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Moriah Olmstead, a student at Toccoa Falls College, created the cover artwork. She explains that a wave is like a Servant Leader. Both are constantly changing with new tides of influence and resurfacing from depths that life passionately brings forth. Always seeking new horizons and growing in strength, Servant Leaders empower others by setting the example of what it looks like to remember hope. In the same way, a wave is powerful and graceful by its gesture of drawing its onlooker into its beauty. Life can become overwhelming when focused on the ever-present waves of chaos, but the very essence of becoming a Servant Leader is to hold fast and stand firm while focusing on, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and whatever is admirable" (Php 4:8). There is a horizon to every ocean and there is a God whose greatness calms the sea. It is in this center of chaos that the Servant Leader displays a calm in the midst of the storm.

A DOUBLE PARADOX: SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND GENDER SCRIPTS IN THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on research from three disciplines – leadership, cultural studies, and theology – this paper addresses a gap that exists in contextualizing servant leadership to a Latin American context that acknowledges social and cultural scripts related to gender roles. The goal is threefold. First, this paper briefly explores the idea of a servant leader as a leadership paradox. Second, servant leadership is approached with a biblical and theological lens to help shed light on the challenge of sensitively approaching leadership and interpretation of women's roles in Scripture when so many denominationally and culturally backed positions exist. Lastly, this paper explores how servant leadership is a cultural paradox in a Latin American context given the social and cultural scripts ascribed to gender roles. Three practical concepts are then presented to help effectively contextualize servant leadership to the Latin American context.

KEYWORDS: *Culture, Cultural Sensitivity, Contextualization*

A Double Paradox: Servant Leadership
and Gender Scripts in the Latin American Context

As a Latino - Nicaraguan to be specific - the word leadership inescapably calls forth images of political, revolutionary, religious, humanitarian, and artistic figures that have made a mark in history: Rigoberta Menchú, Gabriela Mistral, Maria Eva Duarte de Perón, Frida Kahlo, Augusto César Sandino, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Emiliano Zapata, César Chávez, Simón Bolívar, François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, José Martí, Paulo Coelho, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and Oscar Arnulfo Romero to name a few. Given their accomplishments and personalities, the aforementioned Latin American leaders represent various leadership theories. Some fall within the trait or skills approach, others are described well by the behavior or situational approach, still others are best described under the transformational leadership theory. Few, however, fit the full description of a servant leader – someone who leads by being a "servant first" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13) and with an emphasis on "the concerns of their followers, empathiz[ing] with them, and nurtur[ing] them" (Northouse, 2019, p. 227). Additionally, Greenleaf asserted that the difference between the servant leader and the leader-first, those whom are given leadership privileges prior to them serving, is in the "care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served" (p. 13). On the other hand, leaders-first are not familiar with the people and their needs and set a priority, at least from the outset, of accomplishing the organization's goals.

Now, entering its fifth decade, servant leadership has achieved a global reach and influence. Spears (2010) argued that "the times are only now beginning to catch up with Robert Greenleaf's visionary call to servant leadership" (p. 11). Greenleaf's development and contribution allowed him to establish the "Center for Applied Ethics in 1964, now the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, which provides a clearinghouse and focal point for research and writing on servant leadership" (Northouse, 2019, p. 228). The center is a testament to the work and impact of servant leadership across business sectors throughout time.

Culture and gender play a critical factor in how servant leadership is perceived and implemented. In this paper I evaluate how servant leadership is perceived and can be implemented in a Latin American context. I use the term Latina/o, rather than Hispanic, to make cultural claims about servant leadership and leaders in a Latin American context. Bordas (2013) argued that "Latino is politically and culturally a more useful term because it connects people to Central and Latin America and unites them through culture, kinship, and the Romance language" (p. 116). Although not every country in Latin America speaks the romance language (Spanish), there still exists unity through the similarities in culture and kinship, not to mention a common colonial history. This allows room for speaking about servant leadership through a Latin American lens. Additionally, critically understanding gender from a leadership point of view is necessary. Klenke (1996) argued that when leadership has been researched, the research itself has been "framed through the eyes of men," (p. 140) which results in "biased portrayal of women leaders" (p. 140) and often supporting the popular belief that men's capabilities of leading are superior to women. In researching the benefits of sponsorship over the traditional form of mentorship in career progression, Hewlett (2013) argued that often times the sacrifices women make are pinned against the "sacrifices [that] aren't being made but [from a sociocultural perspective] should be," such as those contained within the duties of the home (p. 54). Critically viewing and evaluating leadership through the lens of gender roles requires intentionality.

Literature on servant leadership is plentiful (Atkinson, 2014; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Greenleaf, 1973, 1977; Greenleaf, Beazley, Beggs, & Spears, 2003; Hirschy, Gomez, Patterson, & Winston, 2014; Thomas, 2018; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). Literature that evaluates servant leadership through a cultural lens is available and is growing (Hirschy et al., 2014; Irving, 2010; Irving & McIntosh, 2009; Molnar, 2007; Serrano, 2005; Thomas, 2018; Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). Literature on servant leadership and gender is also available (de Rubio & Kiser, 2015; Hogue, 2016; Reynolds, 2014; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). A gap, however, exists in contextualizing servant leadership to a Latin American context that acknowledges social and cultural scripts related to gender roles. Therefore, the focus for this paper is specifically on the scope of servant leadership in a Latin American context while acknowledging these social and cultural scripts. I draw on research from three disciplines – leadership, theology, and cultural studies. The goal is threefold. First, given the common understanding of how leaders lead, this paper briefly explores the idea of a servant leader as a leadership paradox. Second, servant leadership is approached with a biblical and theological lens. In addition to understanding and evaluating servant leadership through biblical and theological lenses, attention will be paid to how biblical and theological scholars have approached the role of women in Scripture. Lastly, this paper explores how servant leadership is a cultural paradox in a Latin American context given the social and cultural scripts ascribed to gender roles.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP THEORY

The term servant leadership was coined by Robert Greenleaf in his seminal work *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 1973, 1977; Northouse, 2019; Thomas, 2018; van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). In Greenleaf's own words, the concept of the servant as leader "came out of reading Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 7). For Greenleaf, the story of Leo, the servant boy in the story who ends up being the titular head of the Order – a "great and noble leader" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 7) - clearly illustrated the central point that "the great leader is seen as servant first" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 7).

Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2010) argued there are two major differentiators between servant leadership and other leadership theories and approaches. The first is an ultimate concern servant-leaders have for serving others over a concern for the wellbeing of the organization. The second rests on how Greenleaf placed the servant-leader as "*primus inter pares* (i.e., first among equals), who does not use their power to get things done but rather tries to persuade and convince his staff with the power of service" (van Dierendonck & Patterson, p. 8).

Furthermore, the concept of servant leadership is "both logical and intuitive" (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010, p. 12) and has ten main characteristics (Greenleaf et al., 2003). Given that much has been written on these characteristics, a list will suffice - listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf, Beazley, Beggs, & Spears, 2003, pp. 16-19). These ten characteristics make servant leadership a dynamic approach for a wide array of industries, including faith-based and corporate organizations. This approach, argued van Dierendonck and Patterson, is perceived "as a leadership style that is beneficial to organizations by awaking, engaging,

and developing employees, as well as beneficial to followers or employees by engaging people as whole individuals with heart, mind and spirit" (p. 5). As a result, his approach is not a one-sided transaction; both, the leader and the follower benefit.

It is also important to note that since its inception, servant leadership has reached a global audience. Gandolfi and Stone (2018) argued that servant leadership "has influenced and been influenced by many cultures around the world" (p. 264). Servant leadership is similar to Confucius teachings (Hirschy et al., 2014) and the teachings of leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017). Although servant leadership cannot be claimed as an inherently Christian style of leadership, one finds an immense similarity to the biblical teachings and the life of Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Serving is a clear biblical theme. Hence, it is not at all difficult to affirm that one can approach servant leadership with a Christian lens. Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2010) explained that "Greenleaf himself was a Quaker, and the Quaker teachings and practices can be found throughout his writings" (p. 4). Atkinson (2014) claimed that servant leadership is a familiar leadership concept in church settings. He went on to claim that the term servant in the context of servant leadership does not indicate serving God, but, rather, "servant leaders are to be ones who serve those they lead" (Atkinson, p. 147). It is a leadership approach that calls leaders to shift their views and goals from one that solely benefits the organization to one that emphasizes the wellbeing of its followers. Agosto (2005) helped set the tone for viewing leadership within a biblical context by writing,

> The religious leader, according to much of the Bible, responds to a call to action. He or she does so in a particular, personal style or approach to that action; flexibility is key. And the biblical leader undertakes his or her approach contextually, that is, always with the specific needs of concrete faith communities in mind. (p. 9)

Agosto shed light on two important points that will be highlighted in the rest of this paper. First, the need for a leader to be flexible. Second, the need for their leadership to be contextualized.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND SCRIPTURE

Scripture is full of lessons about serving (cf. Heb 6:10; Gal 5:13; Rom 12:1; Jn 13:1-17; Mk 10:43). For the sake of brevity, a discussion on two passages will suffice – John 13:1-17 and Mark 10:43. The former is John's description of the event where Jesus exemplified humility and servant leadership by washing His disciples' feet. The latter is Mark's recapitulation of James and John's selfish request to sit at Jesus' side when He enters His glory and Jesus' response, which sheds light on the Christian understanding of servant leadership.

JOHN 13:1-17 - JESUS LEADING BY SERVING. A few noteworthy events had transpired in the context of this pericope. Jesus had just come from "Bethany six days before Passover (12:1)" (Kruse, 2017, p. 219); Mary had "anointed his feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (12:2-8)" (Kruse, p. 219); Jesus had also just been greeted by crowds with palm

branches and shouts of 'Hosanna!' (12:12-15, NIV); and, lastly, this was the "eve of his betrayal and crucifixion" (Kruse, p. 219). John 13:1-17 is the context of the last supper and the event in which Jesus washes His disciples' feet.

Prior to Jesus' last meal, "Jesus disrupts the ordinary course of events by taking up a basin and towel and washing his disciples' feet. In doing so, Jesus exemplifies the disposition of self-giving love that characterize their life together" (Thompson, 2015, p. 279). Simon Peter's hesitations (Jn 13:6, 8) did not stop Jesus from engaging in this seemingly degrading, yet paradigm-shifting, act. Here, Jesus challenged the cultural and social norms and exemplified servant leadership by washing His disciples' feet. Hill (2016) explained the significance of this act by stating that in Jesus's day, "social class was marked and reinforced in countless ways, one of which was foot washing. It was a menial and dirty job, typically reserved for the lowest-ranking person in the house" (The Example of Jesus, paragraph 2). Jesus was leading using an unconventional approach – by serving.

The act of Jesus washing His disciples' feet, and the conversations that followed, has meaning beyond displaying humility. Kruse (2017) argued that

> the evangelist's statement that Jesus loved them to the end can be construed in two ways: (1) adverbially, meaning 'to the uttermost' – that is, showing the full extent of his love; (2) temporally, meaning 'to the end of his life' – that is, Jesus' love for his disciples did not fail: it persisted to the last moment of his life. (p. 220)

Either way, Jesus' act displays a love that is countercultural in how it nurtures care for His followers. Subsequently, Jesus made clear that His followers should follow His example – "Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). Kanagaraj (2011) explained that Jesus was teaching His followers that "the new covenant community needs to overcome evil with love, humble service, and good works done in union with him (i.e., by bearing fruit)" (p. 163). The act of washing His disciples' feet was a statement of how they were to follow Jesus and lead others to Jesus.

John 13:1-17 has theological ground for servant leadership as seen through the person of Jesus. John sets the stage for the act of Jesus washing His disciple's feet by describing that "Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father" (Jn 13:1). Kruse (2017) argued that this brings "out the significance of this moment" (p. 219) – the moment in which Jesus exemplified and taught principles similar to servant leadership. It is important to note that even as Jesus looked at the arduous road ahead of Him, He took the time to show His disciples what it means to follow Him with a servant's heart. Furthermore, v. 3 serves in two meaningful ways. First, to acknowledge God's sovereignty in light of Judas' betrayal (Jn 13:2). Jesus, in His sovereignty, knew that "the devil had already prompted" (Jn 13:2) Judas to betray Him. Hence, John's inspired words – "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power" (John 13:3) – established a clear foundation that Judas' betrayal does not interfere with God's sovereign plan of redemption.

Second, v. 3 serves to preemptively affirm Jesus' role in humanity's redemption amidst the menial act of washing His disciples' feet. Kruse (2017) contended that Jesus

> adopting a servant role did not change the fact that he was their teacher; he was just a different sort of teacher. That he humbled himself and washed their feet did not change the fact that he was their Lord; he was just a different sort of Lord from the one they had hitherto understood him to be. (p. 222)

Hence, the foundation was set that established Jesus' power under God's sovereign plan. Furthermore, John's insights provided clarification that Jesus, as the Son of God, was about to return to the Father by means of Judas' betrayal. Nevertheless, Jesus chose to provide a lesson on service by way of leading by example. After washing their feet, Jesus explicitly told His disciples – "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (Jn 13:15). Hence, this act is "an exemplary act of the Teacher before his pupils to emulate (13:12-20)" (Kanagaraj, 2011, p. 166). If Jesus is to be considered a precursor, the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) and if Christians are to "bear the image of the heavenly man" (1 Cor. 15:49, 51-54), John's words make a call for Christians to follow Jesus' life, including leading by serving.

Not only did Jesus set the example by washing the disciples' feet, but Jesus also set the example of how to love one another through sacrificial servanthood, in His case illustrated by the crucifixion. Thompson (2015) claimed that Jesus' act of washing His disciple's feet "makes its lasting impact because it is a figure of Jesus' death (13:34-35; 15:12-13)" (p. 279). Therefore, Jesus' intentionality behind the act of washing His disciples' feet cannot be considered as an act devoid of the context of his imminent death. Kruse (2017) put it this way, "Jesus' self-humiliation in washing his disciples' feet symbolized his self-humiliation in accepting death upon the cross to bring about their cleansing from sin" (p. 220). Agosto (2005) asked, "Because Jesus died on the cross, does 'the paradox of power through weakness, life through death' become a paradigm for the exercise of leadership in Christian community?" (p. 10). Jesus' act of obedience, even in light of the crucifixion, sets the premise to how Christ-followers are to live a life of obedience. This obedience includes following the countercultural form of living and leading that Jesus exemplified.

MARK 10:35-45 - JESUS ASKS FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP. Jesus' form of leadership is marked by a sacrificial service to others. This is seen when Jesus taught James and John, and the other disciples, that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mk 10:43-44). Jesus' lesson challenged the established social and political norms. To argue that one must first be a slave to then be great is a philosophical and practical contradiction. Strauss (2014) explained that this is the "third passion prediction [and describes how] the request by James and John for the best seats in the kingdom serve as climax of Mark's central section (8:22-10:52) and summarize the sacrificial mission of the Servant Messiah" (ch. 41, par. 2; Mk 10:32-45). In addition, Cole (2008) described the context of this passage this way:

> Although the disciples may have failed to understand the meaning of the passion-prediction, yet something in the manner of Jesus had convinced them that the hour of the establishment of his kingdom was near; perhaps it was this that had already either astonished or frightened them (10:32). But two at least of the twelve disciples are quick to take advantage of it. Ironically, however, although the request of the two 'Thunderers' was wrong-headed, yet at least it denoted faith in the ability of Jesus to establish his kingdom. (p. 245)

Two things are clear in this passage. First, Jesus' death was near. Second, Jesus was calling for a deviation from the status quo. It is in this context that Jesus takes a moment to establish what following Him in this earthly realm means; mainly, that one must lead by serving.

Jesus' admonition to James and John's request (Mk 10:43) marked the apex of what it means to be a servant leader. Tan (2016) acknowledged that their request is "misguided and ambitious [and] gives rise to unhappiness on the part of the other disciples" (p. 144) and goes on to argue that the

disciples' "perspective on greatness should be the opposite" (p. 144). In other words, the greatest is not determined by social or religious status, but by how one serves their brother and sister. This becomes a blunt difference between Jesus' followers and those who lead in the social and political spheres at the time. Jesus said to His disciples – "You know those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you" (Mk 10:42). This, Tan (2016) argued, is a "revolutionary value [that] has its basis in the vocation of the Son of Man" (p. 144). Serving holds greater kingdom value than leading in earthly matters.

In addition to His remarkable response to James and John's request, Jesus described and exemplified elements of servant leadership as He faced the forthcoming hour of affliction. At this point, the disciples had not fully comprehended Jesus' teachings, which created a "ponderous sense of redundancy as Jesus summons them again for another lesson on servant leadership. This will serve as the climax of his teaching on the suffering role of the Messiah and cross-bearing discipleship (8:31-38; 9:31-51; 10:32-45)" (Strauss, 2014, ch. 41, para. 29; Mk 10:32-45). There is something to be said about the fact that even during this most harrowing time, Jesus ensured His disciples understood what it meant to follow Him through service. He, Himself, led the way by example – "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:44). Though His followers' obedience in no way would bring about the same outcome as Jesus' act on the cross – the redemption of His creation –nor was this the intention, serving others seems to be Jesus' request for how His followers should lead their lives. This lifestyle also clearly differentiates them from the world around them.

Similar to the theological implications of John 13:1-17, Mark 35-45 contains grounds that inform how Christians are to live and lead. Jesus told John and James that those who follow Him and lead others are not to lead in the same way as the officials and authorities around them. Schnable (2017) argued that

> the phrase 'is not so among you' (NRSV) sums up the fact that the kingdom of God (1:15; 9:47; 10:14) is a recognizably alternative society, and that Jesus' family of his followers (3:34) operates with completely different values. Here the conventional expectations and structures are reversed. (Jesus' Messianic Suffering) (p. 253)

Jesus, once again, is the prime example of how to lead in a seemingly countercultural manner. Jesus was, at that moment, establishing what was to be valued – serving others over the gains of the world. Strauss (2014) argued that the leaders of this world have a specific manner of leading, while "Jesus' followers are to operate under a different set of values. Using the present tense, Jesus does not so much command what they must do, but rather states the way things are: 'It is not so among you'" (ch. 41, par. 30; Mk 10:32-45). The way in which Jesus led serves as a guide to how His followers are to follow and lead.

The Christian approach to leadership must reflect a full awareness that God is the only sovereign Lord and Christians are simply stewarding the people and resources God places before them. This may mean to approach leadership in a seemingly countercultural manner. Schnable (2017) explained that although the disciple understood they could not "replicate Jesus' death … the spirit of service and self-sacrifice that characterizes Jesus must also characterize the life in Jesus' family in which they will be servant-leaders" (p. 255). Jesus' life and actions calls for a reformulation of how Christians understand leadership. Jesus' approach to leadership was unconventional. His leadership style did not fit perfectly in any of the existing forms of leading. However unconventional

His approach to leadership was, service to others remained the main idea. Furthermore, Jesus' response to John and James, argued Strauss (2014), is a claim "that human power and dominion are merely illusory, since God is the only sovereign Lord" (ch. 41, par. 29; Mk 10:32-45). If Christ followers are to recognize God as the only sovereign Lord, then this must also be done within the purview of leadership.

A NOTE ON SCRIPTURE AND GENDER

The collection of theological discussions on gender speaks to just how polarized the topic is. Discussions abound on complementarianism (Howell & Duncan, 2018; Piper, 2006; Wright, 2006), egalitarianism (Beed & Beed, 2015; Nicole, 2006; Stackhouse, 2015), ordination (Madigan & Osiek, 2005), and, as presented throughout this paper, and the least contested of these topics, leadership. This paper does not actively engage the conversations on complementarianism and ordination given the focus on gender and servant leadership, although these are forms of leadership within the church. However, it would be a mistake to claim these topics do not influence women's access to leadership opportunities outside the church and how women in leadership are perceived. This is especially the case in a Latin American context where religion has had a profound influence on the composition of the social, political, and cultural landscape.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS A LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL PARADOX

In addition to acknowledging the biblical and theological underpinnings of servant leadership, one must also acknowledge the subtleties with this approach. This approach is a paradox. Greenleaf (1977) claimed that servant leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first [emphasis added]" (p. 13). Furthermore, Northouse (2019) explained that servant leadership is an approach "to leadership [that] runs counter to common sense [because] leaders influence, and servants follow" (p. 226). Hence, the idea of serving has been subjugated to the concept of leading.

In addition to this paradoxical understanding of servant leadership, the idea of a servant leader is a paradox twice over in a Latin American context. First, it continues to be a paradox in the general sense of leadership approach, as alluded above. Secondly, servant leadership must acknowledge the history and background of the Latin American context and the established social gender scripts, which consequently create a cultural paradox.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AS A LEADERSHIP PARADOX

Leadership has been defined in many different ways – as a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2019, p. 5); as having a combination of followers, initiatives driving a specific course of action and a clear need to meet goals and objectives (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018); and as the "overheating crucible of a reframed/reframing world that is in the throes of fundamental and radical transformation" (Veldsman, Johnson, & Madonsela, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, the "words 'servant' and 'leader' are usually thought of as

being opposites" (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010, p. 12). After all, leaders are those who have followers, but more than that, argued Agosto (2005), "they guide those who would follow toward new and challenging paths" (p. 6). Herein lies the first layer of the paradox of servant leadership.

There exist stark differences between servant leadership and other leadership approaches. Some approaches position leaders to "see people merely as units of production or expendable resources in a profit and loss statement" (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010, p. 755). Others, as is the case with transformational leadership, have the primary concern with performance that goes beyond the established expectations (Bass, 1985). Conversely, servant leaders empower their followers to "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14). The focus of servant leadership lies in the people rather than in the process or productivity outcome.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AS A CULTURAL PARADOX

Everyone approaches life, leadership included, with a lens that is informed by the intersectionality of their identities – gender, faith, culture and ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status, to name a few. Bordas (2013) claimed that culture "provides the focus through which groups of individuals define their world" (p. 97). Furthermore, Northouse (2019) explained that servant leadership "does not occur in a vacuum but occurs within a given organizational context and a particular culture" (p. 233). He provided the examples of cultures with low power distance in comparison to cultures with low human orientation. Northouse (2019) claimed that

> in cultures where power distance is low (e.g., Nordic Europe) and power is shared equally among people at all levels of society, servant leadership may be more common. In cultures with low human orientation (e.g., Germanic Europe), servant leadership may present more of a challenge. The point is that cultures influence the way servant leadership is able to be achieved. (p. 235)

Furthermore, Pekerti and Sendjaya (2010) performed a quantitative study on servant leadership in two studies where they found that "servant leadership was perceived to be culturally universal in Australia and Indonesia. However, the different attributes perceived to make up servant leadership were not all rated as equally important" (p. 754). Their study highlights the possibility of servant leadership as a universally acceptable approach while recognizing the cultural nuances. Servant leadership in a Latin American context, therefore, must be achieved in a manner suitable to its cultural norms.

With acknowledging culture, the leader inevitably is faced with the need to acknowledge a culture's history. Latin America's socio-political past influences the manner with which Latin Americans perceive and approach life. Imagery of so-called rebels, revolutionaries, and social visionaries are often associated with modern-day leaders. For example, Barrial, Muiño, and Vonofakos (2018) argued that there are two major factors that influence leadership in modern day Argentina. The first is the work of Jose Hernández originally titled El Guacho Martín Fierro written in 1872 and widely "considered a seminal work in the country's national literary output" (Barrial et al., 2018, p. 20). The second is defined by Argentina's financial power and popular following. The latter

can be mainly traced in the modern political history of the country in the second half of the twentieth century starting with the age of Peronimso practicing the populism strategy and seeking to focus on the leadership of 'popularity' and 'idealization of the Messiah' of this type of guacho leader. (Barrial et al., 2018, p. 22).

Both factors are easily tied to Argentina's social and political landscape and history and how leadership is perceived and exercised.

El Salvador's heinous civil war serves as another example of how understanding the political landscape informs how Salvadorans perceive leadership. Postwar El Salvador is marked by a "fundamental transition toward a new kind of social order," (Wadkins, 2017, p. 63) that allows Salvadorans to "imagine their country as modern and increasingly transnational" (Wadkins, p. 63). Hence, leadership transitioned from the elite to the "egalitarian values of citizenship and earned entitlement" (Wadkins, p. 63). The historical and current sociocultural and political realities play an important role in grasping how leadership is understood and experienced in El Salvador today.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL GENDER SCRIPTS

Some aspects of servant leadership easily fit the Latin American cultural framework, such as the care for people over productivity. Other aspects that easily fit the Latin American context are: "increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making" (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010, p. 13). Bordas (2013) argued that most "Latinos value people and community before material wealth or individual achievement" (p. 98). This collectivist attitude gives way to an easy implementation of community and shared leadership. The Latin American people are a prime community for the implementation of servant leadership.

Other aspects of servant leadership require a nuanced approach in a Latin American context. Gender roles, for example, are sociocultural structures that must be intentionally acknowledged. González et al. (2016) explained that the "sociocultural scripts of male and female gender role socialization in Hispanic cultures are referred to, respectively, as *machismo* and *marianismo*" (p. 204). Furthermore, they argued that the

> construct of machismo describes beliefs and expectations regarding the role of men in society; it is a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about masculinity, or what it is to be a man. Machismo encompasses positive and negative aspects of masculinity, including bravery, honor, dominance, aggression, sexism, sexual prowess, and reserved emotions, among others. (González et al., 2016, p. 204)

Additionally, *machismo* positions men as "cold, intellectual, rational, profound, strong, authoritarian, independent and brave" (Gloria, 1992, p. 11). Whether the attributes are positive or negative, the male social script is very much ingrained in the male identity.

Marianismo, the counterpart to *machismo*, is a "set of values and expectations concerning female gender roles [that emphasizes] the role of women as family and home-centered" (González et al., 2016, p. 204). It sets the expectation for the women's role as passive, sacrificial, and sexually self-restraining. This orientation, argued González et al. (2016),

depicts women in nurturing roles and prescribes respect for patriarchal values. Historically, marianismo is rooted in Christian values brought to Latin America during colonization, which defined women as nurturing figures and spiritual pillars of the family; it is a construction of the expected female gender roles based on the Virgin Mary. (p. 204)

The tie to religion makes this orientation a very compelling and systematically enforced expectation. This orientation creates a social hierarchy and a power distance that is, in part, gender based. Women are lower than men in this gender-biased hierarchy. The data on power distance from the Global Leadership & Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (2004) puts things into perspective. They assigned a power distance societal value, that is the "extent to which the community accepts and endorses authority, power differences, and status privilege," of 3.41 to Bolivia (the highest in the Latin American country they surveyed). This compared to 4.35 to Czech Republic, the highest out of their sample, and 2.04 to Colombia the lowest out of the entire sample (Global Leadership & Organizational Behavior Effectiveness). There is a wide range of how power distance is perceived in Latin America.

Additionally, in discussing social roles in the New Testament times, Thomas (2018) explained that the "culture in which Jesus lived embraced a patron-client cultural construct which supports an unequal power distribution amongst members of society, known as a high power distance culture" (p. 68). This power distance was especially felt by the poor and marginalized, often furthering the power distance already felt by women. The perceptions, both positive and negative, of gender scripts in Latin America affirm a power distance between the genders. Historically speaking, Latin America has also functioned with a patron-client cultural construct. Often times, women are limited to the roles of clients, socio-culturally and religiously. Agosto (2005) contested any position that diminishes the role of women. He argued that biblical scholars, feminist biblical interpretation in particular, have contested for decades that the "New Testament underplays the role of women in earliest Christianity. The fact that several stories about women survived redaction of the gospels indicates how active their role must have been" (p. 37). He furthered his position by claiming that "the resurrection narratives become the clearest instances of the importance of the witness of women disciples in the Jesus movement" (Agosto, 2005, p. 38). Hence, there is a clear need to address the power distance created by a gender-biased hierarchy from a sociocultural and religious standpoint.

The sociocultural scripts assigned to gender create a threat to how servant leadership in a Latin American context can be implemented. From the male's perspective, *machismo* poses an obstacle given that negative traits such as being aggressive, dominant, and sexist are frequently highlighted. This negative view of the male cultural script that González et al. (2016) mentioned does not remain contained within the borders of Latin American; it is perceived this way in any context where Latinos are present. Hence, Latinos may not be seen as capable of approaching leadership with a posture of service within or outside a Latin American context. In the same way, *marianismo* limits the extent to which Latinas can lead, bearing considerable resemblance to what is known as the "glass ceiling" (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) – the barrier to women's advancement in leadership roles in the corporate world – and the "stained glass ceiling" (Adams, 2007) – the religious counterpart. However, this kind of limitation is not set in place solely by the corporate and religious establishments, it is a reality created by a cultural barrier. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) shed light on women's experience in general by arguing that the obstacles they face in leadership "occur in the broader society as well as at a personal level" (p. 2). Their work encompassed a cross-sector

analysis of women leading in the realm of religion and higher education and found 27 gender-based leadership barriers that "can be organized according to three levels of society in which they generally operate: macro (societal), meso (group or organizational), and micro (individual)" (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 7). The reality of gender-based barriers is not contained in any one of these levels; this reality permeates all aspects of a woman's life.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN A LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT DEMANDS CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

In order for servant leadership to be effectively translated into a Latin American context, servant leadership must be presented with cultural sensitivity. However, the scope of this paper is specific to sociocultural gender scripts and will not touch other just as important aspects of the Latin American culture. Bordas (2013) proposed there are three components Latina/o leaders need to understand in order to effectively prepare to lead – *personalismo* (personality), *conciencia* (conscience), and *destino* (destiny). I use these as a general framework for providing a solution to how servant leadership can be adequately embedded within the Latin American context.

Personalismo acknowledges and affirms the individual. *Personalismo* refers to "a leader's character, reputation, and contributions [and, in a Latin American context, also includes] having cultural integrity and staying connected to one's community and people" (Bordas, 2013, p. 54). Although Bordas presented this concept specifically from a leader's perspective, I argue it can, and should, be extended to followers. The focus of servant leadership is on the followers, not the financial and performance outcomes, though these are inevitable outcomes. If servant leadership is to be presented, adopted, and effectively implemented, it must face the challenge of gender scripts. *Personalismo* overcomes gender-biased barriers created by the negative perceptions of *machismo* and *marianismo* by affirming the follower's personal, professional, and cultural identity.

While *machismo's* negative connotations limit a Latino's ability to be perceived as a servant, *personalismo* creates an opportunity within reach of the Latino's actions, accomplishments, and engagement. Similarly, the hindrances presented by *marianismo* can be left to be addressed by the personal effort each Latina makes on showcasing their leadership character, establishing a positive reputation, and on capitalizing on their contributions. As it pertains to women's experience, Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) argued that

> Some women rise to leadership positions despite [...] challenges, but structural impediments and cultural biases continue to shape their developmental and leadership experiences. As women rise in the hierarchy, they become increasingly scarce; as women become scarce, they become more visible and subject to greater scrutiny. (p. 479)

Furthermore, they argued that the problem is exacerbated by the "cultural attitudes towards women in authority" (Ely et al., p. 479). They went on to argue that "some women manage the competence-likeability trade-off by downplaying feminine qualities in the interest of conveying competence, while others attempt to strike the perfect balance between the two," (Ely et al., p. 479) losing aspects of their personal and professional identity, or *personalismo*. Similar to servant leadership requiring buy-in, stepping into *personalismo* also requires a personal and organizational shift and buy-in. By using *personalismo*, servant leadership is able to capitalize on an already established sociocultural need for personal and professional affirmation and begin addressing gender-biased barriers.

In addition, the concept of *conciencia* can be instrumental in successfully realizing servant leadership in a Latin American context. Bordas (2013) explained that *conciencia* asks leaders to be clear on their 'why' in their pursuit of leadership and their 'what' behind their intended goals in leadership. The focus on the why and what behind the leader speaks to their leadership capabilities and moves away from established biases attached to gender. As it relates to servant leadership, the why and what could be focused on follower well-being rather than organizational performance or individual aspirations for financial success. "When leaders become overly focused on being seen in a certain way to advance their careers," Ely et al. (2011) argued, "they become excessively concerned with meeting others' expectations, unable to step outside their comfort zones, and disconnected from their core values" (p. 476). *Conciencia* can help shatter the negative perceptions, and subsequent gender-based barriers, set forth by the prevalent rhetoric around gender scripts in Latin America. Rather than allowing the sociocultural scripts to dictate what the Latina/o leader can offer its followers, *conciencia* asks for the leader to take a posture of ownership and responsibility in establishing a vision and mission that focuses on the well-being of the organization's employees.

Lastly, *destino* helps affirm the leader and follower's personal and professional journey. *Destino* is the choice one makes to "respond to and utilize life's experiences," which Bordas (2013) explained bears resemblance to the interchange of "right-left-right of salsa dancing" (p. 81). It is a matter of winsomely navigating leadership through the use of personal experiences, making use of life lessons, and capitalizing on the personal and professional journey already travelled. All such experiences have been etched on the heart of each Latina/o. "As a person embraces her life's journey, *destino* grows, becomes clearer and more encompassing" (Bordas, p. 81). Embracing *destino* allows the Latina/o leader to grant their team a sense of affirmation for the talents, skills, and competencies they have acquired through life's journey, within and outside the workforce. This affirmation challenges any discrimination of experience based on gender, meaning women's experience is equally as important as men.

Furthermore, *destino* affirms the uniqueness of each individual. Bordas (2013) argued that "the search for *destino* brings a deeper understanding of one's special calling and clearer sense of direction" (p. 81). A leader cannot fully realize their leadership capacities if they cannot acknowledge their team's unique skills and contributions. The strength of stepping into *destino*, therefore, is in the ability for the leader to recognize and honor each individual team member's uniqueness and what they have to contribute. Bordas (2013) put it best, "Appreciating what makes you unique – your history, life path, and *destino* – is the true way to know yourself and to understand the special leadership contribution you are called to make" (p. 81). Servant leadership already has a preference of the care of the people over the health of the organization. *Destino* simply makes a call for leaders to make intentional efforts to acknowledge, honor, and capitalize on the unique path each woman and man has travelled.

PUTTING THEORY TO PRACTICE: MEET KYLE AND ROSA

The following hypothetical attempts to contextualize the content of this paper. Kyle has been the director of operations for 7 years at Equip, a North American non-profit organization that aims at reducing poverty in Nicaragua by establishing orphanages that provide educational and vocational programming. Kyle has three direct reports, two living in the U.S. and one in Nicaragua. Rosa is a Nicaraguan native and manages all the training initiatives for staff in Nicaragua.

While attending a leadership conference, Kyle attended a workshop on servant leadership. During the workshop, he was introduced to the many benefits of having the follower's well-being as the main priority in leadership. He began to see the value in shifting his current leadership perspective, which focused on tasks and performance, to a focus on follower well-being. In other words, he began to adopt the philosophy of servant leadership. He also began to reflect on how his three direct reports have experienced his leadership. He was committed to learning more about this latter point and scheduled an individual meeting with each of his direct reports.

During his meeting with Rosa, Kyle shared about his experience at the leadership conference and the workshop on servant leadership. Kyle asked Rosa to share how she has experienced his leadership style and asked to be candid with him in hopes to learn, grow, and improve his leadership approach. Rosa expressed the frustrations she had experienced in the past on Kyle's focus on performance and tasks over her thoughts and well-being. She went on to describe feeling overworked, unsupported, and unseen. Kyle was devastated to find out how his leadership was being experienced by Rosa and assured her things would change, starting with the adoption of servant leadership as his leadership philosophy.

Kyle's leadership did, indeed, change. His relationship with his North American direct supervisors improved significantly. He was no longer making tasks and performance the top priority. Consequently, the team's overall morale increased and a sense of loyalty for the organization was beginning to seep into each team member. However, Kyle's relationship with Rosa continued faced some challenges.

As the months went by, Rosa wrestled with experiencing dissonance between being valued as a member of the organization and being valued as a Nicaraguan female leader. Kyle was doing a great job acknowledging her role in the organization. However, Rosa felt a tension between that and having her background and experiences as a Nicaraguan woman being valued. In the spirit of the relationship she and Kyle were nurturing, she decided to bring it up with him.

During the meeting, Rosa had three different points she had been reflecting on regarding her experience. First, Rosa expressed feeling misunderstood by her colleagues and by Kyle when differing views were presented at team meetings. Rosa described how Kyle's suggestions during a follow up one-on-one meeting was demeaning. Kyle's suggestions included asking Rosa to tone down her voice, limit her charismatic expressions, and work on her facial expressions. In other words, Rosa explained she felt she was being asked not to be herself (*personalismo* was not being acknowledged nor affirmed). This tension brought her to her second point. Rosa explained that because she felt she was being asked to not be herself, she had to become someone else in order to move forward in her career aspirations. Rosa confided that she was struggling to feel a sense of value and pride in being a Nicaraguan woman in this organization because this was not being recognized. Consequently, although Rosa explained she was well aware (had *conciencia*) of God's calling on her life, she was having doubt in the context of her team and her organization. Rosa explained that she feared that her vocational vision was beginning to fade, which led the third challenge she brought up to Kyle. Rosa felt she was unable to appropriately navigate the challenges that surfaced in her role given that she could not freely draw from her experiences and background out of fear of being further excluded. This left her feeling like she had no way of effectively maneuvering through professional and contextual challenges. Her personal life was also being

affected by this. She feared she could not move forward nor upwards in the organization unless she was able to freely make use of her experiences. Rosa explained she needed to be able to envision her future (*destino*) that embodied the intersectionality of her identity.

Kyle was determined to address these tensions Rosa was experiencing. They agreed to meet more consistently and continue talking about how to best contextualize Kyle's new leadership approach to Rosa's context. Kyle understood that he needed to intentionally take, at the very minimum, the following three steps. First, Kyle acknowledged he needed to find ways to affirm Rosa's *personalismo*. He made a commitment to affirm and highlight specific instances where Rosa's leadership and contribution were on full display. Second, Kyle was convinced that he needed to nurture Rosa's sense of *conciencia*. He believed he needed to become more aware of the social-cultural gender scripts and how they affected Rosa. He also was also persuaded to be more self-aware and sensitive to his approach to providing feedback and how it is perceived and experienced by Rosa. This would require a posture of humility and a learner's heart to better understand Rosa's context. Lastly, Kyle pledged to affirm Rosa's *destino* by intentionally scheduling time during Rosa's one-on-one meetings to discuss her future. Kyle understood that doing so would generate clarity and a sense of direction. Servant leadership caused Kyle to understand that he has a responsibility to pour into Rosa for her sake, not simply for the sake of the company or productivity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, servant leadership has proven to be an effective, influential, and impactful leadership approach throughout time, in various business sectors, and within many cultural contexts (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018; Hirschy et al., 2014; Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010; Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). It is a leadership paradox; it is also a cultural paradox in a Latin American context. Culture influence leadership. Pekerti and Sendjaya claimed that "the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta, 2004) project's exemplary approach of creating a cultural-level theory of leadership, indicates that culture does influence leadership in a number of dimensions" (p. 754). One such way is clearly observed through the sociocultural gender scripts ascribed to men and women in Latin America.

Furthermore, servant leadership easily fits a Christian framework. Scripture presents clear examples of how Jesus led in a way that clearly illustrated care for others, bearing great resemblance to how servant leadership describes a servant-leader. His care for others crossed cultural, social, gender, and political boundaries. Additionally, biblical and theological scholars have also shed light to and affirmed women's role in leadership, a challenge servant leadership inevitably faces. One such scholar goes so far as to call Mary Magdalene the apostle to the apostles given her role in the resurrection narrative (Guardiola-Sáenz, 2002).

Lastly, adequately implementing servant leadership in a Latin American context requires a dash of cultural awareness. Gender scripts, *machismo* and *marianismo*, were used to highlight this prerequisite. The challenge servant leadership faces in a Latin American context is in having to acknowledge the broader cultural and societal obstructions that exists, which are impediments to the flourishing of Latina/o leadership. Gender roles and expectations must be considered within the servant leadership framework. Ely et al. (2011) explained that "cultural and organizational biases that inadvertently favor men impede the identity work of talented, ambitious women in, or aspiring to,

leadership roles" (Ely et al., p. 479). The success servant leadership achieves in a Latin American context will depend on the intentionality with which gender-based barriers are acknowledged and addressed.

This paper runs the risk of overgeneralization. However, it by no means wishes to impose a monolithic approach to servant leadership in Latin America. Further research considering other aspects of Latin American culture will facilitate greater insights into how servant leadership can be appropriately presented and implemented. This paper merely attempts to shed light on one of an abundance of factors that requires attention as the influence and extent of servant leadership reaches the magnificent cultural and ethnic mosaic of Latin America.

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