

SERVANT LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS of GENERAL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA (GED)  
GRADUATES: A NON-RANDOMIZED EXPLORATORY INQUIRY

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues to be an ongoing concern and challenge for leaders and followers alike. According to the Servant Leadership Theory (SLT), individuals with a natural desire to serve have the potential to become servant leaders, lead unselfishly, and demonstrate leadership through authenticity, humility, and trustworthiness. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates? (2) To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics?

The study took place in South Texas. The participants were 75 scholarship recipients of the Education is Our Freedom GED College Scholarship Program. A 2-part on-line survey instrument was used for data collection. The first measured the servant leadership behaviors. The second part collected the selected demographic characteristics of the respondents. Due to non-experimental nature of the study, no causal inferences were drawn.

The respondents were predominantly Hispanic and female, attending a 4-year university full-time and employed part-time. A typical participant was 27 years old. The study participants demonstrated agreement with several leadership behaviors. Specifically, Conceptual Skills and Emotional Healing were ranked the highest, followed by Behaving Ethically, Creating Value, Helping Others Grow, Empowering Others, and Putting Others First. The behaviors were not impacted by the overwhelming majority of the respondents' selected demographic variables that were investigated in the study. The three exceptions were age in association with Helping Others and years of attending college's associations with Empowering Behaviors and Putting Others First.

The study's findings are helpful in offering practical implications. For example, servant leadership training sessions can be developed for GED graduates to add to their leadership skills. Through practice of servant leadership behaviors, GED graduates may contribute to the society by giving of their time, energy, and resources to serve others. Practicing servant leadership may facilitate higher education, afford leadership opportunities within school and community, and ultimately provide a better quality of life. The GED graduates who exhibit and maintain leadership skills through authenticity, trustworthiness, and humility may likely to become exemplary servant leaders.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my sons Enrique and Michael Conn. You have blessed me beyond belief through your own accomplishments and families. You are the inspiration that keeps me going.

To my son and guardian angel, Jose Luis Conn. The memory of you is alive in my heart and sustains me when I need it most.



Pencil drawing by Alex Gutierrez. Photograph taken after Austin Capitol 10K in Austin Texas, 1987.

Runners: Enrique, Sylvia, Jose Luis, and Michael.

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I would like to acknowledge the work of Commissioner Joe A. Gonzalez (JAG), his board of directors, countless volunteers, and generous donors who contribute to the continued success of Education is Our Freedom GED College Scholarship Program. I believe Dr. Hector P. Garcia would be humbly honored by the work being done to further support his work that many have taken to heart: “Education is Our Freedom, and Education Should be Everyone’s Business.” To the scholarship recipients who graciously participated in the research, THANK YOU!

I extend my sincere gratitude to my sons Enrique and Michael Conn and their families who were supportive of my goals throughout my entire educational journey. I could not have accomplished this goal without you believing in me, as I believe in you. Please consider following my lead. Come on now - who’s next?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Settings.....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Operational Definitions.....	9
Glossary of Terms.....	9
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	10
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Servant Leadership.....	12

Elements of Servant Leadership .....	12
Servant Leadership in Educational Setting.....	16
Servant Leadership and the Hispanic Population .....	18
Problems Affecting Servant Leadership and GED Students .....	19
GED Students .....	21
GED Students: A Broad Issue .....	21
Challenges Faced by GED Students .....	23
GED Students and the Need for Leadership.....	25
Summary.....	26
<b>CHAPTER III: METHOD .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Introduction.....	28
Research Design .....	28
Subject Selection.....	28
Instrumentation .....	29
Data Collection .....	31
Data Analysis .....	32
Summary.....	33
<b>CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Introduction.....	34
A Profile of Subjects.....	34

Servant Leadership Behaviors .....	37
Servant Leadership Behavioral Subscales .....	38
Correlational Analysis .....	43
Group Comparisons .....	44
Summary .....	51
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND DISCUSSION .....	52
Introduction.....	52
Summary of the Results .....	52
Conclusions.....	53
Discussion.....	54
Implications .....	56
Recommendations for Further Research.....	57
Personal Reflections .....	58
REFERENCES .....	61
APPENDIX: Servant Leadership Questionnaire .....	75

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	PAGE
Table 1. A Profile of Participants, Categorical Values.....	35
Table 2. A Profile of Participants, Continuous Variables.....	36
Table 3. Servant Leadership Role Models.....	36
Table 4. Ranking of Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75.....	37
Table 5. Servant Leadership Grand Mean Score, n = 75.....	38
Table 6. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Emotional Healing, n = 75.....	39
Table 7. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Creating Value, n = 75. ....	39
Table 8. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Conceptual Skills, n = 75.....	39
Table 9. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Empowering Others, n = 75.....	40
Table 10. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Helping Others Grow, n = 75.....	40
Table 11. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Putting Others First, n = 75.....	40
Table 12. Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Behaving Ethically, n = 75.....	41
Table 13. Repeated Measure ANOVA Results for Servant Leadership Sub-scales.....	41
Table 14. Ranking of Servant Leadership Behaviors Sub-scales, n = 75 .....	42
Table 15. Pos Hoc Results for Servant Leadership Sub-scales, n = 75.....	43
Table 16. Simple Correlations Between Servant Leadership Scales and Sub-scales and Selected Demographic Variables.....	44
Table 17. Gender and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75.....	45
Table 18. Gender and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Homogeneity of Variance Assumptions, n = 75.....	45
Table 19. Ethnicity and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75 .....	46

Table 20. Ethnicity and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Homogeneity of Variance Assumption, n = 75.....	46
Table 21. Level of Education and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75.....	47
Table 22. Level of Education and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variance Assumption Tests, n = 75.....	47
Table 23. College Enrollment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75.....	48
Table 24. College Enrollment and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variance Assumption Tests, n = 75.....	48
Table 25. Higher Education Type and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 69.....	49
Table 26. Higher Education Type and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variance Assumption Tests, n = 69.....	49
Table 27. Employment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75.....	50
Table 28. Employment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variance Assumption Tests, n = .....	50

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

As the country focuses on higher education for the masses, the number of students entering college has increased (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Fowler, 2011; Harper & Jackson, 2011; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhard, 2005, Suspitsyna, 2012; Thelin, 2013). There is a population of students who enter college with a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), as opposed to a traditional high school diploma. It is unclear how many students start with the GED because once they earn the equivalency, most reporting systems combine both under one classification (Bowen & Nantz, 2014; Thomas, Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). As addressed by Crissey and Bauman (2012), the United States Census Bureau “has historically treated GED holders as “high school equivalents” ...with high school diploma and GED completers grouped together” (p. 2). Crissey and Bauman (2012) further pointed out that some Census Bureau surveys are now able to collect data on GED completers separately from diploma earners to allow data users assessing the differing credentials. Many GED graduates face augmented challenges from their traditional high school graduate counterparts; for example, increased financial challenges, complicated family dynamics, coping with emotional problems, overcoming difficulties with school bureaucracy, or in some cases, requiring special needs (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2005; Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Grogan, 2015; Heckman, Humphries, LaFontaine, & Rodríguez, 2012; Heckman, Humphries, & Mader, 2010; Hussey & Smith, 2010; Schachter, 2013; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). Many GED graduates are older non-traditional students with access to limited types of higher education opportunities, mainly attend local community colleges (Boettcher, 2014; Jurgen, 2010; Maralani, 2011). Knowles (1988) explained andragogy as the

process of helping adults learn. There are general assumptions about adult learners that as they mature, become self-directive, develop a readiness to learn from their experiences, recognize that their learning is closely related to their role in society, and recognize they have become better problem-solvers (Knowles, 1988). Additionally, Knowles added to the previous assumptions that adult learners are motivated by internal (similar to intrinsic motivation of a servant leader) versus external motivation, and that adult learners need to know why they are learning. The GED graduates may face disorienting dilemmas (Herbers & Mullins, 2009; Malkki, 2012; Mezirow, 1997), and the reflection may influence the realization that higher education is a solution to change their socio-economic status (Boettcher, 2014; Herring, 2013; Kalison & Cohen, 2010; Marshall & Oliva 2010). Recognizing, understanding, and applying the research, such as that conducted by Knowles (1988) and Mezirow (1997), support the emphasis on the when, why, and where for leadership (servant) for GED graduates enrolled in higher education.

Greenleaf's (1970, 1977, 2003) seminal work on leadership proposes that leaders begin by being a servant first and that leadership follows. Ten principles of servant leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and building community (Spears, 1995; Wheeler, 2012). Core values and principles have been instilled in individuals since birth, which guide and sustain us in roles of leadership that have underlying spiritual roots (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977, 2003; Houston, Blankenship, & Cole, 2007). Servant leaders may be constantly faced with complex societal environments that are politically charged and pose a great responsibility and a sense of obligation (Barbuto, Gottfredson, & Searle, 2014; Chrislip, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2010; Schuh, Jones, Harper & Associates, 2012). The significance of servant leadership is that it adds a component of social responsibility to transformational leadership (Van Dierendonck,

2011). Following the principles of servant leadership promotes serving others as the highest priority; helping facilitate problem solving; helping others deal with dilemmas; leaving a legacy; demonstrating servant leadership and caring; and helping inspire and develop others into servant leaders (Green, 2014; Greenleaf, 1970, 1977, 2003; Wheeler, 2012).

The GED graduates face unique challenges when they arrive on college campuses, spurring from their socio-economic environment. This group of students may benefit from becoming aware of the potential positive impacts of servant leadership behaviors and college involvement (Fisher, 2007).

Through consistent caring and active listening, individuals can be inspired because they believe they are cared for, and they care in return (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977, 2003; Noddings, 2005, 2011, 2012). The GED graduates who have been served by others may become more engaged, which may subsequently increase their desire to become servant leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 1977; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnson, 2008). In the discipline of education, leading as a servant leader has become a challenge when charged with having to “do more with less” as is evidenced by constant budget cuts, increased accountability, dependency on technology, misappropriation of human resource allocations, and less-than-desirable teacher to student ratios (Cohen & Kallison, 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2012). On-line classes and dual credit (DC) programs also create challenges in higher education, which may affect GED graduates; for example, the lack of convenient access to computers and technology-related skills to succeed in on-line classes. The GED graduates are not as college- ready as their counterparts and struggle to keep up academically (Becker-Patterson, 2014; Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Heckman, Humphries, LaFontaine, & Rodríguez, 2012; Schachter, 2013; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). Servant leaders contribute their own time, money, and efforts without any pay or reward. The GED

graduates may encounter difficulty contributing time and resources to become effective servant leaders.

There are approximately a million students dropping out of high school every year (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2010). Some of the drop-outs attain their GEDs and subsequently apply for admission to colleges and universities as non-traditional adult learners (Merriam & Bierman, 2014). There are limited resources available to assist this student population with leadership skills. The higher educational institutions recognize the detrimental impact that downsizing of personnel and reduction or elimination of services have on struggling students. However, they may believe they can make up for the students they lose by focusing on the students that are dual credit earners who are college-ready when they start. There appears to be a consensus that GED graduates are not college-ready and may become a forgotten group of students (Long & Mullen, 2014). However, after experiencing issues as high school drop-outs, this group of students are now entering college, ready to put their best efforts forward to pursue higher education. The GED graduates can change their socio-economic standing through education; thus, it becomes critical that they use and capitalize on behaviors that demonstrate leadership skills. (The GED graduates that understand and apply servant leadership behaviors may give and receive support that can be instrumental in promoting leadership).

### Setting

The study was inspired by the Joe A. Gonzalez (JAG) Education is Our Freedom GED College Scholarship Program (EIOF), which was founded in Corpus Christi, Texas in 2005. Jag retired from the Department of Justice before serving as Nueces County Justice of the Peace, and later as Nueces County Commissioner. JAG has been an influential advocate for education, has extensive volunteerism and community involvement in Nueces county and surrounding areas,

and is the founder of EIOF. JAG was serving as a Nueces County Justice of the Peace at the time when he noted students struggled with bad decisions, (most of them either did poorly in school, or were not in school). JAG further recognized that without education, many high school drop-outs would end up in prison and he saw the need to help those students earn “second chances.” Although it is disturbing, Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2005) posit there seems to be a truth to the statement “from school to prison pipeline.” In his position as a judge, JAG realized he could do something to address the problem. Inception of the scholarship program was to serve as a form of intervention that would help students earn their GED and get back in higher education or technical schools that may provide opportunities for gainful employment and to facilitate opportunities for those who already had a GED to pursue higher education J. Gonzalez (personal communication, August 1, 2016).

The GED graduates may not be able to afford to go to college and receiving the scholarships help meet financial obligations not provided by other means. The organization chose this group of students to be the benefactors of its scholarships so that those who may otherwise not been able to go to college may indeed do so and that they may be able to advance their socio-economic status. The scholarships awarded to GED graduates from EIOF are matched, dollar per dollar, by local colleges and universities, namely, Del Mar College, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, and Texas A&M University-Kingsville, which are all classified as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). The renewal of scholarships and ongoing mentorship demonstrate EIOF’s extended commitment to address GED graduates’ desire to attain higher education.

The EIOF college scholarship program is in honor of Dr. Hector P. Garcia and his siblings, Drs. Xico and Cleotilde Garcia. Dr. Hector P. Garcia was an influential advocate for

higher education beginning in the late 1940s (About Us, n.d.; Dr. Hector P. Garcia, n.d.). In 1948, Dr. Garcia founded the American GI Forum in Corpus Christi, Texas, focusing on veterans' rights, education, and civil rights. Dr. Garcia was recognized for his extensive advocacy by honors and appointments (Biography, n.d.; Dr. Hector P. Garcia); for example:

- 1961: Representative of President John F. Kennedy and a member of the American Delegation, signing the treaty concerning Mutual Defense Area Agreement between the United States of America and the Federation of the West Indies.
- 1964: Appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as Special Ambassador to the inauguration of Dr. Raul Leoni, President of Venezuela.
- 1967: Appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a member of the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity of the United States.
- 1968: Accompanied Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey and the U.S. Delegation to Mexico City for the signing of the Treaty of Tlalteloco.
- 1977: Appointed by President Jimmy Carter as a member of the U.S. Circuit Court Judge Nominating Commission for the Western Fifth Circuit Panel.
- 1980: Attended President Jimmy Carter's High-Level Briefing in reference to Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan Crisis, held at the White House.
- 1984: Awarded the 'Presidential Medal of Freedom' by President Ronald Reagan.

The Papers of Dr. Garcia, which include documents relating to the American GI forum as well as major social issues during his pursuit of social justice, are at the Mary and Jeff Bell Library located at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Dr. Garcia has been recognized in various venues such as schools, roads, hospitals, and even in a treasury bill. His quote

“Education is our freedom, and freedom should be everyone’s business” is inscribed under his statue at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s Dr. Hector P. Garcia Plaza.

### Statement of the Problem

Efforts to increase attendance in higher education during the 20<sup>th</sup> century became a priority in the United States as a result of falling behind academically worldwide after Sputnik (Kessinger, 2011). Federal goals to achieve higher education for the country continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, emphasizing the need for higher learning, focusing on mathematics, science, and education curriculum (Kessinger, 2011). The focus on higher learning was further driven by state mandates to increase higher education (60X30TX Higher Education Plan, n.d.).

On a local level, institutions of higher education also strive to continuously increase the number of students enrolled and provide services that promote degree attainment (VIP Partnership, 2018). In Texas, the push to increase college enrollment and degree attainment (60X30TX Higher Education Plan, n.d.) has helped create opportunities for GED graduates; however, they still struggle enrolling in college, and even more with leadership skills.

Seminal work by Greenleaf (1977) noted that teaching students basic college courses does not necessarily assist them in becoming successful leaders once they leave college. Greenleaf (1977) further posited that college is an excellent environment to prepare students for leadership (Marcketti & Kadolph, 2010).

Following servant leadership principles, the GED graduates may develop leadership behaviors and skills that can be instrumental in helping them be better prepared to succeed in college and beyond. What is not clearly known is the extent and value of servant leadership among GED graduates.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to collect and document the perceptions of GED graduates of their servant leadership behaviors and the demographic variables which could impact the behaviors. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates? (2) To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics?

## Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) that states individuals with natural desires to serve have the potential to become leaders (Greenleaf, 1970). In addition, the SLT states that after being served, followers develop a sense of wanting to become servant leaders themselves. The relationship between the follower and the leader is trusting and authentic (Green, 2014; Greenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2014). Servant leadership offers an alternative to other traditional leadership models that mostly focus on transformation.

During his early work on servant leadership, Greenleaf believed that colleges and universities were ideal settings "to prepare students to serve and to be served by the present society" (Greenleaf, 1977, p.203). Greenleaf (1977) believed that students practicing servant leadership in the college environment would be better prepared for life after graduation. The servant leadership skills that students may learn could help them in their careers as well as in their communities as they promote social justice.

Spears (1995) added to Greenleaf's seminal work as he identified the 10 characteristics of servant leadership and elaborated on their application to the theory. The 10 characteristics are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and building community.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, servant leadership that is people-centered, focuses on ethics, authenticity, and transparency, and offers an alternative to other traditional leadership theories that mostly focus on transformation (Green, 2014; Northhouse, 2014; Spears, 1998; Spears & Lawrence, 2002; Van Dierendonck, 2011) has the potential to be helpful to GED graduates. Van Dierendonck (2011) further ascertained that servant leadership theory overlaps the top recognized leadership theories. The overlap, as explained by Van Dierendonck (2011), is when servant leaders have both the transformational and charismatic characteristics.

### Operational Definitions

For the purpose of the study, servant leadership theory states that the leader serves the follower unselfishly (Greenleaf, 1970). A servant leader has the trust of the follower because s/he leads with authenticity, humility, and trustworthiness. The study utilized the servant leadership questionnaire instrument, which was designed to measure the following behavioral characteristics: emotional healing, creating value for the community, possessing conceptual skills, empowering others, helping others grow and succeed, putting others' needs first, and behaving ethically.

### Glossary of Terms

Dual Credit (DC) – DC is a program that allows high school students to enroll in college courses, which are taught at their high school, that both fulfills high school graduation requirements and earns the student college credits (Thomas, Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013).

General Equivalency Diploma (GED) – The GED is an alternative to a high school diploma; it is a tool for “second chances” to increase socio-economic status by providing opportunities for better employment and opening doors for educational opportunities in higher education or trade schools (Bowen & Nantz, 2014).

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) – Colleges and universities that have a full-time Latino enrollment of at least 25% qualify as HSI (Gooden & Martin, 2014).

Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) – The theory states that an individual begins with a natural desire to serve (Greenleaf, 1970).

Servant Teaching/Leadership – Teachers as leaders can provide inspiration and nurture their students to become future servant leaders by exhibiting the behavioral characteristics of servant leaders (Bowman, 2005, 2014; Greenleaf, 1970; Noland & Richards, 2015).

Volunteer Leader – According to Posner (2015), volunteer leaders are more engaged and effective with their followers than are paid leaders and may be regarded as servant leaders; neither are paid to lead and the benefit is intrinsic (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

#### Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The study was delimited to EIOF scholarship recipients. The external validity was not generalized to the population of GED earners due to the non-probability nature of sampling. No causal inferences were drawn due to non-experimental nature of the study. Due to the proximity to the Texas-Mexico border, the subjects were predominately Hispanic. The study assumed that participants were truthful and completed the survey instrument candidly.

#### Significance of the Study

The study provided GED graduates an opportunity to assess their servant leadership behaviors. Although there are many leadership models being practiced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that involve transformation, most models do not emphasize the personal relationships that are based on trust, authenticity, and respect, which are typical in servant leadership. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is evidence that the SLT is widely accepted and practiced in both private and public

organizations (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Green, 2014; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2014). The findings of the study will contribute to the body of research on servant leadership, which may generate further interest in servant leadership that may help future students, including GED graduates, become better leaders.

It was anticipated that by completing the study's survey questionnaire, the participating GED graduates may develop a better understanding of their own servant leadership characteristics and the role they can play in their current and future leadership roles. The underlying benefit may be that through participation in the study, a spark was ignited in the scholarship recipients to seek leadership opportunities that may complement their academics as they prepare to enter the workforce.

The study's findings are helpful in offering practical implications. For example, servant leadership training sessions can be developed for GED graduates to add to their leadership skills. Through practice of servant leadership behaviors, they may contribute to the society by giving of their time, energy, and resources to serve others, including those who may struggle in college.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The review of the literature focused on servant leadership theory in the context of GED graduates. Electronic databases, namely, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest were used to identify the relevant literature. The keywords included GED, GED graduates, GED students in college, servant leaders, servant leadership, servant leadership in education, and servant leadership theory. The focus was on the literature within the last ten years with the exception of seminal publications. The literature review consists of two major sections: servant leadership and GED graduates.

#### Servant Leadership

##### Elements of Servant Leadership

Greenleaf's (2003) seminal work on leadership proposed that individuals begin with the natural desire to become a servant first and that leadership follows (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Green, 2014; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Northhouse, 2014). The servant leadership theory further states that followers, once led by a servant leader, may choose to emulate that leader and become servant leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 2003). Greenleaf (1970) did not develop an instrument to measure servant leadership. However, Greenleaf (1977) did offer the explanation for a test on servant leadership:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

*And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 7).

Servant leadership is like volunteer leadership according to Noland and Richards (2015) in that leaders give of their time and labor, and share experiences without expectation of payment or reward. The servant leader puts the needs of others first. Servant leaders benefit by learning from other previous leaders' past successes and/or failures (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Green, 2014; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Northhouse, 2014).

Laub (1999) discussed the history of servant leadership and how thinkers at that time adopted the principles of servant leadership in their own works on leadership. As an example, the seminal work of Greenleaf (1970, 1977) was later expanded by Spears (1998). Laub (1999) identified six dimensions of servant leadership. The dimensions were (a) valuing people, (b) building community, (c) providing leadership, (d) developing people, (e) displaying authenticity, and (f) sharing leadership. Valuing people was described as trusting, respecting, listening, believing, accepting people for who they are, and putting others first and showing love and compassion towards them. Building community was seen as building strong and personal relationships, relating to and working collaboratively with others, respecting and valuing differences among others, facilitating team and community building, and seeing viewpoints from different perspectives and cultures. Providing leadership was exemplified by clarifying goals, taking initiative, and envisioning the future. Developing people was described as providing opportunities for learning and personal growth and offering encouragement and affirmation. Displaying authenticity was described as being open and honest to others and being accountable while maintaining integrity and demonstrating high ethical standards. Displaying authenticity also meant having a willingness to learn from others, being non-judgmental while keeping an

open mind, being flexible and willing to compromise, evaluating themselves before placing blame on others, and being able to accept criticism and challenges from others. Sharing leadership meant sharing values and facilitating those values, sharing power and relinquishing control, sharing status, and recognizing and promoting others. To address the lack of an instrument to measure servant leadership, Laub (1999) developed the 60-question Organizational Leadership Assessment which measured six dimensions of servant leadership (Green, Rodriguez, Wheeler, & Baggerly-Hinojosa, 2015).

Patterson (2003) discussed the gap between leader-focused and follower-focused approaches by identifying the constructs of servant leadership and referring to them as virtues, specifically, (a) leading and serving with love, (b) acting with humility, (c) being altruistic, (d) being visionary for followers, (e) being trustworthy, and (f) serving and empowering followers. Love was described as agapao love, a form of social or moral love that is foundational for servant leaders. Humility was described as keeping one's accomplishments and talents in perspective. Altruism was described as making personal sacrifices for the sake of helping others without receiving any personal gain. Vision was described as having passion for the future. Trust was described as leaders doing what they say, being open, and being consistent. Empowerment was described as leaders sharing power with followers. Service was described as serving others. Servant leadership is grounded in the desire and ability to serve others (Greenleaf, 1970).

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) discussed the concepts of servant leadership and further posited that different researchers referred to this type of leadership in other terms, such as self-sacrifice, egalitarianism, pro-social behavior, altruism, spirituality, authenticity, transformation, and stewardship. Servant leadership characteristics were drawn from Spears' (1995) original 10

characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and community building. An eleventh characteristic, calling, was added (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). The 11 characteristics were evaluated to identify the five aspects of servant leadership: altruistic calling, emotional healing, organizational stewardship, persuasion mapping, and wisdom. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) developed a 56-question Servant Leadership Questionnaire that measured the five aspects of servant leadership. Synthesis of the research by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) suggested that a servant leader provides service, leads with selflessness, and has positive intentions.

Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) suggested that servant leadership was grounded in the leader wanting to bring out the best in the follower. The authors also suggested that when a leader knows the follower's individual characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, and interests, s/he could facilitate the follower's growth to its full potential. A servant leader instills the confidence in the followers to become servant leaders themselves; thus, creating a culture of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). The authors developed the 28-item Servant Leadership Scale that measured seven dimensions of servant leadership: (a) emotional healing, (b) creating value for the community, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically.

Sendjaj, Sarros, and Santora (2008) suggested that servant leadership was explained as a conviction of the heart in which the leader is concerned with the followers' holistic needs, personal development, and autonomy. They further contended that trust was essential to foster an environment that was conducive for servant leadership. The followers "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, p 13). Sendjaj, Sarros, and Santora (2008) developed the Servant Leadership Behavioral Scale

with 101 questions that measured the six dimensions of Servant leadership. The six dimensions they identified were (a) voluntary subordination, (b) authentic self, (c) conventional relationships, (d) responsible morality, (e) transcendental spirituality, and (f) transforming influence.

Van Dierendonck (2011) presented research suggesting that leaders are motivated and have a desire to serve while modeling servant leadership. According to the author, engaging in ethical and caring behaviors became a priority for organizations and individuals to flourish. The similarity of servant leadership behaviors among other leadership disciplines such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, Level 5 leadership, and empowering leadership was discussed. Van Dierendonck and Nuijtm (2011) developed the Servant Leadership Survey, consisting of 99 items that measured eight dimensions of servant leadership. The dimensions were: empowerment, humility, authenticity, acceptance, courage, humility, interpersonal, and stewardship.

### Servant Leadership in Educational Settings

A review of leadership literature reveals that there is an increasing number of scholars in educational disciplines who want to model servant leadership to help students with academic success. Although there is research on servant leadership, none was found that addressed GED graduates specifically as servant leaders.

Basham (2012) sought opinions from leaders, and how they ranked the two major leadership styles: transformational and transactional. The results of the study led to identification of leadership qualities that were instrumental in leaders becoming agents of change. The leaders identified in this case study may become agents of change, just as servant leaders are often agents of change.

Watt, Huerta, and Mills (2009) noted that leading is done in and outside of educational institutions. They discussed Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which is an intervention program designed to support leadership and academic success by teaming teachers and students who received professional leadership development that provided tools to enhance learning. Their work suggested that those who go beyond what is expected and may influence the development of other leaders must be provided with resources to stay abreast of current pedagogy and policy.

Noland and Richards (2015) discussed how servant leadership in servant teaching can be effective in promoting leadership: servant leadership and servant teaching are synonymous. The advantage to servant leadership is that student servant leaders may be more effective when they reach out in a personal manner, and they have the natural instinct to serve and put students' needs first (Fink & Markhotl, 2013; Kemp-Graham, 2015; Greenleaf, 1970).

Eddy (2008) discussed how leadership evolved from the "great man" theory to current leadership models, such as servant leadership, that focus on individuals, ethics, and trusting relations (Green, 2014). Eddy (2008) discussed community college leadership from the perspective of leaders who desired to move up the career ladder in higher education. However, Eddy observed that a leader's skills, traits, behaviors and competencies might also apply to followers when they desire to become leaders. She noted that community college leaders must deal with issues such as resource constraints and administrative issues. Effective community college leaders must use clear spoken and written skills and active listening to engage in honest dialogue. Reinforcing servant leadership behaviors, the author placed emphasis on listening, which could help facilitate student success as well as the success of the institution. She also emphasized the importance of demonstrating ethics and promoting collaboration, as well as

contributing to internal and external relationships that are mutually beneficial. Furthermore, she discussed the formal leadership development programs created in professional organizations, state associations, and educational institutions. Research on leadership in community colleges suggested that measuring and developing leaders in specific skills and competencies may lead to a higher level of leadership performance. Administrative leadership can lead to student leadership. Servant leadership theory posits that students who have mentors, receive financial aid, have convenience and proximity to a local college, have social capital, and have time to commit to schoolwork and study may become the servant leaders that other students want to emulate.

### Servant Leadership and Hispanic Populations

As the number of Hispanics increases in the nation, it is important to understand how education becomes the foundation for socio-economic success. The Hispanic population has the highest number of high school dropouts in the nation, according to reports from the 2010 United States census. Research shows that the number of Hispanic students is increasing, yet the accuracy of research documenting the degree attainment of the Hispanic student is lacking (Krogstad, 2016). The accuracy of data reporting on GED earners is unclear because reporting systems are not universal (Heckman, Huphries, LaFontaine, & Rodriguez, 2012). When high school dropouts earn their GED, they are then reclassified as high school graduates when reported to local, state, and federal reporting agencies.

Rosales (2011) discussed the GI Bill and the struggles that Mexican-Americans faced to raise their socio-economic status, primarily through education. Leadership was important in organizations such as the American GI Forum (AGIF), which was founded in the late 1940s. AGIF's early leaders, such as Dr. Hector P. Garcia, were instrumental in securing benefits for

Mexican-American veterans, as well as eliminating racism and addressing educational opportunities (Rosales, 2011). Leadership emerged as a need to become “equals.” Mexican-Americans were being discriminated against in benefits, jobs, education, housing, and other social areas. Rosales told a story of persistence and perseverance as AGIF leadership (mostly veterans) proceeded to promote social justice and invoke change. Although the term “servant leadership” was not coined until the 1970s, the work of the AGIF leaders would have been recognized as being grounded in servant leadership principles.

The development of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was viewed as a method of cultural assimilation that could be achieved through adult education (Rook, 2009). LULAC was founded in Corpus Christi in 1929 as several organizations with similar interests were merged. LULAC members were middle to upper class Mexican-Americans who were interested in the development of opportunities for Mexican American citizens. LULAC’s membership consisted of professionals like doctors and lawyers, as well as Spanish elitists who were liaisons between the Anglo and Mexican communities (advocates) within the educational system and in other social issues. Rook (2009) explained that LULAC’s philosophical means of establishing equality for Mexican-Americans was undertaken along with other efforts that also existed to maintain the Mexican culture during the “collectivist paradigmatic social movement” (p. 56).

#### Problems Affecting Servant Leadership and GED Students

Servant leadership focuses on leaders who serve others. The servant leadership theory posits a natural desire to serve first and then leadership follows. The theory’s application in education explains that the leaders derive intrinsic satisfaction by serving others. Posner (2015) reported on 2013 figures: there were estimations that 63 million people volunteered (26.8 percent

of the population), and they contributed a median of 50 hours (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The report did not indicate how many of the volunteers did so in a leadership capacity. The figures demonstrate that there are many individuals who are serving others already and if they are not considered servant leaders already, they would be candidates for such. The added advantage and application to servant leadership is that those being served by servant leaders develop a desire to become servant leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 1977). At a time when colleges and universities struggle with providing services and financial resources to help students who traditionally fall behind in school, it becomes important to have individuals such as GED graduates, who may be willing and capable of serving as servant leaders, to step up and provide services and support to supplement whatever the colleges and universities can provide.

Servant leaders face challenges that affect their effectiveness. For example, experts understand that leaders must make time for renewal to be effective. Servant leaders are often so busy serving others they neglect their own health, fail to invest in further education for themselves, miss out on opportunities for professional growth, and become ineffective (Green, 2014; Northhouse, 2014). It may be difficult for students to practice servant leadership because of life factors, such as loss of a job or financial support, loss of a family member or loved one, or personal health problems.

Additional challenges arise such as when leaders who serve the targeted student population are not committed enough to be effective or overextended to the point that they cannot deliver. Servant leaders who are overextended may decide to move on to pursue other interests (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Merriam & Bierman, 2014; Merriam & Grace, 2011). An underlying problem for institutions of higher education and organizations that support them is the lack of succession planning for their servant leaders. In addition, the lack of cross training of

the servant leaders, lack of contingency planning, and lack of leader development training in the programs leave the student having either to reestablish relationships with servant leaders or doing without an advocate, and, therefore, losing interest in applying or receiving guidance from leaders. It may be difficult for students to practice servant leadership themselves because of challenging life factors.

Another challenge is presented in the name itself. Some leaders are concerned about being labeled as a servant leader because others may interpret it as religion-based, which servant leadership is not (Greenleaf, 1970).

## GED Students

### GED Students: A Broad Issue

The American Council on Education (ACE) (Pulley, 2011) addressed the gap between students that graduate from high school and ready to go to college and the GED graduate. The ACE found that 40 percent of students required some form of remediation, or developmental education, in order to become prepared to do college level work. Many GED earners are not college-ready when they start college, and they may fall behind academically from the start (Pulley, 2011).

Kenner and Weinerman (2011) describe a non-traditional student as one who is between the ages of 25 and 50 and who may have additional characteristics: is financially independent, has been out of school for some time, and places value on tasks. Harlow, Jenkins, and Steurer (2010) and Kenner and Weinerman (2011) described a non-traditional student as having been out of school, having larger responsibilities and obligations, and realizing the importance of higher education. The GED graduates who recognize that they may have distinct learning styles as non-traditional students may benefit when they apply leadership behaviors that may help them with

academic success. Failure to recognize and address the difficulties they experience may lead to academic failure, which may lead to dropping out of college (Harlow, Jenkins & Steurer, 2010; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Mezirow, 1977).

Strand and Lovrich (2014) examined a court–engaged community truancy board that was also school-based. An intervention program referred to as Check and Consent (CC) was evaluated with a group of students who received the intervention program and a group of students from a school district that shared the similar demographics that did not receive the intervention. The group that experienced the intervention received positive results, which suggested that combined restorative justice and social capital may increase high school attainment, or GED, for the student who is “at risk” and considered to be truant. The findings demonstrated the benefit of CC and its applicability to intervention effectiveness and recommended that intervention programs be available. The study did not determine if intervention led to more GED graduates in higher education; however, that outcome was implied.

Harlow, Jenkins, and Steurer (2010) studied GED graduates in prison and concluded that the GED graduates read better than most of the population not in prison. They defended their comparison by referencing inmates’ access to libraries and time to read. The underlying belief was that while inmates were in prison, they had more time to read, had access to libraries, and tried to prepare for better lives after prison. Seroczynski and Jobst (2016) discussed the term “from school to prison pipeline” (p. 426) which is disturbing in that research shows that minority youth are at higher risk for the experience (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2005; Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). Various federal, state and local programs strive to address the truancy rates and keep those who may have engaged in truant behaviors in high school from making bad choices and following criminal activity and ending up in prison. Students who drop out of high school

and earn a GED have a different set of needs than traditional students. High school dropouts may get their GED and view that as a second chance to increase their socio-economic status and stay out of jail. Helping students earn a GED and attain higher education may help in promoting social justice.

According to Kollontal (2015) and Houston, Blankenstein, and Cole (2007), one goal of using art in higher education is to soften violence. Art is a form of expression through which students can identify pain and self-identity; it can become a coping skill and help students become engaged. Through engagement, students may begin to address disorienting dilemmas that may have interfered with their academics (Mezirow, 1997). The increase in violence in schools in the last decade demands leadership and servant leaders who promotes kindness, authenticity, humility, and trustworthiness. Kollontal (2015) and Houston, Blankenstein, and Cole (2007) suggested that art is often used to deal with disorienting dilemmas and many GED graduates experienced disorienting dilemmas prior to their dropping out of school. Reaching out to students who have dropped out of high school and allowing them to express themselves through art may help them become GED graduates who become engaged in pursuit of education because of the art experience.

### Challenges Faced by GED Students

Tovar (2015) examined the interactions between leaders (faculty and counselors) and student support programs in a study at a community college. The study was based on social capital theory as well as two other college models that measured impact. The study found that interactions and the quantity of interactions between students and leaders had a small but significant effect on Latina/o students. Participation in academically rigorous programs, as well as in support programs (such as in counseling), were indicators of students' success and their

intent to persist. However, the study reported that access to community college does not equate to access to resources, ability to participate in school programs, time to prepare for studies, academic progression, and ability to transfer out of community college (Tollefsen, 2009). The study suggested that leadership and being attuned to student services might influence grades and persistence intentions, as well as degree attainment. The implications of the study suggested that becoming engaged in extracurricular activities might lead to leadership opportunities for students.

Quigley, Patterson, and Zhang (2011) discussed the GED Testing Service that was founded in 1942 and has given opportunities to more than 18 million adults through the high school equivalency program. They observed that the GED and its impact are incalculable with regard to personal growth, societal changes, and economic opportunities (Kantrowitz, 2007; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhard, 2005). Quigley, Patterson, and Zhang (2011) discussed the barriers faced by GED graduates and identified them as being either situational barriers, institutional barriers, or dispositional barriers. Situational barriers were described as those barriers that interfere in life situations, such as lack of social capital; health issues such as illness, death, or pregnancies; and lack of resources such as transportation, childcare, and housing. Institutional barriers consisted of barriers such as geographic inaccessibility, school administrative issues, ineffective teaching, and educational expenses. Dispositional barriers were those individual perceptions based on experience that formed the individuals' views regarding formal higher education, their fear of failure, distrust of teachers and administrators, and concern for participation in large classes. Quigley, Patterson, and Zhang (2011) suggested that it is necessary to understand GED graduates and the barriers they face as they seek higher education (Leese, 2010).

## GED Students and the Need for Leadership

In a study on dropout rates, Lofstrom (2010) referenced a report that 54% of Hispanics graduate from high school, compared to 56% of African Americans and 78% of Whites. He attempted to determine why dropout rates were so high among Hispanics and African Americans, and cautioned that high school dropouts have not always been reported correctly or universally. Some students become home schooled, transfer to private schools, or leave the state and cannot be tracked. The findings in the study indicated that the key contributors to Hispanic high school dropouts were being economically disadvantaged and living in poverty, as well as lacking in English proficiency. The study suggested that for African Americans, the key contributor for high school dropouts was neighborhood characteristics. Lofstrom (2010) reported that Texas Education Agency (TEA) discrepancies on dropouts may be attributed to GED programs. The TEA does not report students as dropouts if they are enrolled in a GED preparation program. Additionally, Lofstrom showed that holding students back a grade was a relevant predictor of dropping out. It appears that many dropouts seek to earn a GED, and after doing so, they may become inspired to seek out higher education opportunities.

Thompson (2013) discussed how different leaders influence students in college. In order to increase enrollment in college and place focus on education; for example, some Christian leaders request that students take part in activities such as placing report cards in offering plates, encouraging prayer, establish good study habits, and striving for good attendance. Thompson suggested that students are not alone on their educational journey because the whole family becomes engaged. Thompson also addressed the need for collaboration between institutions of higher education and students if college attainment is to be reached by the student who may have dropped out of high school and not attended college at all. Thompson did not specifically

identify dropout students; however, he did imply that the leaders take a proactive approach to teaching leadership competencies which may be utilized and built upon once students are in college. Thompson suggested that through perfect attendance, good study habits, good grades, and strong social support, college students, such as the GED graduates, may be provided opportunities to demonstrate leadership competencies through leading by example.

### Summary

The review of the literature focused on servant leadership, its application, and potential impact on GED graduates' academic knowledge. Different theories were critically examined to determine how leaders emerge. Servant leadership is one way that may contribute to student leadership effectiveness. The GED graduates who are now in college bring life experiences and almost demand a leadership approach different from their traditional high school counterparts. However, there is no universal approach to servant leadership; it still becomes a one-on-one relationship to reach the optimal goals of exemplary leadership. The literature review supported the usefulness of conducting this study. The sample of GED graduates' perceptions of their servant leadership behaviors may provide an insight into how they view this leadership theory. Through commitment, communication, and practice of servant leadership behaviors, the GED graduate may become effective and trustworthy as a servant leader. Servant leadership behavioral characteristics and strengths can be taught to GED graduates who may wish to become future school or community leaders. The desired outcome would be that through training and practice, GED graduates transform into servant leaders within their educational institutions, community, and career environments.

The review of the literature showed an abundance of qualitative research studies on servant leadership but very few quantitative investigations. Future quantitative research will add

to the body of literature that can fundamentally expand the knowledge on servant leadership and how it pertains to promoting behaviors that may contribute to students becoming servant leaders.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Introduction

The primary purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates? (2) To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics?

This chapter describes the methods that were employed to conduct the study. The chapter is represented by the following sections: research design, subject selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

#### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design in which quantitative data were collected, processed, and analyzed (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Meltzoff, 1998; Vogt, 2007). The descriptive techniques, which included inferential statistical techniques, were utilized to investigate the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates and the demographic variables that may impact the outcome measures of interest. The Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) was explained in the context of seven constructs, namely, emotional healing, creating value for the community, possessing conceptual skills, empowering others, helping others grow and succeed, putting others first, and behaving ethically (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Pousa, 2014; Van Dierndonck & Nuijtn, 2011). There were no independent or dependent variables due to the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study. Due to non-experimental nature of the study, no causal inferences were drawn.

#### Subject Selection

The study took place in South Texas. The GED participants (n = 75) were scholarship recipients of the Education is Our Freedom (EIOF) College Scholarship Program, who were not

representative of Texas GED graduates, which resulted in a non-probability sample. Participants were over the age of 18, considered adult learners, and could also be classified as non-traditional students. The overwhelming majority of the participants were attending or had already attended South Texas institutions of higher education, primarily, Del Mar College, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC), and Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) (Goodall, 2009). Del Mar College, TAMUCC and TAMUK are Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) (Gooden & Martin, 2014). Due to the proximity to the Texas border, most of the participants were Hispanic. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (HSRP #154-17).

#### Instrumentation

For the purpose of the study, a 2-part survey instrument, the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), was developed by the researcher (Appendix A). The first part was designed to measure the servant leadership behaviors, utilizing a previously published instrument (Green, Rodriguez, Wheeler, & Baggerly-Hinojosa, 2015; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Pousa, 2014). The second part was designed to collect the selected demographic characteristics of the respondents.

There were 28 attitudinal items that measured the constructs of servant leadership. A 4-point Likert-type scaling was utilized: 4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly disagree. The results were interpreted as follows: high range - strongly exhibiting the leadership behavior; moderate range – exhibiting the behavior in an average manner; low range – exhibiting the leadership behavior below the average; and extremely low range - not inclining to exhibit the leadership behavior at all.

Emotional healing behaviors were measured by four items: (1) others would seek help from me if they had a personal problem; (2) care about others' personal well-being; (3) take time to talk to others on a personal level; and (4) recognize when others are feeling down without asking them.

Creating value of the community behaviors was measured by four items: (1) emphasize the importance of giving back to the community; (2) always interested in helping people in the community; (3) involved in community activities; and (4) encourage others to volunteer in the community.

Conceptual skills were measured by four items: (1) can tell if something related to work or school is going wrong; (2) can handle complex problems; (3) have a thorough understanding of the educational institution and its goals; and (4) can solve work or school problems with new or creative ideas.

Empowering behaviors were measured by four items: (1) give others the responsibility to make important decisions about their own jobs; (2) encourage others to handle important work or school decisions on their own; (3) give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best; and (4) do not need others to consult me before they make important decisions at work or school.

Helping others grow and succeed behaviors was measured by four items: (1) can help others make career development a priority; (2) am interested in making sure others reach their career goals; (3) provide others with work or school information that enable them to develop new skills; and (4) want to know about others' career goals.

Putting others first was measured by four items: (1) care about others' success more than my own; (2) put others' best interest above my own; (3) sacrifice my own interest to meet others' needs; and (4) do what can be done to make others' jobs or school work easier.

Behaving ethically was measured by four items: (1) hold high ethical standards; (2) am always honest; (3) would not compromise ethical principles to meet success; and (4) value honesty more than money.

The second part was designed to collect the demographic data. Specifically, the data for the following variables were collected: gender, ethnicity, age, years since earning GED, college classification and status, anticipated years before degree attainment, work history, and social capital. In addition, the participants were asked if they desired to become servant leaders themselves and to self-identify the servant leadership behaviors that they demonstrated. Additionally, participants were asked which of the following influenced them as a servant leader: family member, teacher, friend, religious leader, community leader, or someone else.

The content validity of the SLQ was assessed by the researcher's doctoral dissertation committee and the feedback was used to modify the instrument. The SLQ was then pilot-tested and the data were used to estimate of the instrument (Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha = 0.89).

#### Data Collection

A web-based version of the SLQ was used for the purpose of data collection, utilizing Qualtrics survey software (Vidic, Burton, Couth, Pickering & Start, 2016). The study participants were recruited by email through an EIOF representative. The introductory email was sent to EIOF's email listserv, which included GED graduates from South Texas who had received EIOF scholarships. The EIOF representative sent out the introductory email, informing the potential participants of the study and included a link to the survey on March 2, 2018. The

consent to participate in the study was embedded in the SLQ. The emails were sent to 234 potential participants, of which, 6 were duplicates, and 18 bounced back; thus, the accessible population was 210. Follow-up emails were sent thanking those who had already responded and requesting participation from those who had not yet responded. The follow-up emails were sent on March 13, March 21, and March 29, 2018. The data collection ended on April 11, 2018, at which time, a total of 78 had activated the link, of which, 75 had completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 35.70%. Due to the non-probability nature of sampling, the participants were not representative of the population.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the web-based surveys were downloaded into an Excel file and then exported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which was utilized for the purpose of data manipulation and analysis. Due to performing multiple univariate tests, the level of significance was set, a priori, at 0.01 to reduce the probability of making a Type I Error.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize the data. Specifically, frequency and percentage distribution tables, measures of central tendency, and measures of variability, were used to summarize and organize the data (Field, 2013; Urban, 2010).

Cronbach's alpha co-efficient was used to estimate the internal consistency of the seven constructs (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Specifically,  $\alpha = [k/k-1] [1-(\sum\sigma_i^2/\sigma_x^2)]$ , where  $k$  is the number of items on the test,  $\sigma_i^2$  is the variance of item  $i$ , and  $\sigma_x^2$  is the total test variance (sum of the variances plus twice the sum of the co-variances of all possible pairs of its components, that is,  $\sigma_x^2 = \sum\sigma_i^2 + 2\sum\sigma_{ij}$ ) was computed for each of the constructs.

A univariate repeated measures analysis of variance (Stevens, 2009) was used to examine the differences among the seven construct scale scores. Univariate repeated measures analysis of variance (Stevens, 2009) was employed to examine within-group differences. The statistical technique uses the blocking procedure to isolate the effects of a nuisance variable, thus, reducing the error term. The linear model equation is  $X_{ij} = \mu + \alpha_j + \pi_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$  (Score = Grand Mean + Treatment Effect + Block Effect + Error Effect). The Sphericity assumption, which requires that the variances of the differences for all pairs of repeated measures be equal, was tested, using Epsilon ( $\varepsilon$ ). If  $\varepsilon$  is 0.70 or greater, the assumption is met. Modified Tukey procedure,  $HSD = q_{\alpha, k, (n-1)(k-1)} \sqrt{MSRES/n}$ , where  $(n-1)(k-1)$  is the error degrees of freedom and MSRES is the error term, was used for the purpose of post hoc analysis.

The analysis of the data also included t-test for Independent Samples, One-way Analysis of Variance, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Field, 2013).

### Summary

The non-experimental nature of the study precluded any causal inferences. The non-probability nature of the sampling procedures limited the external validity to the study's participants. The psychometric properties of the survey questionnaire were examined and documented. The data were collected electronically, using an on-line survey questionnaire. A series of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze and report the data.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine servant leadership behaviors in relation to selected demographic characteristics in a non-probability sample of GED graduates who had received scholarships from the Education is Our Freedom GED College Scholarship Program (EIOF). To do so, an on-line Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) was developed and used to collect the data on servant leadership behaviors and selected demographic variables. The study's guiding research questions were (1) What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates? (2) To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics? Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized to analyze the data and report the findings. The level of significance was set, a priori, at 0.01.

#### A Profile of Subjects

The non-probability sample consisted of 75 recipients of EIOF scholarships between 2016 and 2018. The respondents were predominantly Hispanic and female. Additionally, they were likely to be attending a 4-year university full-time, while employed part-time. Most notably, almost all reported they had received family support towards their educational goals. Results are summarized in Table 1.

A typical participant was a 27-year-old who had received a GED within the previous six (6) years. Additionally, on the average, the participants had been attending college for three and a half (3.50) years and expected to graduate within the subsequent two (2) years. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1

A Profile of Participants, Categorical Variables, n = 75

Variable		F	%
Gender	Female	51	68.00
	Male	24	32.00
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	60	80.00
	White	11	14.70
	Black/African American	2	2.70
	Asian	1	1.30
	Other	1	1.30
School Classification	4-year University	45	60.00
	2-year College	24	32.00
	Not Attending	4	5.30
	Vocational/Trade	2	2.70
College Classification	Freshman	5	6.70
	Sophomore	21	28.00
	Junior	16	21.30
	Senior	18	24.00
	Vocational/Trade	2	2.70
	Undisclosed	13	17.30
Enrollment Status	Full-time	48	64.00
	Part-time	23	30.70
	Not enrolled	4	5.30
Employment Status	Part-time	35	46.70
	Full-time	22	29.30
	Not employed	18	24.00
Family Support toward Education	Yes	74	98.70
	No	1	1.30

Table 2

A Profile of Participants, Continuous Variables, n = 75

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age in years	18.00	58.00	27.52	9.25
Years since GED	0.00	33.00	5.65	5.67
Years attending college	0.00	7.00	3.49	1.84
Years to obtain college degree	0.00	6.00	1.96	1.29

The majority of the participants (78.70%) expressed the desire to be servant leaders themselves. The participants were asked to identify their servant leadership role models. A family member was endorsed the most, followed by a teacher, a friend, a religious leader, a community leader, and someone else. Results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Servant Leadership Role Models

Servant Leadership Role Model		F	%
Family Member	Yes	61	81.30
	No	14	18.70
Teacher	Yes	31	41.30
	No	44	58.70
Friend	Yes	27	36.00
	No	48	64.00
Religious Leader	Yes	12	16.00
	No	63	84.00
Community Leader	Yes	8	10.70
	No	67	89.30
Someone Else	Yes	6	8.00
	No	69	92.00

## Servant Leadership Behaviors

The GED scholarship recipients completed the SLQ's 28 servant leadership items, using a 4-point Likert-type scaling: 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree. The 28 items were ranked from the highest to the lowest, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Ranking of the Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel best.	3.69
I value honesty more than money.	3.64
I care about others' personal well-being.	3.61
I hold high ethical standards.	3.59
I emphasize the importance of giving back to the community and/or school	3.55
I can handle complex problems.	3.48
I can tell if something related to work or school is going wrong.	3.47
I have a thorough understanding of the educational institution and its goals.	3.47
I take time to talk to others on a personal level.	3.43
I am interested in making sure others reach their career and/or academic goals.	3.43
I am always interested in helping people in the community and/or school.	3.37
I provide others with work or school information that helps them develop new skills.	3.36
I do what I can to make others' jobs and/or school work easier.	3.35
I recognize when others are feeling down without asking them.	3.35
I give others the responsibility to make important decisions about their own jobs or education.	3.33
Others would seek help from me if they have a personal problem.	3.33
I can solve work or school problems with new or creative ideas.	3.31
I would not compromise ethical principles to achieve success.	3.28
I am involved in community and/or school activities.	3.27
I help others make career development a priority.	3.25
I encourage others to volunteer in the community and/or school.	3.24

Table 4 (continued)

I want to know about others' career and/or educational goals.	3.21
I encourage others to handle important work and/or school decisions on their own.	2.97
I am always honest.	2.92
I sacrifice my own interests to meet the needs of others.	2.83
I put the others' best interest above mine.	2.76
If others need to make important decisions at work or school they do not need to consult with me.	2.72
I care about others' needs more than my own.	2.60

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

The reliability coefficient, as measured by Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, was 0.87, attesting to the internal consistency of the scale. The mean of the respondents' responses was used to measure the servant leadership scale score. The scores ranged from 2.57 to 3.93 (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.28), indicating agreement with the majority of the servant leadership items. Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Servant Leadership Grand Mean Score, n = 75

	Minimum	Maximum	M*	SD
Group Servant Leadership Scores	2.57	3.93	3.28	0.28

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

#### Servant Leadership Behavioral Subscales

In addition to a scale score, the 28-item SLQ measured seven sub-scale scores. Each sub-scale was measured by four items. The mean scores were used to rank the items in each sub-scale, as shown in Tables 6 – 12.

Table 6

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Emotional Healing, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I care about others' personal well-being.	3.61
I take time to talk to others on a personal note.	3.43
I recognize when others are feeling down without asking them.	3.35
Others seek help from me if they have a personal problem.	3.33

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 7

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Creating Value, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I emphasize the importance of giving back to the community.	3.55
I am always interested in helping people in the community and/or school.	3.37
I am involved in community and/or school activities.	3.27
I encourage others to volunteer in the community and/or school.	3.24

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 8

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Conceptual Skills, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I can handle complex problems.	3.48
I can tell if something related to work and/or school is going wrong.	3.47
I have a thorough understanding of the educational institution and its goal.	3.47
I can solve work or school problems with new or creative ideas.	3.31

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 9

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Empowering Others, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best.	3.69
I give others the responsibility to make important decisions about their own jobs or academics.	3.33
I encourage others to handle important work and/or school decisions on their own.	2.97
If others need to make important decisions at work and/or school, they do not need to consult with me.	2.72

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 10

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Helping Others Grow, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I am interested in making sure others reach their career goals and/or academic goals.	3.43
I provide others with work or school information that enable them to develop new skills.	3.36
I help others make career development a priority.	3.25
I want to know about others' career and/or educational goals.	3.21

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 11

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Putting Others First, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I do what I can to make others job and/or school work easier.	3.35
I sacrifice my own interests to meet others' needs.	2.83
I put others best interest above my own.	2.76
I care about others' success more than my own.	2.60

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 12

Servant Leadership Sub-scale: Behaving Ethically, n = 75

Servant Leadership Behavior	M*
I value honesty more than money.	3.64
I hold high ethical standards.	3.59
I do not compromise ethical standards to achieve success.	3.28
I am always honest.	2.92

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

A mean score for each sub-scale was computed. A univariate repeated measure of analysis of variance was performed to examine the differences among the seven servant leadership behaviors. The sphericity assumption was met, because both the Greehouse-Geisser Epsilon (0.76) and Huynh-Feldt Epsilon (0.82) were greater than 0.70 (Stevens, 2009). The mean differences were statistically significant,  $F(6,444) = 31.45, p < 0.01$ . Results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13

Repeated Measure ANOVA Results for Servant Leadership Sub-scales

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Servant Leadership Behaviors	16.89	6	2.82	31.45*
Error	39.74	444	0.09	
Block	40.82	74	0.55	

\* p < 0.01

As can be seen in Table 14, based on the agreement levels, Conceptual Skills and Emotional Healing were ranked the highest, followed by Behaving Ethically, Creating Value, Helping Others Grow, Empowering Others, and Putting Others First. Results are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14

Ranking of Servant Leadership Behaviors Sub-scales, n = 75

Servant Leadership Sub-scales	M*	SD
Conceptual Skills	3.43	0.37
Emotional Healing	3.43	0.38
Behaving Ethically	3.36	0.34
Creating Value	3.36	0.44
Helping Others Grow	3.31	0.43
Empowering Others	3.18	0,29
Putting Others First	2.88	0.48

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

For the purpose of the post hoc analysis, a series of pairwise comparison of mean scores was performed. There were no statistically significant differences among Conceptual Skills, Emotional Healing, Behaving Ethically, and Creating Value, the four servant leadership behaviors that were endorsed the most. The difference between Putting Other First, the behavior that received the lowest score, and all other behaviors was statistically significant. Results are summarized in Table 15.

The respondents were also asked to endorse the abovementioned Servant Leadership behaviors that applied to them. Helping Others Grow was endorsed the most (86.70%), followed by Behaving Ethically (81.30%), Empowering Others (77.30%), Emotional Healing (74.70%), Conceptual Skills (64.00%), Putting Others First (62.70%), and Creating Value (62.70%).

Table 15

Post Hoc Results for Servant Leadership Subscales, n = 75

Pair-wise Comparison	Significance*
Emotional Healing vs. Creating Value	NS
Emotional Healing vs. Conceptual Skills	NS
Emotional Healing vs. Empowering Others	S
Emotional Healing vs. Helping Others	S
Emotional Healing vs. Putting Others First	S
Emotional Healing vs. Behaving Ethically	NS
Creating Value vs. Conceptual Skills	NS
Creating Value vs. Empowering Behaviors	S
Creating Value vs. Helping Others	NS
Creating Value vs. Putting Others First	S
Creating Value vs. Behaving Ethically	NS
Conceptual Skills vs. Empowering Behaviors	S
Conceptual Skills vs. Helping Others	S
Conceptual Skills vs. Putting Others First	S
Conceptual Skills vs. Behaving Ethically	NS
Empowering Behaviors vs. Helping Others	NS
Empowering Behaviors vs. Putting Others First	S
Empowering Behaviors vs. Behaving Ethically	S
Helping Others Grow vs. Putting Others First	S
Helping Others Grow vs. Behaving Ethically	NS
Putting Others First vs. Behaving Ethically	S

\* NS = not statistically significant, S = statistically significant,  $p < 0.01$

### Correlational Analysis

A series of Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficients was used to examine the direction and magnitude of simple associations between the servant leadership scale and sub-scale scores and the continuous demographic characteristics of the respondents. The level of

significance was set, a priori, at 0.01. The overwhelming majority of the associations were not statistically significant. Higher age was associated with higher Helping Others ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Higher years of attending college was associated with higher Empowering Behaviors and Putting others first ( $p < 0.01$ ). Results are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16

Simple Correlations Between Servant Leadership Scales and Sub-scales and Selected Demographic Variables,  $n = 75$

Variable	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4	SL5	SL6	SL7	SL
Age	0.13	0.23	0.12	-0.14	0.30*	0.04	0.15	0.18
Years since obtaining GED	0.29	0.13	0.08	0.07	0.14	0.09	0.02	0.12
Years attending college	0.15	-0.01	0.12	0.35*	0.14	0.33*	0.26	0.26
Years to obtain college degree	-0.03	-0.05	-0.14	-0.20	-0.12	-0.11	0.04	-0.12

\*  $p < 0.01$

SL1 = Emotional Healing, SL2 = Creating Value, SL3 = Conceptual Skills, SL4 = Empowering Behaviors, SL5 = Helping Others, SL6 = Putting Others First, SL7 = Behaving Ethically, SL = Servant Leadership

#### Group Comparisons

With respect to categorical demographic characteristics, a series of t-test for Independent Samples and One-way Analysis of Variance was performed. The level of significance was set, a priori, at 0.01 to reduce the probability of making a Type I Error due to performing multiple univariate tests. In spite of unequal sample sizes, the homogeneity of variances assumption was met in all analyses except one.

There were no statistically significant differences between females and males based on any of the outcome measures. The homogeneity of variances assumption was met. Results are summarized in Tables 17 and 18.

Table 17

Gender and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

Servant Leadership	Female (n=51)		Male (n=24)		t**
	M*	SD	M*	SD	
Emotional Healing	3.40	0.39	3.49	0.37	0.93
Creating Value	3.30	0.45	3.47	0.39	1.54
Conceptual Skills	3.40	0.39	3.50	0.30	1.14
Empowering Behaviors	3.15	0.29	3.24	0.30	1.22
Helping Others	3.28	0.46	3.39	0.37	0.99
Putting Others First	2.83	0.45	2.99	0.53	1.32
Behaving Ethically	3.34	0.35	3.39	0.33	0.50
Servant Leadership	3.24	0.29	3.35	0.24	1.55

\* 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

\*\* None of the t-values was statistically significant.

Table 18

Gender and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Homogeneity of Variances Assumption, n = 75

Servant Leadership	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	0.14	0.70
Creating Value	1.56	0.22
Conceptual Skills	6.88	0.02
Empowering Behaviors	0.05	0.82
Helping Others	1.80	0.18
Putting Others First	0.19	0.66
Behaving Ethically	0.22	0.64
Servant Leadership	1.76	0.19

For the purpose of data analysis, ethnicity was dichotomized into Hispanic or Non-Hispanic. As can be seen in Table 19, none of the group differences was statistically significant.

The homogeneity of variances assumption was met in all analyses, as shown in Table 20.

Table 19

Ethnicity and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

Servant Leadership	Hispanic (n = 60)		Non-Hispanic (n = 15)		t**
	M*	SD	M*	SD	
Emotional Healing	3.48	0.37	3.21	0.36	2.50
Creating Value	3.37	0.44	3.30	0.41	0.56
Conceptual Skills	3.45	0.38	3.35	0.32	0.94
Empowering Behaviors	3.19	0.31	3.15	0.23	0.44
Helping Others Grow	3.33	0.45	3.23	0.37	0.80
Putting Others First	2.93	0.49	2.68	0.42	1.83
Behaving Ethically	3.37	0.32	3.32	0.41	0.51
Servant Leadership	3.30	0.29	3.18	0.21	1.56

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

\*\* None of the t-values was statistically significant.

Table 20

Ethnicity and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Homogeneity of Variances Assumption, n = 75

Servant Leadership	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	0.01	0.98
Creating Value	0.17	0.68
Conceptual Skills	1.28	0.26
Empowering Behaviors	0.16	0.69
Helping Others	1.89	0.17
Putting Others First	0.49	0.48
Behaving Ethically	3.08	0.08
Servant Leadership	1.00	0.32

As shown in Tables 21 and 22, none of level of education differences based on the outcome measures was statistically significant. With one exception, the homogeneity of variances assumption was met in all analyses.

Table 21

Level of Education and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

	Freshman		Sophomore		Junior		Senior		Vocational	
	(n = 5)		(n = 21)		(n = 16)		(n = 18)		(n = 2)	
Servant Leadership	M*	SD	M*	SD	M*	SD	M*	SD	M*	SD
Emotional Healing	3.30	0.37	3.36	0.39	3.36	0.32	3.43	0.41	3.63	0.53
Creating Value	3.35	0.60	3.37	0.46	3.20	0.39	3.30	0.45	3.38	0.18
Conceptual Skills	3.25	0.47	3.39	0.34	3.39	0.43	3.46	0.32	3.50	0.00
Empowering Behaviors	3.05	0.54	3.12	0.19	3.23	0.35	3.21	0.31	3.13	0.18
Helping Others Grow	2.90	0.52	3.25	0.33	3.33	0.43	3.33	0.47	3.50	0.71
Putting Others First	2.80	0.21	2.73	0.29	2.84	0.43	2.90	0.66	2.75	0.00
Behaving Ethically	3.30	0.27	3.20	0.35	3.38	0.30	3.40	0.37	3.38	0.53
Servant Leadership	3.14	0.37	3.20	0.23	3.25	0.22	3.29	0.32	3.32	0.30

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 22

Level of Education and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variances Assumption Tests, n = 75

Servant Leadership	F	p	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	0.37	0.83	1.20	0.32
Creating Value	0.34	0.85	1.34	0.27
Conceptual Skills	0.36	0.84	2.18	0.08
Empowering Behaviors	0.59	0.67	2.36	0.06
Helping Others	1.30	0.28	2.20	0.08
Putting Others First	0.38	0.82	4.59	< 0.01
Behaving Ethically	1.00	0.41	0.73	0.58
Servant Leadership	0.51	0.73	2.42	0.06

Whether the participants were attending college on a part-time or full-time basis or not being enrolled at the time of data collection did not impact any of the outcome measures.

Additionally, it did not matter whether they were attending 2-year community colleges or 4-year universities. The homogeneity of variances assumption was met in all analyses. Results are summarized in Tables 23 - 26.

Table 23

College Enrollment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

Servant Leadership	Part-time (n = 23)		Full-time (n = 48)		Not enrolled (n = 4)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD	M*	SD
Emotional Healing	3.40	0.36	3.42	0.39	3.69	0.38
Creating Value	3.38	0.48	3.33	0.41	3.56	0.59
Conceptual Skills	3.52	0.33	3.37	0.37	3.63	0.48
Empowering Behaviors	3.11	0.26	3.21	0.31	3.25	0.20
Helping Others Grow	3.37	0.46	3.29	0.41	3.25	0.61
Putting Others First	2.78	0.41	2.92	0.51	3.06	0.55
Behaving Ethically	3.34	0.33	3.36	0.35	3.38	0.32
Servant Leadership	3.27	0.24	3.27	0.29	3.40	0.38

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 24

College Enrollment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variances Assumption Tests, n = 75

Servant Leadership	F	p	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	0.97	0.38	0.98	0.38
Creating Value	0.58	0.56	1.15	0.32
Conceptual Skills	1.98	0.14	0.72	0.49
Empowering Behaviors	1.03	0.36	0.36	0.70
Helping Others	0.29	0.75	0.15	0.86
Putting Others First	0.89	0.41	1.02	0.36
Behaving Ethically	0.06	0.94	0.78	0.46
Servant Leadership	0.40	0.67	0.78	0.46

Table 25

Higher Education Type and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 69

Servant Leadership	2-Year College (n = 24)		4-Year University (n = 45)		t**
	M*	SD	M*	SD	
Emotional Healing	3.38	0.40	3.43	0.38	0.44
Creating Value	3.32	0.48	3.35	0.41	0.25
Conceptual Skills	3.39	0.38	3.42	0.36	0.28
Empowering Behaviors	3.10	0.30	3.22	0.29	1.65
Helping Others Grow	3.33	0.49	3.31	0.40	0.20
Putting Others First	2.75	0.42	2.94	0.51	1.55
Behaving Ethically	3.42	0.33	3.34	0.35	0.90
Servant Leadership	3.24	0.27	3.29	0.29	0.62

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

\*\* None of the t-values was statistically significant.

Table 26

Higher Education Type and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Homogeneity of Variances Assumption, n = 69

Servant Leadership	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	0.01	0.99
Creating Value	4.15	0.04
Conceptual Skills	0.18	0.67
Empowering Behaviors	0.91	0.34
Helping Others	0.86	0.36
Putting Others First	2.59	0.11
Behaving Ethically	0.42	0.52
Servant Leadership	0.01	0.32

The employment status differences were not statistically significant for any of the servant leadership scale or sub-scale scores. The homogeneity of variances assumption was met in all analyses. Results are summarized in Tables 27 and 28.

Table 27

Employment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, n = 75

Servant Leadership Subscale	Part-time (n = 35)		Full-time (n = 22)		Not employed (n = 18)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD	M*	SD
Emotional Healing	3.36	0.32	3.63	0.37	3.32	0.44
Creating Value	3.31	0.42	3.42	0.46	3.36	0.45
Conceptual Skills	3.35	0.37	3.57	0.34	3.42	0.35
Empowering Behaviors	3.16	0.28	3.23	0.33	3.17	0.28
Helping Others Grow	3.21	0.40	3.50	0.39	3.29	0.47
Putting Others First	2.80	0.46	3.08	0.57	2.80	0.33
Behaving Ethically	3.36	0.36	3.41	0.34	3.28	0.31
Servant Leadership	3.22	0.27	3.40	0.29	3.23	0.26

\*4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 28

Employment Status and Servant Leadership Behaviors, Summary of F-Ratios and Homogeneity of Variances Assumption Tests, n = 75

Servant Leadership	F	p	Levene's F	p
Emotional Healing	4.52	0.02	1.82	0.17
Creating Value	0.40	0.67	0.04	0.96
Conceptual Skills	2.51	0.09	0.18	0.84
Empowering Behaviors	0.41	0.67	0.25	0.78
Helping Others	3.34	0.04	0.51	0.60
Putting Others First	2.70	0.07	3.84	0.03
Behaving Ethically	0.75	0.47	2.32	0.11
Servant Leadership	3.32	0.04	0.12	0.89

## Summary

To answer the study's first research question: What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates?, analysis of the data showed that the participants demonstrated them. The top two behaviors were Conceptual Skills and Emotional Healing, followed by Behaving Ethically, Creating Value, Helping Others Grow, Empowering Others, and Putting Others First. The analysis of the data also addressed the second research question: To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics? The results revealed that that the behaviors were not impacted by the overwhelming majority of the respondents' selected demographic variables that were investigated in the study. The three exceptions were age in association with Helping Others and years of attending college's associations with Empowering Behaviors and Putting Others First.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In spite of significant strides in promoting educational equality, there is still much work that must be done to increase the likelihood of attaining higher education for those who desire it. The literature on GED graduates suggests that facilitating their quest for higher education is a common theme, focusing on topics such as art, social capital, motivation, attendance and study habits, and even prayer. The implication is that there are various possibilities to assist this group of students in reaching their academic goals. Leadership theories continue to evolve and, for example, focusing on followers and their needs to grow as individuals has been noted. However, there is no one perfect way to lead. Servant leadership, which is based on leaders who lead unselfishly with trustworthiness and humility, can be instrumental in facilitating personal and professional growth.

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of GED graduates, who were recipients of a South Texas scholarship program, of their servant leadership behavior and the extent by which such behaviors may be impacted by selected demographic characteristics of the participants. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates? (2) To what extent are the servant leadership behaviors of GED graduates affected by their selected demographic characteristics?

#### Summary of the Results

The researcher-developed Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) was used for the purpose of data collection. The psychometric properties of the SLQ were examined.

Specifically, a panel of experts evaluated its content validity, which was followed by pilot-testing the instrument and using the data to estimate its internal consistency.

There was a total of 75 participants (68% female). A typical participant was a GED graduate who had received a scholarship from Education is Our Freedom GED Scholarship Program (EIOF), was 27 years old, had received a GED within the previous six years, had been attending college for approximately three years, and expected to graduate within the subsequent two years.

The SLQ measured one overall scale score and seven sub-scale scores for servant leadership behaviors. The results showed that Conceptual Skills and Emotional Healing were ranked the highest, followed by Behaving Ethically, Creating Value, Helping Others Grow, Empowering Others, and Putting Others First. These behaviors were not impacted by the overwhelming majority of the respondents' selected demographic variables. The three exceptions were positive associations between age and Helping Others, years of attending college and Empowering Behaviors, and years of attending college and Putting Others First.

### Conclusions

Based on the results, it was concluded the GED graduates who participated in the study demonstrated servant leadership behaviors and the overwhelming majority of such behaviors was not related to their demographic characteristics. Older GED graduates are more likely to help others, and those with longer years of college education are more likely to demonstrate empowering behaviors and putting others first. Due to the non-experimental nature of the study, no causal inferences were drawn and the external validity was limited to the study's participants because of the non-probability nature of the sampling.

## Discussion

The study was exploratory in nature, examining and documenting the servant leadership behaviors of a non-probability sample of GED graduates who had received scholarships from the Education is Our Freedom (EIOF) program. The study was delimited to South Texas due to EIOF's reach.

Being successful in higher education can be challenging and requires strategies to help facilitate success. Scholarships offer the ability to offset some of the expenses of higher education not provided through grants and student loans. The EIOF scholarships present "second chances" through financial contributions, coupled with mentorship that students receive from the EIOF (Nix, Lion, Michalak & Christensen, 2015; Norris, Sitton, & Baker, 2017).

The review of the literature suggested a paucity of research focusing on GED earners and servant leadership behaviors; however, other topics relevant to student success (e.g., persistence, retention, social capital, and motivation) were noted. Published research on GED graduates and community colleges was found, which was not surprising, because GED graduates typically start their higher education by attending community colleges due to affordability and proximity (Jurgen, 2010).

The review of the literature on leadership showed that servant leadership is among the top emerging leadership theories. Servant leadership in educational environments may lead to servant teaching conducive to student learning. Both are synonymous and relate to the leader's/teacher's intrinsic satisfaction by leading through focusing on the follower/student. Higher educational institutions can be instrumental in providing an excellent environment to facilitate servant leadership behaviors (Greenleaf, 1970).

The review of the literature showed that servant leadership is recognized for focusing on influencing followers (Green, 2014). Since Greenleaf (1970) did not offer either a definitive definition for servant leadership or an instrument to measure it, scholars have been diligently searching for answers to the inefficiencies. To address the absence of a definitive definition, Spears (1998) identified the 10 typical characteristics of a servant leader, namely, (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to growth, and (10) building community. Instruments to measure servant leadership are centered around developing others, building community, and demonstrating ethical behaviors (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Green, Rodriguez, Wheeler, & Baggerly-Hinojosa, 2015; Greenleaf, 1970; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008; Sendjay, Sarros & Santora, 2008; Van Dierendonk, 20110).

As Van Dierendonk (2011) posited, servant leadership theory intertwines with other leadership theories such as Charismatic leadership. In addition, servant leadership theory may interact with other complimentary leadership behavioral theories, like those that expand from motivation to disorienting dilemmas (Vidic, Burton, Pickering & Start, 2016). Proactive SLT training (or practice) may lead to exemplary servant leadership. As it relates to education, servant leadership is synonymous to servant teaching. Teachers and school administrators may influence their students similar to how servant leaders influence their followers, that is, unselfishly, and focusing on the follower/student (Noland & Richards, 2015; Greenleaf, 1970).

The study was inspired by the researcher's years of focusing on leadership as it relates to higher education, believing that industry leaders and experts can be instrumental in embracing and promoting servant leadership. As a GED graduate herself, the researcher delimited the study to such individuals. The study was guided by Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) that

states individuals with natural desires to serve have the potential to become leaders (Greenleaf, 1970).

### Implications

Emotional Healing and Conceptual Skills received were the highest agreed-upon servant leadership behaviors among the GED scholarship recipients who participated in the study. With respect to Emotional Healing, it suggests that a GED graduate realizes the importance of caring about others' personal well-being, taking the time to have personal conversation with others, recognizing when others are feeling down, and knowing that others may seek his/her assistance when they have personal problems. The presence of Conceptual Skills suggests that a GED graduate would like to handle complex problems, to know if there is something wrong with work and/or school, to understand the educational institution and its goals, and to solve work- or school-related problems with new or creative ideas.

Creating Value and Behaving Ethically were the next two highest servant leadership behaviors. Creating Value suggests that a GED graduate is aware of the importance of giving back to the community, is interested in helping others, is involved in community and/or school activities, and encourages others to volunteer in the community and/or school. Behaving Ethically signifies honesty and ethical standards. Although the study participants indicated agreement with creating values behaviors, it received the least endorsement as the behavior that applied to them.

Helping Others Grow was 5<sup>th</sup> among the servant leadership behaviors. A person with this behavior is interested in making sure others reach their professional and academic goals, provides others with the needed information to develop new skills, assists others in making career development a priority, and would like to know about other people's goals. Interestingly,

this behavior was endorsed the most by the study's respondents when asked to indicate the servant leadership behaviors that applied to them.

Empowering Others was ranked 6<sup>th</sup>, which is indicative of four behaviors. First, giving others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the best way they can. Second, giving others the responsibility to make important decisions. Third, encouraging others to handle important tasks by themselves. Fourth, realizing that others do not have to consult with him in making important decisions.

Putting Others First was last. A person with this servant leadership behavior does what s/he can do help others, sacrifices own interest to help others meet their needs, puts others' best interest above his/her own, and cares deeply about others' success.

If servant leadership behaviors are not presented to students in higher education, then there is the potential that they may not be prepared as leaders of the future. Armed with a degree in hand does not guarantee leadership positions in the community nor in the workforce. Mastering leadership skills may contribute to upward mobility. The GED graduates may be better positioned to raise their socio-economic status by not only obtaining college degrees but also possessing and practicing servant leadership.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

The study's delimitations, limitations, and assumptions provide opportunities for future research: (1) due to the non-probability sampling, external validity was limited to the study's participants; (2) the study was delimited to the GED graduates who had received a scholarship from EIOF; (3) the study was further delimited to the seven subscales of servant leadership: Emotional Healing, Creating Value, Conceptual Skills, Empowering Behaviors, Helping Others,

Putting Others First, and Behaving Ethically; and (4) the study assumed that the participants were truthful in completing the survey instrument.

A replication of the study with GED graduates who did not receive the EIOF scholarship is recommended. For greater understanding of servant leadership behaviors among students enrolled in higher education, it is recommended to replicate the study at various college settings (e.g., public, private, HSI, non-HSI). It would be further recommended to research GED graduates' servant leadership behaviors and the applicability to persistence in pursuing college education. This study was delimited to few demographic characteristics, which mainly had nothing to do with servant leadership. The investigation of other variables such as family type (single-family household, dual parent household, birth-order) or community type (urban, suburban, metro) may be helpful in assessing the link between servant leadership and individual characteristics. Conducting qualitative investigations to document the perspectives of concerned individuals can be helpful in our understanding of servant leadership.

### Personal Reflection

Conducting the dissertation research provided me with an opportunity to challenge myself as an educational leadership student focused on higher education. Although I have experience teaching undergraduate classes, I believe I have learned how to better address the many challenges faced by students, including how to facilitate servant leadership. I believe that my experiences, coupled with my academics, will help me be a better advocate for higher education. In an era where opportunities seem bountiful, there are some restrictions and limitations to what a person can do to increase his/her socio-economic status. Through higher education, some of those restrictions and limitations may be lifted. Dr. Hector P. Garcia's quote, "Education is our freedom, and education should be everyone's business" has been meaningful

to many due to the implication that education is what sets one apart and does not keep one tied down to a lower socio-economic status, but rather, it opens opportunities that may not be available to those without education.

Failure to address this group of students can create bigger and longer lasting challenges for the student, as well as for local, state, and federal entities that provide services and incur monumental expenses in the process (Hernandez, Slate, & Joyne, 2015). There is no one single solution or magic pill to address student needs, especially those of a GED graduate. Nor is there any evidence that servant leadership will address any of the student needs. Most likely, combination of strategies must be put in place to address the multitude of challenges, which at times, are not rooted in academics. To address academic challenges, colleges and universities must establish and promote services such as mentoring, tutoring, and group classes. To address non-academic challenges, student services have taken steps such as establishing food pantries, and school health care professionals provide contacts to local groups that can help with emergency housing or services.

I have gained extensive and enduring interest, and expanded my knowledge on the how, where, when, and why GED graduates struggle in higher education. I am delighted when I learn about a new process put in place that may help address problems GED graduates may face (even though that may not be the group being targeted). The focus for the study was on servant leadership with this group of students who have most likely experienced a disorienting dilemma, (or perhaps a multitude of them since they often intertwine) but are now ready to embrace and address their obstacles as adult learners and potential servant leaders (Mezirow, 1997; Plageman, 2011; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

This research has provided me with insights on what an aspiring educational leader and advocate should understand at a time when higher education has been recognized as an influential predictor of economic success. Students that are “prepared” to become servant leaders may be better prepared to succeed not only in their quest for higher education, but also in society as a well (Greenleaf, 1970).

After conducting the research, I am left with a thought provoking question: Is a GED graduate as prepared to start college and be on the same academic level as colleagues who are high school graduates or dual credit earners even if they should demonstrate servant leadership behaviors?

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## APPENDIX A

### Servant Leadership Questionnaire

The web-based survey is organized as a two-part instrument and your responses will be kept confidential.

In Part I, you are asked to indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with behaviors that relate to your leadership skills.

In Part II, you are asked to provide some demographic information.

For the purpose of the study, servant leadership states that an individual has a natural feeling to want to serve others and that by doing so, leadership follows. The theory also states that once served by a servant leader, a follower wants to emulate the leader and become a servant leader himself/herself.

## CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study, entitled, *Servant Leadership and its Demographic Correlates in a Sample of GED Graduates*. The study focuses on servant leadership and your perceptions of leadership behaviors. For the purpose of the study, servant leadership theory states that the leader serves the follower unselfishly, and leader has the trust of the follower because s/he leads with authenticity, humility, and trustworthiness. The study is conducted at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. If you decide to participate in the study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey. The survey may take 15-20 minutes to complete.

### **What are the risks involved?**

The risks are minimal and not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **What are the possible benefits?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the study's findings may have a benefit in the field of higher education leadership.

### **Do I have to participate?**

No, your participation is voluntary and you may decide to drop out at any time throughout the study with no penalties.

### **Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

No one, and no identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any report that may be published. Your name and/or IP address will not be collected.

### **Who do I contact with questions about the research?**

You may contact the researcher, Sylvia Del Bosque, at [sdelbosque@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:sdelbosque@islander.tamucc.edu) or 512-517-6682.

### **Who do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

The research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Office, at [irb@tamucc.edu](mailto:irb@tamucc.edu) or 361-825-2497.

### **Agreement to Participate**

You agree to participate in the study by completing the following survey. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Please do not complete the survey if you do not wish to participate in the study.

**Part I. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

**4 = Strongly agree    3 = Agree    2 = Disagree    1 = Strongly disagree,**

Others seek help from me if they have a personal problem.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I emphasize the importance of giving back to the community and/or school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I can tell if something related to work and/or school is going wrong.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I give others the responsibility to make important decisions about their own jobs or academics.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I help others make career development a priority.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I care about others' success more than my own.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I hold high ethical standards.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I care about others' personal well-being.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I am always interested in helping people in the community and/or school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I can handle complex problems.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I encourage others to handle important work and/or school decisions on their own.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I am interested in making sure others reach their career goals and/or academic goals.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I put others' best interest above my own.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I am always honest.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I take time to talk to others on a personal level.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I am involved in community and/or school activities.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I have a thorough understanding of the educational institution and its goals.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I give others the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I provide others with work or school information that enable them to develop new skills.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I sacrifice my own interests to meet others' needs.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I do not compromise ethical principles to achieve success.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I recognize when others are feeling down without asking them.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I encourage others to volunteer in the community and/or school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I can solve work or school problems with new or creative ideas.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

If others need to make important decisions at work and/or school, they do not need to consult with me.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I want to know about others' career/educational goals.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I do what I can to make others' job and/or school work easier.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

I value honesty more than money.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

## Part II. Demographic Information

What is your age?

What is your gender?

Male  
Female

What is your Ethnicity?

American Indian or Alaska Native  
Asian  
Black or African American  
Hispanic or Latino  
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
White  
Other

What is the number of years since obtaining GED? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the classification of your school?

Vocational or trade school  
2-year college  
4-year university  
Not applicable

What is the number of years attending college? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your college classification?

Freshman  
Sophomore  
Junior  
Senior

What is your enrollment status?

Part-time  
Full-time

What is the anticipated number of years to obtain a college degree? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you employed?

- Yes, part-time
- Yes, full-time
- No

Are your friends and family supportive of your pursuit of higher education?

- Yes
- No

Do you believe you are a servant leader?

- Yes
- No

Who has been a model of servant leadership in your life? (check all that apply)

- A family member
- A friend
- A teacher
- My religious leader
- My community leader
- Someone else, please specify

Which behaviors do you believe you may demonstrate? Check all that apply.

- Providing emotional healing for others.
- Creating value for the community.
- Demonstrating conceptual skills.
- Empowering others.
- Helping others grow and succeed.
- Putting others first.
- Behaving ethically.