She was optimistic with positive relational energy, and she focused on building up people's strengths and confidence. When mistakes were made, she pondered with the team what could be learned from them. Alexis described her as open, honest, caring, authentic, intelligent, savvy, and strategic. Alexis recounted a negative experience with a leader earlier in her life shortly after graduating from college when she worked at a small family run business. The leader was autocratic, and he did not listen to the team nor involve them in the decision-making process. The experience left Alexis feeling disrespected, demotivated, diminished, and disempowered. From it, she learned the importance of involving the team in decisions that affect their work, and how to recognize a culture and vision by design with the team versus defaulting to the status quo or forcing a vision on others. Alexis described:

> Then they hired someone–because it was growing–to be the office manager. And the person came in–and at the time I don't think I had the language for it–and instead of getting to know the culture that was there, just kind of bulldozed, and was like, 'This is how we're doing it'.

Alexis reflected on her leadership at the start and end of each academic year. She felt humbled by her over 20 years of higher education leadership experience, and she pondered this

when thinking about a new first-year class every autumn; students who are *doing college* for the

first time. When Alexis ruminated on her own leadership, she explained how she first learned

about servant leadership at her current university, where it was discussed in her unit.

Characteristics of the construct that resonated with her were integrity, caring for others, active

listening, authenticity, empowerment, and modeling. Connections exist between these

characteristics and stories she shared of times when she first felt like a leader. During Alexis's

sophomore year of college, she was invited to participate in a leadership program. Until then,

she never considered herself as a leader. She only viewed leaders as those with formal authority,

but the leadership program taught her leaders come in all shapes and sizes and the importance of

leaders having a sense of humility, modeling positive behavior, and developing trust within a

team. Another early leadership story was when Alexis was a new employee at a university. She

recounted how she started to recognize how students and colleagues sought her out for guidance,

because they trusted her and had confidence in her ability to do her work. Alexis remarked how

she felt empowered to make decisions, and grateful with a sense of humility for the opportunity

to build her confidence and independence as a leader.

Carolyn

Carolyn worked at a large public R-1 institution, and she possessed 21+ years of

leadership experience. When Carolyn reflected on her lived experiences as a leader, she

described how leading was not about the leader but about something bigger than them. She

commented how strong leaders had a life view that the idea of leading was not about them.

There was an ingrained sense of humility and selflessness. She shared how good leaders were

adept at building consensus, when possible, and caring about other perspectives even when they

didn't align with the majority. Carolyn described how leaders sometimes had to do something or

took action first before building momentum of waiting for inspiration or motivation. The momentum oftentimes turned into the motivation to keeping going or doing. Carolyn cited how investing time in the team and being an active listener in a genuine and non-patronizing way built trust.

Carolyn shared how the first leader who made an impression on her was her Girl Scouts leader. She described how she was respected as someone who helped and served people. She was also productive and result-oriented. Carolyn remarked how the leader was empowering, and she created conditions where the girls figured things out on their own and succeeded in them. When mistakes were made, she forgave the girls for them and sought to help them learn from them. Carolyn explained how the leader did not have much formal education, and she described her as ordinary. However, in leading, oftentimes ordinary was extraordinary. Years later when Carolyn was in high school, she was selected as co-captain of the volleyball team. Carolyn did not feel like she was doing anything extraordinary to be selected captain, but she remembered how her teammates looked to her to figure things out. She described a personal sense of responsibility, and she felt empowered to lead and make decisions. She valued leading, and she was humbled by it; she did not take it for granted. Carolyn recounted how these early positive leadership experiences laid the foundation for her leadership development and motivated her to model these characteristics later in life as a higher education leader.

Upon further reflection, Carolyn relayed a story about two strong leaders with whom she worked. They were each presidents of a different professional organization, and they had different agendas. She said their predecessors were combative, controlling, rigid, and ego-driven. As a result, nothing was materially accomplished, and it created a toxic environment for both organizations and their constituents. The new presidents set their egos aside, and together

they unified the two groups to make them stronger both combined and individually. From that experience, Carolyn developed greater appreciation for negotiating, compromising, being optimistic, and active listening when seeking common ground to achieve objectives. Carolyn commented:

> (They) insisted on sitting down and establishing a working relationship together. Still not agreeing on everything, but publicly appeared together. Talked about differences. I think they really solved something that was a silly problem, but with very big consequences for a lot of people.

Carolyn depicted another story, but it was about a leader who lacked courage. Carolyn spent a considerable amount of time and resources to establish a new partnership between an external organization and academic program that would have led to greater faculty development and student experiences. The partnership was starting to generate positive results, but she was challenged by a human resources colleague on its classification. Instead of having Carolyn's back, her manager asked her to stand down, which led to the partnership falling apart. Carolyn explained how the experience reinforced her belief in the importance of having the courage to stand up for what is right and to support the shared vision of the team.

Carolyn regularly reflected on her lived experiences as a leader who identified with the servant leadership framework, but it happened more episodically when she was either reading or having a mentoring conversation with someone on her team. Carolyn first learned about the framework when she became a leader at her current place of employment. She identified with the framework, because a focus of it is on others and supplying them with the resources and guidance to develop them to reach their goals. She remarked how servant leaders are good communicators who are focused on the big picture, the vision. They are results-oriented, and

they create an environment where they keep themselves and others accountable. Carolyn felt

that servant leaders empower and trust their teams. To create an environment of trust, servant

leaders follow through on what they say they are going to do; they talk the talk and walk the

walk. Carolyn commented how servant leaders enjoy their work and have fun. Their enjoyment

with their work and optimism permeate among team members, and it helps to create a more

positive work environment for everyone.

Albert

Albert worked at a large private institution, and he possessed 21+ years of leadership

experience. Albert's earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on him was a U.S.

Senator from his home state. He described how he was charismatic and his parents and

community thought highly of him. For Albert, the senator's aura was what resonated most for

him than any more salient leadership characteristics. When Albert reflected on his childhood

and adolescence, he commented how he was not the kid most teachers wanted in their classes.

He described how at home he was rewarded for making his mother laugh, and how this behavior

carried over into elementary school and high school. He was regularly in trouble in school.

Therefore, he did not have positive formative experiences with leadership. His teachers and

principals valued the quiet kid who walked in line and was not disruptive, not the irreverent kid,

which is similar to schooling today. Conditions changed for Albert in college. Albert

expounded on how his personality remained relatively the same, but the audience in college was

a change and was more receptive to him. They appreciated his intelligence and differing

viewpoints and perspectives.

When Albert was in his doctoral program, a professor made a strong impression on him

and influenced his approach to leadership. Albert remarked how he was caring, took genuine

interest in him, and helped him to develop and reach his goals. On one occasion Albert's professor spent three hours talking with him to figure out who he was. He wanted to learn about Albert's identity and persona. Albert commented how being a leader was more than just being positive and nice. Good leaders have to be situationally aware and attuned to their teams. One reason is to know when to intervene more quickly. Another reason is to learn what deserves investing. Albert described how the positive experience with this leader reinforced in him the importance of authenticity and talking the talk and walking the walk–more doing than just modeling behavior.

Albert explained how in general he did not think highly of leaders with whom he had worked in higher education. He did not reveal much about why, but he described how he valued the intelligence of a leader at his current place of employment, because he seemed to make all the right decisions, despite not being collaborative. Albert valued being respectful to his colleagues and mutual accountability–for himself and others. He described the importance of authenticity and having passion for one's work. Pairing the two help people not only enjoy their work but be more successful at it. He remarked how everyone has flaws and most often people do not know what they are talking about most of the time. Albert shared what was important was using one's strengths, being authentic, having good intentions, and wanting to have a positive effect on people. Albert remarked:

> Because your job is to use your intellect and whatever abilities you have to help, okay? To really say, 'What kind of an impact can I really have on this person?' And that's my reason for being, frankly...professionally.

Albert viewed his job as a leader was to support but not to serve. When he was asked to reflect on his lived experiences as a leader in a supportive capacity, he explained how he did not

intentionally reflect on them, unless he was directly asked to do so. However, when asked about

his lived experiences, he explained how they 100% influenced his decision-making as a leader.

Further, he described how he made all of his decisions based on data and input from stakeholders

without considering servant leadership as a construct. Albert added how he believed leadership

is a co-responsibility on every level. When considering servant leadership as a framework, he

contended the construct emphasized serving too much. Albert believed under the servant

leadership construct, leadership was less shared and more subservient in nature.

Summary of Participant Profiles

The eight participants worked in different capacities as higher education administrators at

various universities in the Midwest. They shared stories about their lived experiences and life

journeys, and how they shaped their approach to leadership and decision-making. The

participants commented on their values and the role they played in managing their professional

relationships and the power structures within the hierarchies at their places of employment, both

above and below their levels at various points in time. Recognizing a sense of joy in their work

was important to them, but they all remained steadfast and focused on the goals at hand.

Emergent Themes from Participants

By analyzing data from this qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand how

lived experiences shaped the journey of higher education administrators who exhibit servant

leader or servant leadership characteristics. Through the analysis of the data, four major themes

emerged: (1) Values Serve as a Compass, (2) Spirituality, (3) Relationship Development, and (4)

Pragmatic Practice.

Theme 1: Values Serve as a Compass

Values serving as a compass for leadership surfaced across all eight participants. To varying degrees, the participants shared how they exhibited at least some of the servant leader and servant leadership characteristics found in Table 1 (see page 3). Yet when they described their myriad experiences as leaders, they focused on the importance of identifying with particular values that help to guide their behavior. Three subthemes emerged: (a) Authenticity, (b) Courage, and (c) Transparency.

Authenticity

Participants expressed how important it was to be themselves, hold true to their convictions, and let their authentic selves show. For some authenticity created a more comfortable environment for their team, because it sent a signal to others that it was okay for them to also be themselves. Authenticity also created a greater sense of trust, which was a prerequisite for a healthy team environment. When Veronica was asked about the impact of lived experiences on her life journey as a leader, she spoke about authenticity and creating a safe space for her team. She highlighted:

> And I felt like one of the things that I needed to do was to be there for her. And I would spend additional time with her. Just kind of saying, 'Come on in and let's just chat.' And we would just talk. I would kind of make sure that she just felt welcomed. And our team is very welcoming. So they kind of loved on her a little bit. Gave her a little bit of extra love during that time. So, I think that kind of thing is super important. You know, for people to have that experience.

Carlos commented how not being afraid to be vulnerable and unabashedly oneself created more safety for the team without jeopardizing the leader's respect. Leaders who reflected on their own

lives and recognized their faults and weaknesses should not only address them with themselves, but they should also express what their areas for improvement are to others on the team. This became a signal to the team that it was okay not to be perfect: progress over perfection. When reflecting on experiences with a leadership role model, Carlos remarked:

> We do not lose our authority when we are vulnerable. We lose our authority when we think people we are perfect (sic), and people see how imperfect we are. Yeah. So, consistency, integrity, no fear of vulnerability, leading by his example, and inspiring, provoking, expanding the boundaries, making the boundaries of more porous (sic), the flow of information, fearless, not being afraid.

For others, authenticity was a non-negotiable, regardless of the circumstance, but in some situations it was easier for the leader to temper their authenticity to make the situation easier to navigate, whether it was to placate someone or not challenge the status quo. When asked about positive characteristics of a role model who navigated a difficult situation, Alexis explained:

> You might not be making everyone happy, and everybody might not like it, but you could still stay true to who you are and what your normal default is, even in light of that. So, I think she stayed true to herself, which I think was a good lesson to see and observe. Still honoring [the institution's] mission. I guess the main thing is, no matter what's going on, staying true to yourself and what's important to you is, I guess, what I'd take from it most.

When questioned to reflect on an early challenging leadership experience, Albert commented:

> And, you just do who you are, and if they buy it, if they like what you're doing, then you go on, frankly. You go on. And that's what I learned. If you have a passion for what

you're doing, and don't worry about all that other stuff. If people buy it, and you're true

to yourself, then you're a happy camper.

Authenticity equipped the participants with a natural ability to show up as themselves. They

expected those around them to take the good with the bad, but it was reciprocal. They

appreciated those around them and took their good with their bad.

Courage

Participants shared the importance courage played in their development as leaders.

Whether courage was exhibited by a leader with whom the participant had a positive experience,

or the participant courageously acted in a challenging circumstance, it was a highly regarded

value. In some instances, the courage was shown by a participant's manager who trusted and

supported their decision when it may have been easier and less time consuming to either

acquiesce or maintain the status quo. When commenting on a positive experience with a leader,

Rebecca remarked:

When I made a decision, delivered it to the student, the student came back and said, 'I

don't accept your decision', and he emailed the dean, and the dean replied, essentially,

'Rebecca has given you the decision, and it stands.' And it was just the fact of the matter

that this person had my back.

Rebecca described how the positive experience with the leader demonstrated their trust in her

decision-making. She said how she felt trusted and more empowered to make decisions, because

she knew her manager had her back. In contrast, when Rebecca described a negative experience

with a leader, she shared a story about a different manager who did not have the courage to

support her decision. Rebecca commented:

I would say it was a lack of his own will to say no. Or to stand up to the student. It was easier to give in. Regardless of what was right or wrong. So, in terms of that individual, sure, the individual was completely absent.

Rebecca explained how the negative experience with a manager left her feeling demotivated and isolated without support. When Carolyn was asked to share a negative experience with a leader, she described a former manager who did not stand up for her. Carolyn recounted:

And I had been working on this for a long time. Actually, long before this person was my boss. And it had finally happened. It was bearing a lot of positive things. But I had this new boss. And he let it all fall apart. He was challenged by the human resource system, and he was unable…he couldn't defend it. And then he asked me to back down.

Carolyn said how her manager's lack of courage made her feel defeated and demotivated. In a different circumstance about lack of courage, Albert elaborated on how another department at his institution lacked the courage to stand up for what was right in a contentious situation. Albert shared:

It's an example of blatantly looking at fairness and unfairness, and equity, I think in a frightened way. In a way that's to avoid conflict, as opposed to…in their mind's eye, it's much easier to comply than not comply. Even though, by not complying you're standing for equity. You're standing for fairness.

Albert described how the department's lack of acting courageously ironically defeated the purpose of the department's support for a marginalized group. Courage was cited by Carlos when describing a woman with whom he worked who stood up for social justice, even in the face of physical violence. He was helping an impoverished community in another country build a neighborhood. A local from the country claimed the land was his, and he forced demolition of

the neighborhood, but not before police were called by him and during the chaos he physically

assaulted the local female leader. Despite giving in to their threats, she stood up for what was

right and just. Carlos described:

> So, we created barriers to stop the trucks…all the police getting into the neighborhood.
> Sheila…I was by Sheila in the first line with the elderly members of the community.
> And the police came with guns and bastones. Very aggressive. And the first person that
> was hit, it was her. In her face. Her face was destroyed. And the neighborhood was
> destroyed. It probably took two or three hours. They used bulldozers…trucks to destroy
> the houses.

Courage provided leaders with the motivation to speak truth to power, even when their voice

proverbially cracked. Courage was a value that provided inspiration for them to speak up for

others on their teams who had less power than them.

Transparency

Participants described how creating an atmosphere of transparency built trust in the team,

the organization, and individual relationships. When commenting on how a positive experience

with a leader made A. J. feel, he described how transparency helped him to feel respected and

empowered by the leader. When modeling that behavior himself, A. J. remarked:

> Well, I would want to be taken seriously. I would want to have my time respected. I
> would want to feel like I was treated with decency, transparency, and openness. I would
> not want to feel like I was a pawn in some game.

Veronica shared a story about one of her direct reports who attempted to hide that he was gay,

because he was not sure how Veronica or other members on the team would react. She wanted

to ensure a trusting, respectful, and transparent culture for her team. Veronica explained:

So, he don't want to tell me about his partner and that. And, so, one of the other (team

members) sort of slipped, and told me about his partner. And then she was like, 'Oh,

don't tell him I said that.' And I said, 'Let's be transparent here. You know? If you

want to go back and tell him, I could care less. You know? My son is gay. Big deal.'

Transparency created a safe space where people felt comfortable sharing information that might

be difficult but important to share. The safe space allowed people not only to feel trusted and

respected, but it promotes an environment where they could be vulnerable, learn from their

mistakes, and grow. Suzanne commented:

I was able to lend not only expertise that I'd learn on the job and through some training,

but also through listening and offering support, because that kind of work isn't easy. And

people came to me and felt comfortable talking about hard things with me.

The importance of leaders creating a safe space of transparency helped to build their confidence.

When asked how it made Suzanne feel, she responded:

It made me feel good and sort of afraid at the same time. You know, it's a tremendous

honor, and sometimes responsibility to be a leader…and I tried a few things on before it

didn't make me afraid anymore. Yeah, it took a minute.

When Alexis was asked to share a story of a leader who made a positive impression on her, she

described a manager who did not hide her mistakes nor the oversights of others. She was

transparent and wanted to recognize them in an effort to grow and develop herself and her team.

Alexis recounted:

She was always like, 'We need to fix it. What can we do better?' She was always

focused on moving forward and what we learned from the experience. Not just…you

obviously have to rehash things to learn from them, but she wasn't like dwelling on that.

Like, 'What could we learn? And, let's move on and figure out what we do from here.'

When asked about the effect of a negative experience with a leader, and how it impacted the

participant's own approach to leadership, Rebecca explained:

> It's a great example of what not to do. You realize that if you're a leader, you have to be
>
> there, you have to be available, you have to suspend judgement at the outset when
>
> you're…for instance if somebody does make an error at work, you have to create a safe
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> space so that people can do their best and feel safe. Or even feel safe disagreeing with
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> you. I want to invite the other side of the conversation, and not be the expert. I want
>
> others to tell me, you know, [I ask them] what do you think is best in this situation?

The participants described how transparency provided them with a tool to help them

communication more effectively with their teams. They commented how the tool enabled them

to model healthier communication, and it had a positive ripple effect across the team.

Theme 2: Spirituality

The spirituality theme manifested across all eight participants. The participants deeply

internalized their responsibility as leaders, and it helped to inspire and motivate them. Their

leading ontologically expanded beyond their professional roles, and it permeated their lives

outside of the work environment. They understood and respected their privilege as leaders and

the responsibility and meaning it carried. The participants shared stories of how spirituality

played a role in their leadership, whether it came from a secular or non-secular place. Two

subthemes emerged: (a) Something Bigger than Themselves (b) Joy of the Gig.

Something Bigger than Themselves

Participants explained how their leadership represented something bigger than themselves. They viewed leading as a great responsibility, and they did not take it for granted. For the leaders, leading was not temporal within the work setting, and it became a raison d'etre that continued at home with family and friends and when interacting with people in different settings. Leading was not confined to work; it was a way of life. When asked to describe how the participant's identification with the servant leadership model was painted by lived experiences, Carolyn described:

I think it's consistent of a life view of this idea it's not all about you. People's reason for being has to be something bigger than themselves. Not sure that's exactly what you're thinking about, but I think it's played out in many ways. Even within my extended family or community…even amongst a group of friends there are usually leaders.

Carolyn recounted how she learned her passion for finding more purpose in her work from leaders who exhibited a zest for life, and it came through in their job. Leaders who identified with their job seemed to exhibit a greater sense of responsibility. When describing the responsibility of leadership, Veronica remarked how she is humbled by being in a position to make a difference. Veronica shared:

It's a big responsibility, in a good way. It's an honor and a privilege and a responsibility. And they're all tied up together like that, because I feel I'm responsible in some sense, not only for my team, but really 3,000 students that come through us. You know, on a regular basis. And so that's a huge responsibility. So, sometimes I really feel the burden. Sometimes I really, really feel the burden. But I feel responsible to them and for them. And at the same time, it's a privilege to be, you know, in this position. And to be at a

place where I can make a difference. You know, in my team's life and hopefully in some

of my students' life (sic).

Veronica described how she embraced a sense of humility in her leadership. She did not take her

profound sense of responsibility as a leader for granted. A. J. was also humbled as a leader. He

commented:

My (unit) has 1,200 students, give or take. And 250 faculty and staff. So, that's a whole

bunch of people whom I could help feel powerful and valuable and meaningful. And,

why wouldn't I? To me, I find that very attractive. That's something that I feel really

attracted (sic). That's my main motivation. I see meaning. I find meaning and purpose

in helping other people achieve a more satisfying life for themselves.

With humility comes the responsibility of leadership and modeling how it can create meaning for

the leader and paying it forward. Reflecting on humility as a leader, especially during the

COVID-19 pandemic, A. J. shared a story of how he personally visited as many graduates as he

could when the university canceled its commencement. He recounted:

This recognition there's something kind of bigger than me. And my job is to try to help

this thing bigger than me to be better. Or another example of this might be in 2020 when

all the in-person graduations were canceled. I realized that…was something that was so

important to so many students. So, I decided to give up my whole weekend. I drove all

over…in my regalia to take socially distanced front yard photos holding a diploma cover

with any graduate who wanted it.

The spirituality came not only in secular forms, but it also imbues the lives of leaders in non-

secular forms and causes them to reflect on what is important. Their humility caused them to

turn praise into a catalyst for how to improve their leadership skills. When Carlos was asked

how he felt about leaders at his organization trusting him and his expertise, he explained:

>When people ask you, "So, what do you think?" They're expecting from me values that I
>
>want to incorporate…I hear a call reminding me of my vocation. You know?...but I
>
>heard in that voice an invitation to be close to God. To be able to serve others. And
>
>that's spirituality. So if leaders listen in the praise of people (sic) or the recognition of
>
>people (sic) a reminder of their own vocation and their own call that would be very
>
>wonderful. If somebody says, "You're such a good leader. You're a listener." More
>
>than a praise, it's a reminder to be a listener always. Don't forget to listen. Incorporate
>
>listening as an essence of your service. That's very powerful.

Carlos described how he internalized a greater sense of meaning, and how others' respect for his

work reinforced his purpose. When Veronica was asked to reflect on her lived experiences as a

leader who found meaning in and identified with the servant leadership framework, she

explained how she believed there was some form of meaning or lesson in all life events, whether

they were positive, negative, or something in between. She channeled her spirituality and

remarked:

>And I'm starting to think, for the most part mistakes don't happen. We think we're on
>
>this path that goes straight, and we're not. It zigs, it zags, it goes a different direction,
>
>and then it comes back. And all that kind of crazy…I now can say there really are no
>
>mistakes. And suffering is not meaningless. We have to work to find the meaning in
>
>that. And sometimes I'll even say to God, 'I do not get this, but I know eventually you're
>
>going to help me to understand why all this is happening to me.'

Veronica described herself as a spiritual and prayerful person, and her faith in God guided her work, especially during times of making hard decisions. Her spirituality also reaffirmed the purpose and meaning she derived from her work.

Joy of the Gig

Deriving genuine enjoyment and a sense of fulfillment from meaningful professional work was important to the participants. As the participants elaborated on their lived experiences, they commented how having fun and genuinely looking forward to going to work in the morning seemed to be rare among most adults and how privileged they were to feel this way. The participants explained how work presented peaks and valleys, but their passion for work enabled them to persevere during the low points. When Albert was asked what inspired him as a leader, he reflected:

> I know this is trite, but I wake up every morning loving my job…and fun is a big part of it–that's what I love about the job. That to me is everything we do…leadership. It's the gig…it's the joy of the gig.

Albert remarked how he genuinely has fun at work, and it is connected to his greater sense of meaning and the impact he has on others' lives, not the least of whom are students in the community. Participants remarked how some of the more rewarding experiences in the professional setting involved the decision-making process. When Alexis was asked what she learned from navigating a difficult decision that she had to make as a leader, she commented:

> And to some people it may sound naïve, when something is happening or happens, you don't have a choice but to figure it out. So, why not do it in a positive way? And even if it's not ideal, we still have a job. There are things to be grateful for, even if there are things we're not excited about it.

Alexis recounted how the difficult decisions created moments of reflection and appreciation for the impact leaders have. Participants described how their lived experiences influenced their thought process as leaders. When Suzanne reflected on her lived experiences and what might trigger her to think about them as a leader, she described:

It's usually times of stress. I have to…really have to carefully consider the impacts of my decisions on actual people and their families. It's times of stress when I do the most reflection. When it's not so stressful…when hard decisions don't have to be made, I don't have to spend as much time thinking about it.

Suzanne commented how she appreciated when she did not have to reflect on her leadership, because she knew she was not in a valley; she was enjoying her work and relishing it. Enjoying one's work had a practical aspect to it, too. Rebecca reflected how when people were happier with their work, the team achieved better outcomes. Rebecca expounded:

You know honestly at the end of the day–it might sound trite–I do want people to be happy. I know if they're happy with their work they're going to be more productive. And you're going to get a better result. And I've learned over time…and maybe it's part of the fact that, as a leader, there's very little you can control…or almost nothing…you kind of control what you can…I control the way I lead and the way I interact with people, and what's important in our office, so to speak. And, the fact that they could feel good about coming to work and doing their job, and I have their back, if something comes up, I'm going to be there to represent them at the table.

The participants described the peaks and valleys they encountered as leaders, and how the peaks provided moments to look back down at the valley and recognize the progress they made to get there.

Theme 3: Relationship Development

The relationship development theme surfaced across all eight participants. The participants emphasized how fostering, nurturing, and growing relationships between and among stakeholders and themselves was paramount to both the individual success of the leaders and to the team's capacity to accomplish their goals and objectives. At the foundation of successful relationship development was healthy, constructive relational communication between and among stakeholders, and it was a prerequisite for a strong sense of teamwork. Further when the team felt it was genuinely supported and its leaders had their best interests at heart, the teams seemed more trustful and professional relationships thrived. Three subthemes emerged: (a) Co-responsibility (b) Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk c) Developing Others.

Co-responsibility

Participants valued sharing the responsibility of leadership among members of their teams. Carlos shared a story of a negative experience with a leader from his youth. When he was in third grade, he shared how he and his classmates were abused by their teacher. Even for no apparent reason, the teacher hit the students on the inside of both their hands with a piece of wood. Carlos described how he had the courage to inspire the class to rise up and jointly expose the abuse. One day, as soon as the teacher entered the classroom, all the students collectively screamed and cried. Startled, the teacher threatened to hit the students' hands, but his words were heard by the principal who–concerned by the noise–just entered the class. When Carlos reflected on the experience, he deemphasized his role in favor of describing the shared responsibility. Carlos explained:

I was simply joyful with them. I think my ego was in a very early stage of development that I didn't take that as an action (sic). In my memory of a child, it was more us. The

one who is elaborating today is my own ego–that was basically me leading it–is my own

ego as an adult that allows me to become a child pretty often. And it's affirmation and

recognition, even if it's coming just from me.

Carlos elaborated how managing his ego enabled him to recognize how co-responsibility

required leaders to have the ability to elevate the good of the team and the organization above his

own needs. Carlos expanded:

And, I have found in leadership in my life…in this leadership…the latest leadership…a

good sense of ego, service, community, common good. The greatest leaders are less

egocentric, and their center is the good of…the common good. And the common good

involves for me at least two elements: the institutional element and the personal element.

And there is always tension between these two levels. And a good leader needs to pay

attention to people, to individuals, and to the institution. (Where) all of them represent

and serve together…and the leader needs to be able to overcome egocentrism to be able

do it.

Carlos shared how when leaders feel threatened or fear relinquishing control, which is a

prerequisite for co-responsibility, it is due to fear. When reflecting on instances of being

challenged by others, Carlos remarked:

And when people tell me the criticism or praise comes to me and become (sic) an

invitation. And less threatening. And so I embrace them with less fear. And less

defensiveness. We are so defensive. And we are defensive, because our egos are afraid

of being criticized. It's amazing. You know?

In contrast, Albert described the importance of co-responsibility but in the context of a criticism

that he had of the servant leadership construct not emphasizing it. Albert explained:

I think I see leadership on every level being a co-responsibility. A shared responsibility.
And when I think of the notion of servant leadership, I see it more as…I don't see it as
shared. I see it more as subservient to a degree.

Albert challenged the servant leadership construct when he was asked to describe it in his own
words. When Rebecca was asked to do the same, she highlighted the notion of not always
leading from the traditional front. Leaders lead from the front, middle, and back. Further, she
explained how she viewed her leadership role as a facilitator with an emphasis on serving.
Rebecca shared:

You know…leading from behind versus from the front. Again, ensuring the welfare of
the individual in terms of what…in terms of leadership. Expressing empathy and
compassion for people. And knowing that…right...that you're working for them more
than they're working for you.

The participants described the importance of leading being a co-responsibility across the team
and across the organization. They also viewed co-responsibility as an effective way to develop a
greater sense of empowerment on their teams.

Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk

Matching words with action was an important leadership characteristic for the
participants. Some shared stories about leaders in their lives who neglected to follow through on
their words, and it damaged the leaders' credibility and created a sense of mistrust on the team.
A. J. described a story when a leader was disingenuous and patronized him into thinking that he
had the autonomy to make a decision only to change their mind later. A. J. described:

I consider bad leadership when you're not describing honestly and accurately what are
the parameters that are actually at play. In this case, simultaneously pretending as if one

has agency and autonomy, but at the same time not permitting a person to act with agency and autonomy. That's something that I've experienced in a number of different organizations and a number of different positions… I know how disempowering it feels to be on the receiving end of that…when you have a person who pretends they're soliciting input, but they don't really care about the input that's being received.

A. J. explained how it was important to him for leaders to be transparent and frank about boundaries and to avoid any form of humoring. He preferred when a manager asked for feedback, but explained how they might not be able to incorporate it into a decision with a reason. Being transparent and open was respected by A. J. Taking transparency a step forward and matching it with action and words, Albert recounted a story about a mentor whom he had when he was earning his doctoral degree and did this. The mentor was not charismatic nor was he nurturing as a doctoral committee advisor, but he took a genuine interest in getting to know Albert for who he was and *what made him tick*. Albert was particularly struck how much the mentor inspired him. He commented:

What he did, he had a way of inspiring by his behavior. To me, that's influence. Inspiring by behavior. Not inspiring by words, but inspiring by behavior. People say I have humor. Fine. That couldn't be more important to me than you getting it. You see? As long as you understand what we're doing. I think that inspiration that he showed, that was the biggest influence.

Albert described his experience with his mentor as formative, because he had mostly negative interactions with leaders through that point in his life. By having a positive experience with a leader who was an active listener, Albert learned the importance of genuinely giving people space to be themselves and enable them to be heard. Active listening without pretense played a

role in participants' view of the importance of leaders who talked the talk and walked the walk, even when the leader could not deliver on something. Especially in the latter instance, transparency is valued. Alexis expounded:

> I think always trying to–like going back to the listening part–both a positive or a negative, like, either acknowledging, like, I know we talked about a, b, and c, we're not able to do that right now, but that was important feedback, thank you for including it. Or, on a positive, we talked about how important a, b, and c were, and we're able to do those things. Trying to acknowledge, like, that you heard what other people said, and not that you could always do it and incorporate it, but when you can, acknowledge it. And when you can't, acknowledge it, too.

Alexis explained how she felt greater trust in leaders who not only were active listeners, but proceeded with genuineness and transparency. She reinforced how leaders who coupled these two behaviors solidified greater trust in them among other team members. Albert remarked on the importance of active listening and soliciting feedback from others to incorporate into his decision-making as a leader. He did not request input for the sake of requesting input, but he genuinely involved others in decisions that impacted them. Albert succinctly remarked, "I make all decisions based on data and input from all the stakeholders." Albert distilled in one sentence how his decades of experiences with higher education leaders was guided by his early interactions with his mentor and some other leaders who actively listened, were genuine and transparent about their motives, regardless of how charismatic they may or may not have been. They contributed to developing Albert to become a supportive and collaborative leader.

Developing Others

Participants valued the importance of developing others on their teams. They were intentional about helping others to reflect on their professional development as a tool to grow for career trajectory and personal purposes. They felt it was part of their responsibility as leaders to play an active role in providing opportunities and sharing feedback with members on their team with the clear intention to help them get to the next phase of their career. Having open and honest conversations about career goals also helped to create a greater sense of trust and discretion. When asked how positive experiences with leaders in her life influenced her leadership, Veronica described the importance of developing and supporting members of her team. Veronica highlighted:

> I want them to do well in their lives, so when they do make a decision to go forward, I really support them in that. When they start looking, they come and tell me they are. And I always hope that the position…when they're going to leave…is something that's going to help them grow, not necessarily something lateral.

Veronica explained how trust provided her with the foundation to enable her team to be transparent about their professional lives, even when they disclosed how they might be leaving the team to pursue the next phase of their career. Veronica added how it was a reflection of her approach to develop them, and it was evidence it was working. With a similar approach to team development, Rebecca offered:

> I'm not here to give you all the answers, but you know, we could be in this together, and I can help you develop your own skills and interests, and move, honestly, move to your next level or position is.

Not unlike Veronica's reflection about developing others on her team for the next phase of their careers, Rebecca explained how if she did not support her team and nurture their skills and abilities then she would not be doing her job as a servant leader. With an emphasis on team development, when A. J. was asked to describe servant leadership in his own words, he shared a story of when one of his research projects was published as a highlighted cover story in a highly regarded newspaper. At the same time, he was mentoring a junior faculty member. A. J. shared:

> I realized I derived more satisfaction out of helping other people achieve their own objectives than the satisfaction I derived from my latest discovery... I was also helping a junior colleague think through an NSF grant. I realized how much more jazzed I was about helping this junior colleague think through how they were going to put forward this NSF grant than I was from–in celebrating–I got a thousand emails that day from people around the country, saying 'A. J., I saw your stuff. This is so cool!' And it was cool, but this other thing (sic). I kind of view that as servant leadership.

A. J. elaborated how he relegated his self-interests-even when he knew they were objectively admirable-to focus his attention on supporting and developing others. A. J.'s selflessness was a common characteristics shared among the participants who favored to develop a sense of circularity and replicability with their influence over demonstrating self-serving tendencies. They modeled behavior that could be replicated and sustained either by them or others on their team under myriad circumstances, regardless of differences in purposes, obstacles, or stakeholders. Creating successful frameworks from which to work enhanced the development of the team. Carlos was asked to reflect on the first time when he knew he was leading. He said at the time when he was eight years old, he did not know. However, when Carlos reflected, he explained:

See, I was a leader on that day. Something small…it lasted one hour, but it had a great impact. The replicability…the sustainability of the impact is unknown to me. Great leaders, in my understanding, create projects that are sustainable, replicable, and projects are expansive. They could be used in other places. In a very simple way, that action had that impact at that time.

Carlos expounded how effective leaders lead with purpose and intentionally use approaches that develop not only projects with lasting effect but in turn hone team members who work on those projects and hone their skills and abilities for what is professional next for them. Carlos offered how his leadership role models made this type of enduring impression on him. When Suzanne was asked to share a story about her earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on her, she described her high school speech teacher. The teacher was a formative role model who helped to shape her focus on caring for and developing others with finesse. Suzanne commented:

She was one of the first people to have an honest conversation about who I was and how I could be better. And she did it in a way that was very caring. She did it out of wanting to be a good teacher and role model. And really demonstrating what it would be like being a leader of people, to me. She was able to help me in my development, and do so in a non-threatening way.

Suzanne described how developing others sometimes involved confronting a difficult truth but focusing on the strengths and expertise of the team, even when something goes wrong. Suzanne's reflection on this formative experience with a strong leader contributed to the early shaping of her approach to leadership. A. J. shared how his earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on him was his maternal grandmother. He said how she had integrity and

tried to find the good in others and be there for them, even when it may have been to her own

detriment. For example, as a small business owner, she had to mortgage her home to pay

payroll. A. J. recalled:

> She was somebody who was…who looked for the assets in people…I don't know if
>
> there's a formal leadership term for that…and maybe this gets back to lessons I learned
>
> from my grandmother, right, forgiving people for when they make mistakes.
>
> Recognizing that nobody's perfect, and sometimes people hit rough patches. And
>
> sometimes people just make the wrong decision. We shouldn't judge people on the basis
>
> of a single action or set of actions.

A. J. added how his grandmother not only taught him the importance of forgiveness and second

chances, but she instilled in him a sense of humility. Humility led A. J. to become curious for

the sake of being open, accepting, and avoiding the tendency of making assumptions.

Participants valued the utility of asking questions. A leader with whom Rebecca had a positive

experience was one who asked a lot of questions when she went to him for guidance. Instead of

providing her with his perspective or insight right away, he first asked a series of questions, some

of which she could not answer. Rebecca explained how it was a signal to her that she needed to

understand the problem and ascertain more facts and information before she was ready to make a

decision. After she returned to him and could answer his questions, he asked her what she

thought that she should do. Through this iterative process, he helped her develop her problem

solving skills and a heightened sense of self-awareness. Rebecca said that she used this tactic

with her team. She remarked:

> And a lot of times when a person I lead comes to me with a problem, I say to them,
>
> 'What do you think is the best solution?' before offering a suggestion. I think everyone

has their strengths, and if you could help someone find their strengths first, and realize

that they have it within themselves to do whatever it is they need to do. You just might

be there to help them a little bit, ask the right questions, versus give answers, help them

find their motivation, if that's necessary. In that way you could help someone be

successful.

Rebecca described how she invested time in developing people on her team first and foremost to

ensure each individual team member was honing their skills and abilities to prepare them for the

next step in their career, but simultaneously it helped to maintain the gel that held the team

together to achieve their goals and objectives.

Theme 4: Pragmatic Practice

The pragmatic practice theme manifested during interviews with all eight participants.

The researcher found that all eight of them were productive and efficient leaders. They were

quality-driven and held themselves and others accountable for their work. The participants were

effective conductors of change management, and they were adept at leading their teams'

responsiveness to change. Two subthemes emerged: (a) Goal-oriented and results-driven (b)

Change management.

Goal-oriented and Results-driven

Participants described their clear focus on a vision. They were collaborative when

creating action plans to achieve their team's goals and objectives. When the researcher asked

Alexis how the servant leadership construct informed her decision-making, she responded with a

story about a manager who faced strong criticism for being part of a controversial decision. She

took ownership of not considering all facets of a problem, but she did not lose focus of her vision

to make things right. Alexis shared:

So, um maybe be, like, thinking of more than in just this moment, like, 'How is this going to help us moving forward, as either a department or as people, like to grow and get better at what we do?'

Alexis recounted how the students whom she and her team serve provide the inspiration and motivation to maintain their focus on their goals as a team. She added how their team was the tool through which they sought to live out the vision of the university. Vision creation was valued by the participants, but it was not enough. Taking action with stakeholders toward pursuing the vision was highlighted as paramount and where the rubber meets the road. When Carlos was asked to reflect on his earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on him, he shared an anecdote about a professor who was an inspirational visionary and thought outside the box and colored outside the lines. He encouraged his students to do the same, but it was not enough. He espoused how they needed to take action to make a difference. Carlos recalled:

I would say his ideas were proved in his life. His lifestyle. He told us about (sic) commitment with the poor. He has a personal commitment to the poor and compassion. He was a guy who (sic) make alive words and theories closer. Which is so important today.

Carlos viewed his early servant leadership role model with much fondness, and he explained how the professor not only taught him how to lead with compassion but have a vision and share it with others to help mold it together. When the researcher asked Carolyn what about the servant leadership framework appealed to her, she described how it presented a practical way to collaboratively accomplish the work and simultaneously emphasized the development of people. Carolyn described:

That it wasn't all about me. Getting something done wasn't just my responsibility. But my responsibility was to also get other people to take responsibility. And to develop them. And it seemed like a more enjoyable way to get something done than going at it alone kind of thing. I think that was a large part of it. Feeling good about getting the job done, but also having relationships with people and a social experience and that kind of thing.

Carolyn described how servant leadership provided a framework through which teams could achieve goals but do so through practicing empathy. In a similar way, A. J. explained how servant leaders are focused on goals but lead with understanding. A. J. shared a story about the first time when he felt like he was leading. He was an assistant professor trying to achieve tenure while also starting a family. During the interview, he realized how he was goal-oriented and results-driven, but at that time he did not view it in that particular manner. A. J. recounted:

I think the set of objectives I had, I was realizing–you know what I'm doing?–in my mind, I'm creating a strategic plan. I'm figuring out what the PQIs (prevention quality indicators) are. I'm executing on this plan. I'm holding myself accountable. These are the responsibilities…I have for these other people. These are the responsibilities I have to these other people. These are the expectations I have from these other people. This is what I'm doing to help these people to meet the expectations I have from them. This is what I'm doing to help these other people achieve their objectives. And I guess I kind of started realizing this is what they mean by leadership.

A. J. championed servant leadership, because it was not just about its lofty ethos of serving first but it was also about being practical and achieving goals and objectives. The participants

described this duality, and they found it particularly appealing to incorporate into their lives as leaders.

Change Management

Change management is an intentional, systematic approach to foster and develop change within an organization or unit that is intended to create value and sustainability address its changing needs and growth in a dynamic environment (Paton & McCalman, 2008). Participants were active agents of change, and they effectively implemented change within their units, despite facing numerous obstacles, including a team's resistance to change. Navigating the human element of change management is particularly challenging. Suzanne offered:

> I was promoted to turn…around, because we had started to tank. So, I was on the road to do that. And, some of the people that worked there when I came in didn't want me to change anything. And they had a visceral reaction to me stepping into that role. The other leader had been asked to step down. It was a volatile situation. And I was expected to make decisions and move things forward. And while doing that, their reaction was pretty darn bad. So, I think ultimately, I ended up turning it around in not that much time, so that was a success. But their reaction to it was just, pretty darn bad. So that was the negative aspect to it. We got the job done, but…wow. That was hard.

Suzanne explained that she took a practical and methodical approach to turn around a division that was struggling. She knew that she needed to be an agent of change, but she wanted to approach it the right way and lead with empathy. Suzanne enacted successful change management as a servant leader. Other participants also engaged in change management. Albert described how he led significant change in his unit, and metrics point to its success. When reflecting on it, he used an analogy. Albert illustrated:

You don't have to get on the bus. That's okay. And no one is going to punish you for

not getting on the bus. But the bus is going to move…And you have to decide, do you

want to be the driver of your bus? Do you want to be a passenger on that bus, which is

still going to be really rewarding, because you're going to be on someone else's bus

that's gonna take you to some place good. Or you're going to be back in the playground,

messing around, not doing anything…fooling around. Well, that's your choice. And

enough of you are going to be riding that bus or driving that bus, we're really going to do

some marvelous stuff here.

Albert embraced change management. He sought data and feedback from stakeholders and-

when he could-incorporated it into his decisions. Other participants took a similar approach,

whether it was in their professional life or personal life. For example, change management could

be applied to personal relationships. Veronica shared a story about how she and her husband

encountered obstacles in their marriage. They reflected on their relationship, and they sought

professional assistance from a therapist. They realized their relationship was changing over

time, and they had to be flexible and adaptable to successfully navigate the change together.

Veronica elaborated:

With the difficulties with my husband, it sort of taught me, I kind of laid down the law.

If you really still want to be married to me, x, y, and z is not going to cut it. That's got to

change…This dog won't hunt. So, we were able to do that. And I learned why his

behavior was in such ways. And he was able to get healed. If we hadn't gone through

that, we wouldn't have gotten to that healing…We think we're on this path that goes

straight, and we're not. It zigs, it zags, it goes a different direction, and then it comes

back. And all that kind of crazy.

Veronica explained how she approached challenging situations in her personal life not unlike how she navigated difficult circumstances as a professional. Veronica led with purpose, but she sought to be empathetic and put herself *in the other person's shoes*. In alignment with Veronica's approach, Rebecca explained the importance of taking into consideration people's feelings and personal lives when managing change. She reflected on a time early in her career when she was part of organizational change, and it disrupted her professional life. Rebecca decided the change was not for her, and she left the organization. Upon reflection, she recognized that leaders cannot please all the people all of the time, but they could still lead with compassion and treat others respectfully and with dignity. Rebecca commented:

> It was upsetting. And I felt…I didn't feel safe, I suppose. There wasn't anything in the way the message was delivered…or the way…the person I suppose handled it professionally, however, didn't really take into account how I felt about the situation and what was happening. In terms of, okay, this is my livelihood. And, I remember moving on and certainly as I've encountered other places where changes or cuts have happened, you know, that's one of my…probably go back to that thought…I get it. These things have to happen. There's a way to do it. And I think that she could have been more empathic.

Rebecca's experience resonated with her, and she averred how it transformed how she approached her team, including during time when she was the messenger of bad news. Not unlike the other participants, she described how she sought to be empathetic, and she intentionally led with compassion and understanding.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented findings from a narrative inquiry study on understanding servant leadership in practice among administrative leaders in higher education. The researcher highlighted the backgrounds of the eight participants, and how they connected to the study. The participants reflected on their lived experiences, servant leadership and servant leader characteristics, shared stories about their lived journeys, and drew meaning from them. The researcher identified four emergent themes from the findings which included: values serve as a compass, spirituality, relationship development, and pragmatic practice. Participants described how values formed the foundation of their approaches to leadership. Spirituality offered the participants a form of motivation and inspiration to do well and to keep doing better. Participants explained how developing relationships provided them with the ability to foster and nurture caring, resilient teams. Participants focused on the pragmatic practice of collaboratively setting a vision, developing goals and objectives, and aligning actions and behavior to achieve them. The researcher's findings revealed rich experiences and stories that spanned from participants' childhood to present day, and they illustrated their complex and storied lives.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how lived experiences shaped the journeys of servant leaders in higher education. As a self-described servant leader, the researcher developed an interest in searching for patterns and themes across the storied lives of higher education administrative leaders, because it represented a gap in the literature. The researcher sought to fill part of that gap by studying the lived experiences of eight higher education administrative leaders from four different universities in the Midwest. Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews. The data were coded, organized, analyzed, and assembled into categories and subcategories found in Chapter 4. The aim of this chapter is to provide an interpretation and integrated synthesis of these findings, connect them to existing literature, and answer the study's research questions:

1. What lived experiences shape the journeys of university leaders who exhibit servant leadership characteristics?

2. What motivates the university leaders to demonstrate servant leadership characteristics?

3. How do university administrative leaders who possess servant leadership characteristics reflect on their lived experiences when making decisions?

Through analysis of the findings, three analytic categories emerged: (1) Growth and Joy Come from Pain, (2) Paying Forward a Sense of Agency, and (3) Feeling Safe Is Foundational to Success. Analytic categories guided the open and selective coding, analysis, and organization of the themes and subthemes, and they align with the research questions. The researcher identified patterns and relationships within and among three analytic categories, made connections between and among them, and derived meaning from them. The discussion integrated postmodern theory, which grounded this study, and it connected with literature on servant leadership practiced in the

education setting. Implications highlighted the importance of universities and colleges to make an effort to understand their servant leaders and invest in support and development tailored to their unique needs.

Analytic Category 1: Growth and Joy Come from Pain

Participants described how their approach to leadership was shaped by personally experiencing adversity and witnessing leaders at various phases of their lives navigate and overcome challenges of their own. At times of struggle, they reflected on their past lived experiences and channeled inspiration or motivation from them. Not unlike how muscles fibers become stronger through resistance training and pain, over time the participants grew and became wiser and more resilient leaders when faced with new challenging situations. Eliot (2020) described how servant leaders with a high degree of resilience are more easily and adeptly able to navigate change and obstacles, and they are able to develop and help others around them to learn from the experiences and grow. Over time and with more experience, the participants also became more skillful at prioritizing and choosing what *battles to fight*. Through experience, personal growth, and reflection, the leaders developed wisdom and resilience. In essence, it aligns with the cliché don't work harder but work smarter. Further, they had a greater understanding of how to prioritize their efforts in light of their personal capacity limits. By overcoming adversity and the pain that sometimes accompanies it, the participants developed resilience and more adeptly learned how to find the simplest path to overcome the next obstacle on the horizon.

Participants explained how enduring hardship created value for them. By going through difficult circumstances at an institution where the mission of the institution resonated with them, it made their journey more meaningful. By experiencing the bad, it made the good that much

more joyful with a feeling of greater gratitude for it. In this study, Alexis described how she felt

a sense of gratitude during a budget cutting scenario at her institution. She learned how other

units within her group were cut more deeply than hers was, and she appreciated how her team

was preserved. She took her gratitude to the team, and she suggested that they appreciate what

they had and to offer assistance and support to the other units when they could. Howard and

Irving's (2014) study highlighted the importance of the interrelationship between navigating

challenges and building relationships in the development of the leader. During difficult

circumstances, participants leaned on their life journeys as leaders, and they valued the

opportunity to view them through a humanistic lens in an attempt to contextualize it as a

reference point to address the present obstacle and lead their teams through the challenge and

successfully come out on the other side. The participants found inspiration by succeeding in the

face of headwinds. Their self-confidence incrementally grew, and it created a cumulative effect.

If they could succeed at A in the face of B, then they could succeed at X in the face of Y.

Whether it came from a place of religious faith or reflecting on overcoming a hardship and

channeling a strong leader's wisdom from the past, the participants also intentionally sought

inspiration to help guide them through a present challenge and endure the pain associated with it.

Chand (2015) described a similar sense of how enduring pain develops resilience before coming

out on the other side as stronger leaders. When they persisted and came out on the other side,

they had a greater appreciation for what was learned through the struggle.

Allen, et al. (2017) proffered in their study how aligning personal identity to an

organization's mission was important to leaders, and this notion was supported by this study.

Participants described the importance of identifying with their institutions' mission, and how

aligning with it made their struggle worth fighting for. This sense of resilience in the face of

pain was further supported by the body of knowledge about the importance of servant leaders

feeling more effective when they are engaged in an organization where they identify with its

mission (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Greenleaf, 1982). Participants seemed to be well equipped

to lead people through change, which can sometimes be painful. Albert described how he was as

transparent as he could be when COVID-19 broke in March 2020. When he learned of changes

navigated by executive leadership and the challenging implications to come for his team, he

shared as much as he could, despite some of the pain that would result for his team. Whether it

involved more in-person modalities or expecting more work hours during the week, he was clear

with his expectations, which were always informed by data and his team's feedback. He

expounded how, notwithstanding COVID-19, he collaboratively worked with his stakeholders to

develop a vision and attempt to secure genuine buy-in for it. While soliciting and incorporating

feedback from the stakeholders, they developed a strategy with objectives and a plan to navigate

the change process, and it simultaneously helped the team develop and grow as a more coalesced

unit. Greater buy-in led to a firmer sense of accountability between and among members of the

participants' teams. Followers also developed a greater sense of meaning in their professional

lives when they were led by leaders who either identified with or exhibited servant leadership

characteristics (Burch et al., 2015; Cerit, 2009; Dean, 2014; Greenleaf, 1982; van Dierendonck &

Nuijten 2011).

 Participants valued the importance for both them and their teams to have a personal sense

of identity and connection to their work. They felt that it enhanced team morale and

performance. When leaders identify with the mission of their organization, they exhibit behavior

that aligns its values. An effect is the team mirrors similar behaviors, and they work in sync with

the leaders as the struggles and successes ebb and flow over time.

Analytic Category 2: Paying Forward a Sense of Agency

Participants were adamant to empower members of their team and develop their sense of

agency. The believed it was paramount to their individual success as leaders and the success of

their teams and organizations. Russell (2001) described how leaders who embrace servant

leadership values have a positive effect on their teams' recognition of similar values, and they

collectively influence the organization's performance, and the findings from this study support

this notion. For some participants, empowerment and developing others to achieve their goals

sometimes meant deemphasizing or deprioritizing the participant's own professional goal

attainment or accomplishments in favor or helping others achieve theirs or celebrating their

achievements over those of the participant. A. J. explained how earlier in his career he was

proud of one of his scholarly achievements that appeared in a highly regarded and popular

periodical. He received adulation from his colleagues across the country. Despite feeling pride,

he was more focused on helping one of his junior colleagues with a research project. A. J.

prioritized developing his colleague and supporting their development above promoting his

achievement. A. J. and other participants learned this behavior through either having positive

leadership role models who trusted them and empowered them to make decisions, or having a

disempowering leader-an anti-role model-at some point in their lives and making a conscious

decision to behave in an opposite manner. Suzanne described how earlier in her professional

career, she had an anti-role model who was disempowering, demotivating, and controlling. He

attempted to wield power through fear and insulting her. His approach backfired. Suzanne not

only left that job because of him, but she developed a conviction to lead in a diametrically

opposite manner. She expounded how she reflects on that experience when confronted with a

difficult predicament involving a person on her team. She was steadfast in ensuring they felt

heard, respected, and empowered. Murari & Gupta (2012) postulated how leaders' sense of empowerment leads to teams with greater levels of foresight, awareness, and stewardship. In addition, it paved the way for enhanced organizational commitment, work environment satisfaction, role satisfaction, and job involvement of employees that led to higher performance of the organization and provided it with a greater competitive advantage. Participants noted how prioritizing empowerment among their team members enhanced team morale and contributed to lower turnover. Further, there was a sense that the participants worked more for the team than the team worked for them, and this notion was supported by Greenleaf (1982) who posited how servant leaders took on the role as facilitators and servants of their followers. The sense of leaders becoming servants of the team is modeled for the rest of the team. Some participants explained how they viewed servant leadership as *leading from the middle* and taking turns at leading and serving with other team members. This approach seemed to enhance the leadership development of others on the team. Modeling produces a cyclical loop whereby the leaders model the leading through serving approach and the other members of the team learn and adopt this behavior and lead through serving as well.

In juxtaposition to the primary axiom of servant leadership and the circularity of servant leaders becoming servants of their followers and the notion is inherited by other members of the team, through the findings of this study, Albert, one of the participants, took issue with it. He identified with some characteristics of the servant leadership framework, including authenticity, developing a sense of agency, transparency, supporting the team for it to succeed, being results-oriented, and having self-awareness. However, he felt that the serving aspect of the servant leadership construct was overemphasized, and servant leaders become subservient to others versus sharing responsibility with others (Cerit, 2009; Liu, 2019). On one hand, if a leader

focused heavily on the serving others aspect of servant leadership, they could jeopardize the benefits of modeling and having the sensibility to know when to be decisive as a servant leader. On the other hand, the serving others aspect of servant leadership is at the heart of its meaning and is the primary strength of the framework. When servant leadership is embraced by a team and the serving function is elevated, it could result in better performance outcomes (Cerit, 2009; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Jit et al., 2016; Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017). Based on the literature, servant leadership contributed to the success of teams.

Success is contagious, and it leads to improved morale and greater opportunities for teams to outperform. Success with a serving other approach has developed a foundation for servant leaders to nurture a greater sense of co-responsibility on a team. Developing shared responsibility empowered others to step up, lead, and grow, and team members were encouraged to lead and become role models and mentors to new members on the team. Participants developed positive behaviors with circularity and replicability, and they commented how it was a signal of a healthy and thriving team. In alignment with Norris, et al.'s (2017) study, their view of sharing leadership responsibilities and modeling–servant leadership characteristics–enhanced accountability between and among participants' team members, because they modeled how to take ownership for their efforts and responsibility for their behavior. Participants in this study explained how they empowered their teams, and it had a positive ripple effect whereby they encouraged faculty and staff in their units to provide their students with a greater sense of agency. They sought to create conditions where students could feel empowered to lead and live better lives. Further, servant leadership's focus on fostering and nurturing co-responsibility and empowerment positively influenced the behavior of servant leaders to contribute to enhancing the behavior of teams that enhanced better organization outcomes (de Waal & Sivro, 2012;

Russell, 2001). Participants believed that their teams performed better when others on the team felt empowered to lead, and the participants desired similar expectations from those to whom they reported at higher administrative levels of the university. When it happened, the participants felt that they had greater opportunities to thrive. Servant leaders who foster and nurture a greater sense of co-responsibility develop more empowered team members with a penchant for greater connection to each other and their work together.

Analytic Category 3: Feeling Safe Is Foundational to Success

Participants described how trust and a sense of safety was a fundamental prerequisite when they reflected on the success of their leadership. Through lived experiences in myriad settings, trust and a sense of safety was the thread that weaved its way through successful relationships, teams, and organizations. Sarkus (1996) opined how relationships built on trust, especially in organizations with a service mission, created conditions where servant leaders could thrive, and this study supports this position. In this study, Rebecca illustrated how at times in her career she did not feel safe. Whether a manager was not transparent about their motives or one did not support her and have her back, she was determined not to approach her leadership in this manner. She wanted people on her team to feel supported and safe; she wanted them to trust her, and she wanted to trust them. Empathy, compassion, and patience grew from trust, and they contributed to a sense of safety for the participants, and those who were part of their teams.

Feeling safe was an effect of servant leaders who engendered a trusting environment where they acted with compassion and humility. Humility stood out in a qualitative study conducted by Rego, et al. (2017) in which the leaders who demonstrated more humility, as described by their fellow team members, were found to be better communicators who engendered a more disarming team atmosphere where team members felt safe enough to feel

vulnerable enough to express their opinions and beliefs in an authentic way. This perspective was supported by this study, because in the findings the participants commented on the importance of ensuring that their teams felt heard, appreciated, valued, and respected. The participants humbly took a genuine interest in the lives of their team members, and they remarked how they made a deliberate effort to get to know them on a more personal level. They trusted their teams, and it carried substance and purpose. The participants felt that the trust helped them and their teams to focus on goals, results, and quality of work. Participants were strong communicators who actively requested feedback with genuine intent, and they genuinely involved others in decisions that impacted them. These characteristics galvanized trust on their teams, and they aligned with the servant leadership framework's characteristics in Table 1 (see page 3). From the feeling of safety, the participants' teams were positioned for success and experienced less turnover, and it aligns with Brohi, et al. (2018) who detailed in their study how educators who practiced servant leadership employed people with a higher degree of psychological safety and lower turnover.

Foucalt (2002) believed leaders had to first take responsibility for themselves before taking care of others. Harter's (2016) analysis of how Foucalt viewed leadership highlighted how the latter prioritized the well-being of the leader first, because one cannot *pour from an empty cup*. When participants practiced humility, empowerment, authenticity, and active listening, they created an environment of trust and ultimately safety on their teams, but they first must practice self-care. This study supported this perspective especially in the findings when Veronica described how she offered self-care advice to an HR colleague who struggled to balance caring for an ill loved one and simultaneously caring for her own health. Veronica and the other participants described how their dedication to serve others was sometimes at the

expense of their own well-being, because they valued the mutual trust with their teams to such a high degree.

Participants adamantly described how trust was paramount to their teams' success. In Pouramiri and Mehdinezhad's (2017) study, they described how servant leaders who believed they exhibited servant leadership characteristics expressed a higher degree of trust in their organizations and those who worked at them. However, participants explained how the trust of their teams could be undermined by a sense of distrust and not feeling safe at the organizational level. When the participants and their teams lacked trust in their university's executive leadership, it jeopardized the sense of safety felt by them at the team level. Participants consistently described how they valued transparency from their managers and executives at their universities, especially when they worked tirelessly to create a team culture of trust, transparency, and free information sharing at all levels within their units. Having the latitude and agency to express feelings and emotions and to behave authentically play strong roles in servant leadership, and knowing how to optimize them, and at times harness them, enables servant leaders to be more effective and supportive when working in team environments (Heath & Heath, 2010). Yet when the participants' organizations lacked transparency at its upper administrative levels, it led to a toxic environment where people throughout the organization felt afraid to speak their minds and how they felt, regardless of how much trust and safety were felt by a singular team within it. Even the best and most trusting teams will not be able to reach their full potential when they are within an organization devoid of trust and transparency. Creating an environment of trust and ultimately safety on teams is imperative.

Connection to Postmodern Theory

Postmodern theory posits a disassociation with absolute truths, and the truth of the subject is what matters. The theory decenters a subject, but it simultaneously emphasizes its multi-faceted identity or concept (Crotty, 1998; Dallmayr, 1997). In essence, qualitative research analysis is a postmodernism concept, because it is the deconstruction of a study's findings with the aim of identifying connections and patterns to understand and derive multiple meanings from them (Bloomberg & Volp, 2012). When practiced well, servant leadership is not top-down, and it encourages thinking *outside the box*. In this study, Carolyn recounted how two leaders of different professional organizations set their egos to the side and placed their stakeholders' needs above theirs. They collaborated in an innovative and selfless way, and as a result, were able to accomplish shared goals, which their predecessors could not.

Servant leadership is a living, growing, mutating organism that is inextricably connected to the leaders' lived experiences. In the spirit of postmodernism, servant leadership *turns leading on its head* by exerting a focus on the followers' transformation into leaders, and it breaks with traditional practices of leading through formal leadership's command and control. In line with postmodern theory, servant leaders are encouraged to have the freedom to construct their own truths and identities as leaders, and they tend to reject dogma when it might hold back their team's success (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Tierney, 1996).

Servant leaders move more traditional leadership boundaries and relinquish control to lead from the middle and sometimes from behind, and this behavior demonstrates postmodern theory in action. For example, Sackney, et al.'s (1999) postmodern view on leadership and power in education as fragmented and diffused with more challenged boundaries was depicted in this study when Carlos explained how his seminary professor role model was not afraid to push

the boundaries of the dogmatic curriculum, expand the walls of learning, and create a bigger space for understanding. Servant leadership imbues freedom from more traditional leadership frameworks that stem from hegemonic power constructs of formal authority; it asserts a complete rejection of modernity's command and control authoritative leadership tactics that are grounded in respect through fear (Crotty, 1998; Glaser & Pilnick, 2005). Pynchon (2006) famously wrote, "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers" (p. 204). This study lent support to Pynchon's notion, because when servant leaders encountered obstacles or resistance to change, they reflected and channeled role models who were distinctive, authentic, and challenged the status quo. They rely on their values and look for traps in resistance to change. They inspired and empowered others on their team to think differently and act courageously to circumvent or extricate themselves and their teams from the pitfalls that get in their way on the road to progress and success.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 portrayed an analysis of the study's findings, and it answered its research questions. The discussion provided a synthesis of the eight participants' lived experiences that they shared during the semi-structured interviews. The participants have lived storied lives, and this section highlighted connections and patterns found in the findings. They expressed how professional growth and sense of meaning derive from overcoming obstacles and challenges. The participants valued creating a sense of agency among and between those on their teams, and how it served as a model to pass along to others who joined the team in the future. They endeavored to create an environment for themselves and their teams in which all members, regardless of position or title, felt safe to be themselves and express their views and perspectives. Creating a safe environment was not only the right thing to do, but it contributed to a higher level

of success for the team. The researcher's study was grounded in postmodern theory, and it

provided the overarching framework for the research. Postmodern theory informed the

researcher's approach to the study's methods, including the semi-structured interview questions,

and analysis and interpretation of its findings.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to understand how lived experiences shaped the journeys of higher education administrative leaders who exhibited servant leader and servant leadership characteristics in Table 1 (see page 3). Eight participants shared stories from their childhood to their present day roles as leaders at four different universities in the Midwest. Conclusions from this study aligned with its research questions:

1. What lived experiences shape the journeys of university leaders who exhibit servant leadership characteristics?

2. What motivates the university leaders to demonstrate servant leadership characteristics?

3. How do university administrative leaders who possess servant leadership characteristics reflect on their lived experiences when making decisions?

During the study, the participants reflected on their lived journeys, and they drew meaning from their storied experiences. The participants described how their lived experiences contributed to who they became as leaders in all facets of their lives. They shared what motivated them to possess and exhibit servant leadership characteristics, and how it directly influenced their approach to leadership. The participants offered how and when they reflect on their lived experiences, and what role the reflections played when they made more challenging decisions. Participants provided the researcher with rich qualitative data to form the basis for the study's findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study added to the existing research on servant leadership in the higher education setting. In particular, it helped to close two gaps in the literature. The first gap was how lived experiences shaped the journey of leaders who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership

characteristics. The second gap was an extension of the first one, and it focused on how leaders who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership characteristics reflect on their lived experiences and how those reflections inform their decision-making. Findings from this study provided an understanding of the profound impact participants' lived experiences had on their approach to leadership, which centered on the demonstration of servant leader and servant leadership characteristics. They also highlighted how and when the participants reflected on their lived experiences, and how they factored into their approach to making decisions. The findings offer implications for servant leaders who work in the higher education setting with an emphasis on how to recruiting and retaining them, and creating an environment where they could thrive.

The first implication is servant leaders vary in terms of how and when they reflect on their lived experiences when making decisions. Some of the participants regularly reflected through intentional meditation. Others reflected during prayer. Some only reflected when asked to reflect. This latter category was problematic, because the participants cited value in intentional reflection. They believe that reflection gave them an important opportunity to pause. Pausing provided them with time and space to be more thoughtful and ruminative, and it provided them with more confidence to either be decisive or realize that they might need to collect more information before making the decision. Higher education institutions' servant leaders could incorporate more intentional and regular opportunities for their faculty and staff to reflect. Servant leader-led units could partner with human resource departments to include intentional reflection as part of onboarding training programs for new faculty and staff. Upper administration who identify with servant leadership could expect intentional reflection from their reports, and the expectation could be passed along reporting lines throughout the organization.

Servant leaders could spend intentional time with regularity at faculty and staff meetings, whether the reflection is done individually or in smaller group settings. They could reconvene with their teams to discuss the takeaways from the reflection, and how they could inform team learning and decision-making. When servant leaders have an opportunity to reflect on connections between their work and lived experiences, they are better prepared to make decisions.

The second implication is servant leaders have a tendency to be exceptionally humble and downplay their accomplishments or contributions to their teams' success. Servant leaders' humility is a strength, and it enables them to manage their ego and focus their effort on team development and pursuit of their collective goals. However, too much of a good thing could have a deleterious effect. A drawback of a heightened sense of humility is a missed opportunity to embrace and express self-gratitude. More regularly recognizing and celebrating personal accomplishments through demonstrative self-gratitude could have a positive impact on servant leaders' mental health, because it is a form of self-care. Taking some personal time to reflect and be thankful for their contributions would not only benefit the servant leaders, but it would serve as an example for others on their team to recognize and appreciate their own contributions. The demonstration of self-gratitude could be done on their own time outside of the work setting, but it might have a greater impact when done on campus. In a higher education setting, servant leaders could make intentional time to share stories with their teams when they felt proud of themselves. Servant leaders could build this practice into a pattern to occur during faculty or staff meetings, or they could include them during their regular one on one meetings with team members. Modeling this practice is important, because other members on the team would feel more comfortable sharing their expressions of self-gratitude. Incorporating the sharing of proud

moments would normalize the behavior, and it would have greater reach through a positive impact on team members' mental health and team morale.

The third implication is servant leaders experience compassion fatigue to varying degrees. Due to the serving nature of the servant leadership construct, servant leaders tend to over-commit and over-extend themselves, because they regularly put their teams and their students before themselves. This could lead to compassion fatigue and, without recognizing and addressing it, burnout and turnover. Servant leaders have a tendency to be more vulnerable with their teams, and they could leverage it when it comes to recognizing and addressing compassion fatigue. Servant leaders in the higher education setting could openly discuss the concept of compassion fatigue with their managers and teams alike to start recognizing it. They could highlight instances when they felt it, and how they navigated it. Through open discussions the servant leaders could create a safe space where other members of the team would feel comfortable describing how they have experienced compassion fatigue and citing examples. More importantly, this discussion could lead to conversation about methods they used to cope with it. Creating a safe environment where it is normal to share vulnerabilities and struggles will enhance trust, teamwork, resiliency, and ultimately results. By sharing in coping tactics, the servant leaders and their teams could start identifying constructive methods to address compassion fatigue together and individually.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Existing research on servant leadership overwhelmingly focused on the framework either in a for-profit or non-profit setting. Of the research within the P-20 education domain, the majority of it appeared in the elementary and secondary school settings. Within the higher education milieu, a preponderance of the scholarship highlighted quantitative studies, and how

myriad leaders' servant leader and servant leadership characteristics were measured and compared. Among the qualitative studies in the higher education environment, they focused on how some leaders demonstrate servant leader and servant leadership characteristics but not why. The researcher's study attempted to close that gap as described by the findings and discussion in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively.

The eight participants in this study were in higher education leadership roles below the executive level of president and provost but with at least ten years of higher education leadership experience. Results may have been different had at least some of the participants been in either a president or provost role. Future studies could focus on learning about the lived experiences of presidents and provosts who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership characteristics and may have had longer careers in leadership. To wit, leaders in these roles might have more lived experiences, and they might lend well to richer findings. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a future study about higher education leaders with less than ten years of experience might demonstrate their more formative approach to leadership, because it is still in an earlier stage. Their grasp of servant leadership might be less stable, and it would be worth investigating how to stabilize and grow it.

The researcher attempted to identify a diverse sample of participants. In particular, he sought a group that would not be predominantly white, heterosexual men. He achieved this, because among the eight participants, only three fit this category as found in Table 2 (see page 53). However, only one participant identified as Latino and another one identified as multi-racial (Native American, Latina, and African American). This represents a limitation, and future studies could highlight the lived experiences of higher education servant leaders who identify as

BIPOC. Their journeys to leadership roles in academia could be unique, because they would have had to overcome more challenges, such as racism and discrimination.

Seven of the eight participants worked at private universities, and it exemplifies a limitation of this study. Especially with servant leadership having its early roots partly influenced by the Christian faith, a future qualitative study with a focus on selecting leaders at public institutions would expand the scholarship of understanding the lived experiences of servant leaders in higher education. Their life journeys could have taken on different paths and shaped different values.

This study provided an understanding of how and why lived experiences shaped the approach of eight higher education leaders who exhibit servant leader and servant leadership experiences. Another limitation of this study is learning how the people who regularly work with the leaders would quantify the leader's demonstration of servant leadership. A mixed-methods study would provide an opportunity to research it. A qualitative approach to understanding the leaders' lived experiences could be combined with a quantitative approach to measure the stakeholders' assessment of the leaders' demonstration of servant leader and servant leadership characteristics.

Finally, how the participants reflected on their lived experiences when making decisions was a centerpiece of this study. Participants described role models, anti-role models, lasting memories of experiences from the arc of their lives, and other milestones on their lived journeys that served as motivation or inspiration. A future study could focus on diving more deeply into understanding servant leaders' motivation and inspiration and quantifying their effect. The researcher might be able to measure the significance of the factors that motivate and inspire the

participants, and they might be able to draw correlations between and among them to advance scholarship on servant leadership.

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Researcher Reflection

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When reflecting on the study, the researcher pondered the impact of the findings on his own approach to servant leadership. In some instances, the researcher identified with the participants through similar experiences as they had, both with positive and negative impacts on him, and he identified areas where he succeeded as a servant leader and where he fell short. The findings demonstrated how eight seasoned higher education leaders were guided by their values, which were adopted and shaped throughout their lives. The more salient servant leadership values shared by all eight of them were authenticity, courage, and transparency. These values were developed through lived experiences from childhood through present time. They were modeled for them by leaders who served as role models, but they were also developed as a contrast to leaders who were anti-role models; leaders who inspired the participants to behave in an opposite manner. Authenticity, courage, and transparency resonated with the researcher, and he believe that shared these values, too. The participants described how the interplay of these values inform just about all of their actions from setting priorities, making decisions, communicating with their teams, negotiating, etc. Identifying values is important, because they serve as a compass and guide leaders' behavior over time. The values also act as an ethical anchor when leaders are tested. The researcher considered instances when he fell short with communicating well with the team, and how it particularly became an area of growth for him during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher also reflected on what inspired and motivated him as a servant leader, and why he pursued higher education as a career. Mainly, he sought

work that would resonate with his values. Further, the researcher wanted to derive meaning from his work and make an impact on the lives of young adults.

Whether secular or non-secular, the participants embraced a sense of spirituality that their work was bigger than themselves. Their values informed this sense of spirituality, but it went beyond them; the spirituality was an abstraction of who they were as a person. The participants derived joy from their work in relation to how much meaning they ascribed to it. Positive role models influenced what participants wanted to get out of their work. The researcher considered one primary role model from his early higher education career, and how he thinks of her and what she might do when he is confronted with a difficult decision. Through positive role models, the participants witnessed what joy could look like in work, and they wanted to not only experience it, too, but pay it forward to other on their teams. The price of joy was pain. The participants observed how their positive role models navigated the bad to overcome obstacles and relish the good, which was worth the pain. They embraced the same mindset when they encountered challenges, and they sought to mentor those on their team. They empowered them to navigate the joy and pain, which fortified their development as leaders who demonstrate servant leadership characteristics, too. The participants' role models imbued in them a yearning for work that was bigger than themselves, and they embraced the same sense of spirituality in their own work as leaders, especially as they developed those around them on their teams to find a greater calling in their work.

Success as a servant leader primarily comes down to how successful one is at relationship development. The participants looked outward toward others to gather information before looking inward to make decisions. They consistently sought feedback and perspectives from stakeholders, whether they were at a higher, lower, or peer level, and they genuinely factored the

information into their decision-making process, which was informed by their values experiences with joy and pain. The participants provided their teams with a great sense of agency and co-responsibility, and these two go hand in hand for servant leaders who have an earnest desire to strive to develop all members of their teams, regardless of level, as leaders. When the participants knew they might not be able to incorporate everyone's feedback into a decision for a particular reason, they were transparent and forthright about it; they provided reasons why. They were careful not to patronize nor humor their teams. The researcher reflected on his sense of creating a transparent environment, and how he shared everything-that he could-as openly and honestly with the team during COVID-19, whether the news was good or bad. The participants shared how they approached their teams in a similar manner during the pandemic. They knew that being transparent aligned with their values, and it would enhance trust on their teams.

Servant leaders get stuff done. During the interviews, the participants reflected on their professional experiences with an emphasis on results. Their vision was clear. They all described how at the end of the day, their work was to improve the lives of the students at their university. The participants endeavored to create a safe environment for their teams, where all members could feel empowered and appreciated. When the team is positioned in this manner, it is primed to be more resilient to navigate obstacles and challenges that are on the path to reaching its goals. The team's goals were practical and tied to the success of their students, and this in of itself created a greater sense of self and meaning for the research participants and their teams. As the researcher reflected on the totality of his study on servant leadership, he found himself repeating a particular refrain in his mind. The researcher committed to saying the mantra to himself once a day and more often when he found himself confronted with a more challenging situation or

making a more difficult decision: be good, be yourself, be kind to yourself, work hard, and do it

for others.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Recruitment Email

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is Michael Roberts, and I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at DePaul University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation study about servant leadership in the university setting. The purpose of this research is to better understand how lived experiences shape the journey of servant leaders in higher education.

It appears you're eligible to participate in my research study, because you are an administrator at a Midwestern university and you have at least ten years of higher education leadership experience. I obtained your contact information from LinkedIn.

If you are selected to participate in my study, you will be interviewed by me either in-person or via Zoom–your preference–for approximately one 60-90 minute session. During the interview, I would audio record our conversation. Following the interview, I will transcribe, code, categorize, analyze, and interpret data, and I'll incorporate it in my dissertation.

This study anticipates minimal risk to you, and I will limit it as much as possible. The interview questions are not more invasive than those asked by colleagues or supervisors, and they will not cause undue harm or psychological effects. Foreseeable risks could involve the possibility of you choosing to disclose illegal activities that might require my reporting to authorities, collection of personal or sensitive information revealed by you during the interview, and possible feelings of anxiety or sadness when reflecting on some moments of your life.
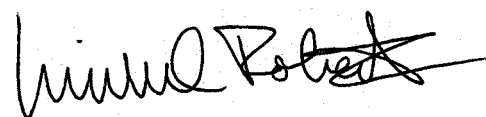
Participants might benefit indirectly from the study by learning how to better understand how their lived experiences shaped them as servant leaders. By better understanding the implications of your lived experiences, you might gain further insight into and be more mindful of how your ongoing lived experiences will continue to shape your approach as a servant leader. Information from this study will add to servant leadership scholarship, and it might benefit other leaders in the future.

Please note this study is completely voluntary. You may request to be in it or not. If you'd like to participate, please complete this **Pre-Interview Questionnaire** (link) by (X date). If after completing the questionnaire you are selected to participate in my study, I will email you by (Z date) with next steps. If you have any questions about the study or the questionnaire, please email me at mrobert7@depaul.edu or call me at 773-865-7955.

Further, if you so choose, I invite you to forward this email to people in your network who might be administrators at Midwestern universities and who have at least ten years of higher education leadership experience.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Pre-interview Questionnaire

1. What is your name (first and last)?

2. What is your administrative title?

3. How many years of higher education administrative leadership experience do you possess?
    a. 0-5 years
    b. 6-9 years
    c. 10-15 years
    d. 16-20 years
    e. 21+ years

4. What is your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary
    d. Other
    e. Prefer not to identify

5. What is your race?
    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    e. Hispanic or Latinx
    f. White
    g. Other
    h. Prefer not to identify

6. What is your sexual orientation?
    a. Bisexual
    b. Gay
    c. Heterosexual
    d. Lesbian
    e. Other
    f. Prefer not to identify

7. What is your phone number?

8. What is your email address?

Servant leadership is a popular leadership framework that focuses on leaders who put the needs of their followers and other constituents before their own in the interest to serve others (Greenleaf, 1982). The servant leaders' primary motive is to serve versus to lead, but

through the practice of serving first they ironically lead. Servant leaders become models to empower and inspire their followers to become servant leaders themselves (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

9. To what level of agreement do you strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree or disagree (3), disagree (2), or strongly disagree (1) that you possess the following **servant leader** characteristics?

   a. Altruistic
   b. Authentic
   c. Empathetic
   d. Humble
   e. Self-aware
   f. Interpersonally supportive
   g. Cooperative
   h. Integrity-forward

10. To what level of agreement do you strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree or disagree (3), disagree (2), or strongly disagree (1) that you exhibit the following **servant leadership** characteristics?

   a. Conducive environment for decision-making
   b. Egalitarianism
   c. Empowering followers
   d. Focusing on shared values
   e. Fostering group consensus-building
   f. Growth of community members
   g. Strong emphasis on stewardship

Participant Interview Guide

Opening:

"This interview is being audio recorded for research purposes. If you wish for the recording to stop at any point during the interview, please let me know and I will stop the recording. Do you consent to being recorded? Recording starts now."

Focused life history

Describe your earliest memory of a leader who made an impression on you.

    Prompts: What happened? What more salient leadership characteristics did they possess?

Describe a past negative experience with a leader.

    Prompts: What happened? What were some of the negative characteristics of the leader?

    How did it make you feel? How may have that influenced your approach to leadership?

Describe a past positive experience with a leader.

    Prompts: What happened? What were some of the positive characteristics of the leader?

    How did it make you feel? How may have that influenced your approach to leadership?

Would you describe your earliest memory of when you first felt like a leader?

    Prompts: How did you know that you were leading? What were you doing? How did it

    make you feel?

How did you discover the servant leadership framework?

    Prompts: When?

How would you describe servant leadership in your own words?

Details of professional work experience

Why do you identify with servant leadership?

What motivated you to adopt servant leadership?

Describe a recent scenario when you made a major decision where the outcome was positive.

Prompts: How did approach it? What was the result? What did you learn from it?

Describe a recent scenario when you made a major decision where the outcome was negative?

Prompts: How did approach it? What was the result? What did you learn from it?

Do you consciously think of being a servant leader when you're faced with difficult decisions?

Prompts: If so, please explain.

How does the servant leadership framework inform your decision-making?

What inspires you today as a leader?

Prompts: How does this relate to being a servant leader?

Reflection on meaning

How do you know when someone is a servant leader?

What impact have your lived experiences had on your decision to ascribe to the servant

leadership framework?

When do you find yourself reflecting on your experiences as a servant leader?

Participant Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Understanding Servant Leadership through the Lived Experiences of Higher Education
Administrative Leaders at Three Universities in the Midwest

Principal Investigator: Michael Roberts, graduate student

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

College: College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD

Key Information:

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about better understanding how lived experiences shape the journey of servant leaders in higher education. This study is being conducted by Michael Roberts, a graduate student at DePaul University, as a requirement to obtain his doctoral degree. This research is being supervised by his faculty advisor, Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD.

We hope to include between five to eight people in the research.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a higher education administrative leader at a Midwest university, you have at least ten years of leadership experience, and you self-reported that you possess characteristics of a servant leader.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, being in the research involves participating in one approximately 60-90 minute interview in either an in-person session or via a Zoom, whichever format is preferred by the participant. During the interview, the principal investigator will ask the participants questions about formative lived experiences from childhood to present day that impacted their journey and informed their identity as a servant leader. Interview questions will involve cover the following topics: early life history, professional work experience, and reflecting on and deriving meaning from their lived experiences. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said.

Approximately 60 days after the interview and after the principal investigator's data analysis emerges, he will initiate a member-checking discussion with each of the study's participants. The purpose of the member-checking discussion is to ask participants to respond to his interpretive accounts of their lived experiences and to provide him with feedback on whether the meaning of their stories is captured in the data

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?

This study anticipates minimal risk to the participants, and the principal investigator will limit it as much as possible. The questions are not more invasive than those asked by colleagues or supervisors and will not cause undue harm or psychological effects. Possible foreseeable risks follow:

- Legal risks involve the possibility of discovering illegal activities willfully disclosed by the participant that might require reporting to authorities

- Collection of personal or sensitive information in the interview

- Emotional risks involve possible feelings of anxiety or sadness when recounting lived experiences

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

Participants might benefit indirectly from the study by learning how to better understand how their lived experiences shaped them as servant leaders. By better understanding the implications of their lived experiences, participants could gain further insight into and be more mindful of how their ongoing lived experiences will continue to shape their approach as servant leaders. Information from this study will add to scholarship on higher education servant leadership, and it might benefit other leaders in the future.

How much time will this take?

This study will take about 60-90 minutes of your time for the interview, and it will take about 30 minutes of your time for the member-checking discussion.

Are there any costs to me for being in the research?

If you prefer to meet in-person for your interview, you are responsible for any costs related to getting to and from the location where you will participate in the research.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

The researcher may remove you from the study without your consent, if your situation changes and you no longer meet the inclusion criteria for the study.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?

The research records will be kept and stored securely. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, I will write about the combined information I have gathered. I will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. Some people might review or copy our records that may identify you in order to make sure we are following the required rules, laws, and regulations. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board may review your information. If they look at our records, they will keep your information confidential.

To prevent others from accessing our records or identifying you should they gain access to our records, we have put some protections in place. These protections include using a pseudonym for you and other participants in the study. Further, the recorded interviews will be downloaded to a password protected device, and it will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office.

The audio recordings will be kept until accurate transcribed notes have been made, then they will be destroyed.

You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or neglected or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Please be aware that disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence during the course of research does not constitute a formal report to the University and will not begin the process of DePaul providing a response. If you are seeking to report an incident of sexual or relationship violence to DePaul, you should contact Public Safety (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7777; Loop: 312-362-8400) or the Dean of Students and Title IX Coordinator (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7290; Loop: 312-362-8066 or titleixcoordinator@depaul.edu). Individuals seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence should contact a Survivor Support Advocate in the Office of Health Promotion & Wellness for information and resources (773-325-7129 or hpw@depaul.edu). More information is available at http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/hpw/shvp.html. Individuals are encouraged to take advantage of these services and to seek help around sexual and relationship violence for themselves as well as their peers who may be in need of support.

If you do disclose an experience with sexual or relationship violence, we will also provide you with a resource sheet containing this information at the end of the study.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Michael Roberts at 773-865-7955 or mrobert7@depaul.edu, and his faculty sponsor, Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD, at 773-325-8670 or brieckho@depaul.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

If you have complaints about the principal investigator or the study, please contact Jessica Bloom, DePaul University's Research Protections Coordinator, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-6168 or via email at jbloom8@depaul.edu

You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by Michael Roberts or Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD.
- You cannot reach the Michael Roberts or Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD.
- You want to talk to someone besides Michael Roberts or Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD.

You can print a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.
Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____