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Servant Leadership in the Context of Mosque: A Qualitative Case Study of Muslim Women's Perspectives

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Abstract: This research provides an exploratory analysis of how Muslim women perceive servant leadership in the context of Mosque. The study consists of 8 long interviews with Muslim women, and conceptualizes sources of servant leadership in the context of Mosque by investigating Muslim women's perceptions of the Imam's leadership style. The emerging taxonomy illuminates five categories and fifteen sub-categories of Muslim women's perceived servant leadership origin, relating to the impact Imam and Mosque have on: (1) Serviceability, (2) masculinity, (3) community, (4) accessibility, and (5) inclusivity. Findings show disparities between women and men and demonstrate the fact that Muslim women do benefit from Imam's leadership, services, and resources offered in Mosque; however, the benefits to women are disproportionate and different from men. In addition to making a vital contribution to the scarce literature on Muslim women's perspectives, this article provides stakeholders with a comprehensive set of issues which may evoke favorable/unfavorable perceptions and offers insight to direct improvement efforts in addressing these issues.

Keywords: servant leadership; wellbeing; Imam; Mosque

1. Introduction

The question of servant leadership and the desire to serve others has become a central and enduring quest for scholars and practitioners of leadership. Indeed, majority of the existing literature relating to servant leadership explores this type of leadership in the Christian context (Engstrom 1976; Whitehead and Whitehead 1992; Nouwen 1989; Lavery 2009) as well as organizational, educational, spiritual, religious, and cultural settings (Abdalla and Al-Homoud 2001; Bekis 2006; Jogulu and Wood 2008; Jogulu 2010; Ayrançi and Semercioz 2011; Hage and Posner 2015). Certainly, the Christian perspectives among other views are of great importance, but to develop further comprehensive understanding, researchers must also investigate servant leadership in the context of Mosque and, more importantly, how this type of leadership is perceived by Muslim women. Despite a considerable extension of the related research body over the last two decades, literature focusing on Muslim women's view of servant leadership, especially the Imam, is still in need of in-depth exploration.

The general perspective of what does and does not constitute servant leadership (Sendjaya and Sarros 2002) may be congruent with Muslim women's perceptions, and, as I discovered, the current knowledge about Muslim women's servant leadership beliefs and values are near non-existent. Yet, women's subjective beliefs (Alfred 2003) and servant leadership perceptions act as sources of motivation (Bande et al. 2016) and may ultimately influence workplace climate, both to the benefit and detriment of religious, private, and non-private organizations.

The influence of servant leadership on workplace motivation, workplace satisfaction, and workplace performance has been widely studied. The general conclusion of these studies

reflect uniformity in reporting that servant leadership is a good predictor of motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Anderson 2005; Cerit 2009). Yet, the beliefs and perceptions of Muslim women about leadership, especially servant leadership remain unexplored. While there are many reasons for the unavailability of women's perspectives on a wide variety of issues, one of the dominant force behind the absence of such information, according to feminist scholars (CITE FEMINIST SCHOLARS), is the patriarchal system, which contributes to the silencing of women, especially women of color, from becoming potential leaders (Biereema and Cseh 2003; Parker 2004; Minnis and Callahan 2010).

Appreciating this perspective coupled with servant context-bound leadership beliefs and perceptions (i.e., organizational, spiritual, religious, and cultural), the fundamental question this study sets out to address is: how do Muslim women perceive the services and practices of their Imam in light of servant leadership?

2. Purpose of Research

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand first-hand Muslim women's perceptions of servant leadership as they relate to their perceived servant leader, the Imam. The secondary purpose of this enquiry is to understand Muslim women's perspectives of the Imam's leadership, services, and resources available in the Mosque as they benefit women and contribute to their wellbeing. Specifically, the study explores the perceptions of Muslim women who actively practice (i.e., go to the Mosque for praying) Islam. The study results may provide meaningful insights for researchers and organizations seeking to promote a climate of diversity and inclusivity.

To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Muslim women perceive their servant leader, the Imam?
2. How do Muslim women benefit from the Imam's servant leadership, services, and resources offered in the Mosque?
3. What are Muslim women's beliefs and values related to servant leadership in context of Mosque?

To the questions of who you are and how you think and see the world, your answers suggest the degree of credibility in the world of research. Thus, reflecting on positionality tend to increase trustworthiness of the researcher and the research process itself (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In this view, my gender (i.e., male and straight), national origin (i.e., from a Muslim-majority country), faith (i.e., Islam), marital status (i.e., single) travel to countries in the West and East, visit to museums, historical sites, and religious centers (i.e., Mosques, Churches, Temples, and Synagogues), background as a Fulbright scholar, student in tier one research institution in the United States played a role in undertaking this research. Additionally, my knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of women in different societies (i.e., in some Islamic countries women play an active role in social, political, and economic aspects of day-to-day life and in others their roles revolves around homes), belief that women have as much potential as men, if not more, dedication to advance women rights, and realistic view of the world might have acted in the development of researcher questions stated above. In light of this position, I seek to explore how Muslim women understand the role of the Imam as a servant leader; what are their experiences in the Mosque, and lastly, how women describe received benefits (if any) from Imam's leadership.

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to advance scientific knowledge, the need for theoretical framework has been vehemently emphasized in conducting research (Mendoza Diaz et al. 2019). In the absence of hypotheses and theoretical framework, undertaking research may still be a scientific activity; however, theoretically uninformed studies are deemed rudimentary and often demand subsequent enquires in order to qualify for making scientific contribution (Shavelson and Towne 2002).

A theory is a comprehensive, coherent, and internally consistent system of ideas about a phenomenon (Knowles et al. 2015). Despite its impractical nature, humans are voracious

consumer of theory because it helps us understand to make meaning of what exists around us (Christensen et al. 2004). Whether what we think exists are abstract or concrete, theory enables us to make a coherent sense of our ontology. Leadership, for instance, is a socially constructed and abstract concept whose meaning and explication are often contested (Robert 1995) but it is necessary for the effective management of organizations and societies (Parris and Peachey 2013; Udogu 2008).

Conceptually and circumstantially, earlier scholarship on servant leadership as, for instance, those of the American management scholar and consultant, Robert Greenleaf (1977), devoted tremendous efforts in attempts to study characteristics that might describe a person as servant leader. For his contribution, leading up to the development of what are now called the abstract and general definitions of servant leadership (Van Dierendonck 2011), Greenleaf is regarded as the father of servant leadership concept (Buchen 1998) and his conceptual framework is widely used in the realm of leadership studies.

Be that as it may, it is axiomatic that there exist many theories, models, metaphors, and frameworks of leadership (Udogu 2008), some of which are contradicting as to what leadership is and what it is not (Ladkin 2010). This abandon existence of theories simply suggests how cumbersome it is for researchers to clearly conceptualize and articulate features that are conducive to leadership discourse. Nevertheless, in order to achieve the purpose of this article, the theoretical framework employed draws on the seminal work on servant leadership undertaken by Spears (1995) and Laub (1999) and augmented with analysis provided by Van Dierendonck (2011) and other contemporary scholars (see Albert and Spears 2012; Greasley and Bocârnea 2014).

Although the conceptual framework for this study, which is described in detail subsequently, rest on six features (i.e., develop follower, share leadership, instill a sense of community, display authenticity, value followers, and provide direction) was grounded in servant leadership principles developed by Laub (1999), it is important to point out several scholars that have contributed to the understanding of servant leadership and how it is theorized. According to Van Dierendonck (2011); Laub (1999) was first to develop an instrument, using the Delphi method and integrative literature review, to ascertain essential qualities of servant leadership. As a consequence of his extensive study, there came firstborn framework that conceptualized servant leadership in six clusters and is now widely used by scholars and practitioners for research and practice purposes (Van Dierendonck 2011; Parris and Peachey 2013).

4. Literature Review

Generally, the thrust of this paper can be divided into three parts with the first breaking down the basics of what it means to be a servant leader. This section will unpack loaded terminologies that can sometimes be confusing. It will explore questions such as: Is Imam a servant leader? How? And Why? After reading part one, you will have a better understanding as to how servant leadership applies in the context of Mosque. Part two will help you understand the methodology employed to collect data, analyze data, and interpret the findings. In this part, you will learn about the sample size, method used to recruit participants, participants and their demographics. Lastly, part three will explain the findings, highlight limitations, and provide an overall conclusion.

Servant Leadership

In general, servant leadership refers to “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first . . . to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served (Greenleaf 1977, p. 27). Thus, in order to construct a society that advances democracy, development, growth, and human welfare (Graham 1991; Spears 1995), the leader must genuinely serve his or her followers (Greenleaf 1977). First coined by Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf 1988), servant leadership has increasingly become a widely accepted topic for research and practice. Initially, servant leadership according to Greenleaf (1977) was seen as a lifelong journey and a way of life. Subsequently, scholars have dedicated tremendous efforts to conceptualize servant leadership and unlock its secrets for practice. Seminal scholars of servant

leadership as, for instance, [Spears \(1995\)](#); [Laub \(1999\)](#), and [Russell and Stone \(2002\)](#) enumerated several characteristics conducive to servant leadership.

Drawing on [Greenleaf \(1977\)](#) framework, [Spears \(1995\)](#) identified ten features describing servant leadership style: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, and commitment. Possessing these characteristics according to [Spears \(1995\)](#) is necessary for growth and development at multiple levels: individual, group, community, and society. In a similar form, [Laub \(1999\)](#) proposed that servant leaders prioritize the good of people over his or her self-interest. After conducting an extensive analysis of servant leadership research, [Laub \(1999\)](#) concluded that six features distinguish servant leaders. Included in these features are valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership ([Laub 1999](#)).

Writing on servant leadership, [Russell and Stone \(2002\)](#) operationalized this type of leadership by proposing nine attributes. In their view, servant leader leads with a clear vision, believes in honesty, shows integrity, establishes trust, admire service, models behavior, pioneers work, appreciates and empowers others. In another systematic review of servant leadership, [Van Dierendonck \(2011\)](#) introduced a conceptual model, revealing six features unique to servant leaders; ranging from developing and empowering people, displaying humility, possessing authenticity, manifesting interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and indicating wise and sensible stewardship. Beginning with serving followers as its starting point ([Greenleaf 1977](#); [Stone et al. 2004](#)), servant leadership creates an environment that promotes participation, care, virtue, and development ([Russell and Stone 2002](#); [Van Dierendonck 2011](#); [Hunter et al. 2013](#)).

In principle, scholars have developed a wide range of conceptual frameworks, models, and tools to formulate the discourse on servant leadership ([Liden et al. 2008](#); [Parris and Peachey 2013](#)). Summary of the present literature suggests six themes shedding light on the concept and practice of servant leadership (see [Van Dierendonck 2011](#)): (1) develop follower, (2) share leadership, (3) instill a sense of community, (4) display authenticity, (5) value followers, and (6) provide direction. In short, servant leader is described as someone whose actions are reflective of the six mentioned categories ([Van Dierendonck 2011](#)). The half dozen themes are reflecting the work of seminal scholars of servant leadership such as [Spears \(1995\)](#); [Laub \(1999\)](#). Subsequently, these themes are further analyzed and synthesized for clarification purposes (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Describes the six features describing servant leader.

Features	Description
1. Develops followers	The key to developing followers lies in the leader's role to appreciate and recognize the need for development at the individual level (Greenleaf 1977 ; Spears 1995). In so doing, it is incumbent upon the leader to develop a deep understanding of current development level and potential for development both at individual as well as organizational (Bass 1985 ; Conger and Kanungo 1988). This feature (i.e., develops followers) of servant leadership enables a leader to inspire confidence for growth and motivate people towards learning (Laub 1999 ; Sendjaya et al. 2008). The servant leader, in this view, is an agent of development at multiple levels: personal, professional, and organization.
2. Share leadership	Sharing leadership, according to Laub (1999) , is a common characteristic of servant leaders, which is reflected mainly in their practice of sharing power, expressing humility, and relying to persuasion, not coercion. Van Dierendonck (2011) associates humility with servant leadership and points that servant leaders practice humility by prioritizing the needs and interests of their followers. Servant leaders are persons who value participation in the decision making (Posner and Kouzes 1993). In summary, sharing leadership is one of the attributes of servant leaders when exercised leads to an inclusive environment and level playing field for all.

Table 1. Cont.

Features	Description
3. Instill a sense of community	Instilling a sense of community involves advancing diversity and inclusivity as well as embracing collaboration and cooperation (Spears 1995; Laub 1999; Russell and Stone 2002). This feature of servant leadership is reflected in the leader's ability to listen to different viewpoints, promote relationship, and encourage teamwork (Laub 1999). The role of anchoring a sense of community, in fact, is a distinguishing characteristics of servant leadership (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006). This feature of servant leadership according to Van Dierendonck (2011) allows leaders to mobilize others towards a common responsibility and objective.
4. Display authenticity	In the eyes of Russell and Stone (2002) authenticity is referred to expressing honesty and integrity. Expressing authenticity in this sense is reflection of servant leader's commitment to establishing an environment that is fair and just for all (Russell and Stone 2002). Some scholars describe authenticity by referring to consistency in action and behaviors (Avolio and Gardner 2005). Others see authenticity in light of spiritual ethos (Barbuto and Wheeler 2006). Scholars in this camp, argue that servant leaders draw on spiritual morals to assist their followers' to find meaning and purpose in both life and work (Fry 2003; Sendjaya et al. 2008).
5. Value followers	Greenleaf (1977) asserted that servant leaders value followers by listening to their concerns, respecting their viewpoints, and believing in their potential. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) go further by associating servant leadership with interpersonal acceptance and emotional healing of followers. A servant leader is someone who values followers by respecting their perspectives, listening to their voices, trusting their judgement, and displaying compassion for their concerns (Laub 1999). This attribute of servant leadership is equated to playing the role of a servant rather than acting as servant (Sendjaya et al. 2008).
6. Provide direction	Mobilizing followers towards a desirable direction is a distinct feature of effective leadership (Kotter 1990; Posner and Kouzes 1993). In general, providing direction suggests that in order for a leader to lead effectively, he or she must have a clear vision of the desired future (Greenleaf 1977). Having a clear vision of the future enables the servant leader to set up goals, provide direction, empower followers to take actions, and remove barriers in the face of achieving goals (Laub 1999). Providing direction towards an envisioned state (goal) creates powerful incentives for shared values (Russell and Stone 2002; Kotter 1990), allowing followers to see themselves together in the struggle for achieving the ultimate objective.

In addition to Laub (1999) contribution to the discernment of servant leadership, Russell and Stone (2002) and Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) are among other scholars who have made a profound impact in the quest for unlocking servant leadership characteristics. As a tenable solution, servant leadership and its human and democratic approach has tremendous appealing power to organization of all kinds (i.e., profit, non-profit, national, multinational, state agencies, and religious institutions). Because of its humanistic and universalistic character, servant leadership has been explored in a wide verity of contexts, especially religious contexts (see Wallace 2007; Shirin 2014).

5. Servant Leadership in the Context Islam

Given the shift in leadership paradigm, from that of power and prestige to service and stewardship, the need for understanding leadership in the spiritual context has been widely recognized (Bekker 2009). Lipman-Blumen (1996) addressed this paradigmatic transformation in terms of individualism and collectivism. While the former is associated with competition, the latter is referred to cooperation. Present scholarship on leadership in the context of theology and beyond centers on cooperation and draws widely on post-patriarchal, post-structural, and other critical paradigms (Bekker 2009). Precisely, in the context of theology, researchers recognize the existence of "spirit" in the ontological domain of values (Kourie 2006). Servant leadership, according to Bekker (2010), serves as the most comprehensive framework offering meaningful insights in the quest for understanding leadership in the context of theology. In the following section, servant leadership and its associated spirituality is compared with the religious philosophy of Islam.

Leadership in Islam revolves around Prophet Muhammad and it is generally accepted that the best leader is one who comprehends and follows the prophet's way of resolving issues at all levels: individual, group, community, and society (Kriger and Seng 2005). Leadership referred to in *The Glorious Quran: translation and commentary* by (Ali 1975) "those who, if we establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong" (21:73). In Islam everyone serves Allah and the best way to serve Allah is to follow the Prophet's way of life. The Quran also referred to Prophet Muhammad as an exemplary leader, guidance, teacher and call upon believers of the faith to follow him. In essence, the general assumption in Islam is that the Prophet possesses divine attributes—qualities that are bestowed on him by God. Lastly, the Quranic call for Muslim to follow Prophet Muhammad ways of life establishes his legitimacy as a servant leader.

The concept of servant-leadership is clearly present in Islam and Prophet Muhammad is distinctly identified as an exemplary servant leader (Kriger and Seng 2005). Yet, this type of leadership remained less or unexplored in the context of Islam, more precisely in the context of Mosque. The literature review on servant leadership and its associated spirituality within the Islamic philosophy pointed to the grand narrative of Islam—the best way to serve Allah is to follow Prophet Muhammad's way of life. And so doing will lead to peace, prosperity, and a balance life not only at the individual level, but also at the family, community, and society levels. In light of this grand narrative along with references to leadership in the Quran as well as the six themes previously identified, the author seek to explore Muslim women perspectives on servant leadership in the context of Mosque.

6. Methodology

To achieve the objective of this study, a qualitative case study research method was employed. Case study according to Robert Yin (1994) is "scholarly inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (335). Pointing to its distinct characteristics, Dooley (2002) refers to case study research as a method used to study and understand issues embedded in complex patterns. Because case study research encompasses comprehensive analysis of the context of a given phenomenon, it is widely used method for emphasizing contextual details (Dooley 2002). Thus, for the given reason, case study method was best suited not only for identifying and interpreting themes, but also achieving the overall objective of this enquiry.

Thematic analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2018) of the semi-structured interviews with eight Muslim women was conducted. While interview is a commonly used method in exploratory research (Taylor 2005), semi-structured interview format is by far the most widely used interview method in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). What really made semi-structured interview format desirable for this study is its power for creating a conducive environment for reciprocity between the researcher and the research participant (Galletta 2013). This study offers the first comprehensive analysis of Muslim Women's perspective on servant leadership in the context of Mosque.

6.1. Sample

Generally, qualitative inquiry centers on an elaborative exploration of a small yet diverse sample (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). While the number of subjects vary from study to study, a sample size of eight is deemed good enough to satisfy the requirement for many qualitative inquiries (McCracken 1988). After eight long interviews, it was evidently possible to reach theoretical saturation (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Contrary to existing man-dominated research on Servant Leadership, the focus of this article is on Muslim women. Contrasting participants' profiles were prerequisite for capturing the variety of prevailing values, perceptions, and feelings. To include multifaceted views, this study employed a theoretical sampling method, guided by a process of on-going comparison (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Participants were recruited via convenience and multiplicity (snowball) sampling technique (Lune and Berg 2016). Consistent with Internal Review Board permission, all participants in this study were residing in the United States.

Participants were all Muslim women, coming from different walks of life (i.e., race, color, ethnicity, national origin, marital status, age, and education status). Efforts were made to recruit Muslim women who go to the Mosque not only for prayers, but also participate in events and activities facilitated by the Mosque. Additionally, the researcher reached out to Muslim women who were actively serving on the board of the Mosques or serving on the board of Muslim Student Associations in major universities in United States. Majority of the participants were born and raised in the United States. In addition to age between 20–60 years, other characteristics of participants included student, professor, corporate manager, self-employed, convert, single, married, mother, and divorced (Table 2).

Table 2. Describe the demographics of interviewees.

Interviewee	Age	Marital Status	National Origin	Professional Status
Int. 1	20+	Single	North Africa	Master Student
Int. 2	25+	Single	Central Asia	Self-employed
Int. 3	25+	Married	Middle East	PhD Student
Int. 4	30+	Single	European	PhD Student
Int. 5	30+	Married	Middle East	PhD Student
Int. 6	35+	Married	Central Asia	Corporate
Int. 7	45+	Married	South Asia	Social Worker
Int. 8	55+	Single	Africa	Professor

Notes: Int. = Interviewee number 1; 20+ = More than 20.

6.2. Data Collection

The consideration of Muslim women perspectives of the Imam as a servant leader is inclined to social desirability symptoms and is therefore not only subjective and personal but also sensitive topic (Lu and Gilmour 2006). In light of this view, one-to-one interview data collection method was deemed the most appropriate. Because of the unexpected COVID-19 global Pandemic in the midst of this study, the interviews were conducted online, using Zoom platform. A semi-structured interview format allowed for an exact, yet broad form of dialog and created an environment conducive for discussion. The synchronous online conversation combined with the informal interview format in the comfort of participants' home provided a relaxed atmosphere and consequently, the subjects were eager to engage and answer questions openly. Participants' comfort was essential, considering the sensitivity of the topic and the aim to minimize social desirability bias.

In addition to seeking insights from expert researchers, the interview guidelines were developed following a review of cultural and analytical suggestions to facilitate a process of familiarization and defamiliarization (McCracken 1988). After some minor refinements, the guide repeatedly evolved in the face of emerging themes and patterns (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The questions were open-ended and presented to all participants in order. Beginning with more general topics revolving around the nature of servant leadership to more specific practice of servant leadership in the Mosque, and then concluding with more specific subjects, summarizing with instances of perceived benefits of servant leadership practice and a discussion of servant leadership-specific examples. Given the unprecedented circumstances caused by the COVID-19 global Pandemic, the data collection was conducted online. Accounting for the active participation and interaction, interviews lasted between 45 min to 110 min.

6.3. Data Analysis

With the consent of interviewees, all interviews were recorded and transcribed at full length, yielding a total of 6 pages of verbatim transcripts and 6 pages of field notes for analysis.

Data analysis took place during the data collection process (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The on-going comparison followed by subsequent elaboration and refinement provided the opportunity for both processes to intertwine, a strategy tend to be useful in the context of exploratory research (McCracken 1988).

To make sense of the data, interview transcripts and field notes were read and re-read in search for identifying recurring themes, patterns, and relationships. Drawing on the counsel of [Spiggle \(1994\)](#), the analysis process relied on procedures suggested for developing categories (i.e., coding deductively and inductively), dimensionalization (i.e., masculinity versus femininity, more benefits versus less benefits, favorable versus unfavorable), abstraction (i.e., common leadership features), comparison, integration, iteration, and refutation. In the aftermath of this analytical process, a review process was undertaken in quest for establishing the validity of the findings ([Kvale 1996](#); [Spiggle 1994](#)). This review process involved sharing results with several interviewees and a professor of qualitative research. In both instances, feedback was sought on the interpretations of data. The review process allowed for further clarification and interpretation of the data and categories under questions.

The analysis process showed no significant differences between categories when the data from interviewees were compared. Though coming from different regions (i.e., the Middle East, Arica, Europe, and Asia) of the world, participants' perceptions and feelings about servant leadership in the context of Mosque were close to identical. The findings presented subsequently reflect the shared views of the sample population.

7. Findings

The researcher set out to identify and conceptualize potential sources of servant leadership, namely the kind of servant leadership activities taking place in mosques; especially activities that evoke favorable and unfavorable servant leadership perceptions. Interviews resulted in elicitation of a wide variety of explanations, most pointing to values, traditions, practices, and services that constitute servant leadership in the context of Mosque. The data generated during interviews had to be conceptualized into distinctive domains of servant leaderships in line with [Spears \(1995\)](#); [Laub \(1999\)](#) reflections and categorizations.

The data was clustered in line with participants' perceptions and according to consequences of servant leadership practice in the context of Mosque. The emerging domains of servant leadership practice in the stated context therefore reflect the questions of whom or what will ultimately be affected by the perceived justifiable or unjustifiable leadership practices of the Imam by respondents. Because the positionality of researcher affect each step of the research process, including interpretation of the findings, the fundamental question therefore is: what are the best ways to present results. [Sandelowski and Barroso \(2002\)](#) suggested to report results in a way that will make it comfortable for the diverse and intended audience to ascertain.

In light of that understanding, data analysis revealed five domains of servant leadership, each comprised of a three subthemes as depicted in [Figure 1](#). In the discussion of the findings that follows, the five domains are: (1) Serviceability, (2) Masculinity, (3) Community, (4) Accessibility, and (5) Inclusivity. The ensuing discussion reflects the perceptions and views of Muslim women about their Imam, services, and resources offered in the Mosque. What will become notable and evident in this discussion is the contentment of women with received benefits, despite so much recognized complexities and difficulties, in the context of the Mosque. Lastly, the data from participants pointed that culture plays a dominant role in terms of leadership in the Mosque, Mosque management, access to services and resources for women, and the general treatment of women.

Serviceability	Masculinity	Community	Accessibility	Inclusivity
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
<p>1. Teaching men, women, & children</p> <p>2. Leading prayer (men & women)</p> <p>3. Performing ceremonies (i.e., marriage, funeral, etc.)</p>	<p>1. Men Centric teaching, activities, and events</p> <p>2. Imam and instructors are always men</p> <p>3. Man Benefit more than women</p>	<p>1. Sense of brotherhood, & sisterhood</p> <p>2. Collaboration on food, health, safety, education,</p> <p>3. Bonding people to people relationship</p>	<p>1. Services available 24/7</p> <p>2. Men has more direct access to leadership & services</p> <p>3. Women do benefit but less and often times indirectly</p>	<p>1. Most mosques in the U.S.A are inclusive than outside U.S.A.</p> <p>2. Culture plays a significant role in Mosque's inclusivity</p> <p>3. U.S.A born and raised Imams are more inclusive</p>

Figure 1. Depicts recurring themes.

One of the principle findings of this study involves understanding the Imam and the Mosque. The Imam is a leader in a space called the Mosque, where he offers or facilitates a wide variety of services. Included in these services are religious education, marriage, funeral, and welfare to people in the community. Reflecting on the proliferation of servant leadership in various contexts (i.e., organization, education, spiritual, and church), this article underscores the fact that today Muslim women’s perceptions of servant leadership in the context of Mosque are largely unknown and hence, makes a significant contribution to the dearth of literature on the topic. Indeed, this may be the first study to address the need for understanding Muslim women views about servant leadership in the context of Mosque. In this sense, the developed taxonomy provides a natural extension to existing research on servant leadership and a valuable prerequisite for any future studies in the area of leadership in the context of Mosque.

7.1. Serviceability

The taxonomy may appear to share some similarities with the conceptual framework previously introduced, but diverges in several other ways. In the same view, the taxonomy may reveal some similarities with men perspectives of servant leadership in the context of Mosque (Hammer 2012). While respondents in this study are Muslim women, they reflected upon their experiences and the experiences of other Muslim women in their hometowns, they unanimously mentioned that women do benefit from services offered by the Imam; however, the benefits often come indirectly and in a limited form. For instance, one participant born and raised outside the U.S. said “Imam’s teaching benefited her and other women in her community only once a week on Fridays during Khutbah (religious teaching) in which the Imam delivers address to members of the community. She added, “I have the opportunity to attend Khutbah in person here in the United States, but back home [country of origin] women do not go to Mosques and neither are Mosques designed to accommodate women.” In Islamic traditions, only men are obliged to attend the call to prayer in the Mosque (Nyhagen 2019; Predelli 2008) and women, on the other hand, are obliged to pray, but not required to do so in the

Mosque. Some respondents prefer to pray and hear the Imam's teaching in the Mosque; others like to worship at the comfort of their homes. "I go to pray in the Mosque every Friday because I learn so much" said another interviewee. She elaborated further by stating:

"There is even free of charge Arabic language classes offered in the Mosque for adult women, like myself, who is non-Arab speaker. Then there is Quran classes offered just solo with the Imam, where there is just women and the Imam. The Imam is teaching them stories [about the Quran]. There is another program for high school kids, like they will have a lock in night, where the girls will spend the night [in the Mosque]. They talk about a variety of topics. For instance, things like I know it's a taboo topic, but we women don't pray when we are on our menstrual. There are certain etiquettes where you don't ask. Women don't fast when they are on their menstrual."

Depending on national customs and traditions, not all women attend Friday prayer at the Mosque pointed one of the women who was born and raised in North Africa. In some cultures, women have no option to pray in Mosque. In general, "women are not required to pray in Mosque" said the same woman from North Africa. She went further to mention that "In addition to teaching community members, the Imam participate in social events. For instance, when there is a wedding in the community, the Imam is invited to perform the marriage ceremony and become a witness to the process". In the same fashion, the Imam offers funeral service to both men and women alike. It was pointed regarding funeral ceremony and the role of the Imam to be one of the most important services he delivers to the community. Funeral, she described "... is a community event in all Islamic societies and here again, women are not required to participate in the funeral prayer or accompany the deceased to the burial site. But if women want to participate in such occasions, they can do so by standing up behind men lines." Despite the availability of occasions and options to the same participant, she has not participated in funeral prayers. "I haven't attended because I knew there would be few women If had gone" she added.

7.2. Masculinity

The role of men and women in many societies of the world is context-bound (Cornwall 2009). Beside culture, religion plays an important role in shaping how different we behave in different settings (Cornwall 2009). Holloway (1984) termed context-bound behaviors as "subjectposition". Holloway (1984) pointed that the position of men and women in mosque, church, family events and other social settings may be very different. The difference between the role of men and women is true and visible in the context of Mosque, where men dominate the space. Although, there is variations among predominantly Islamic countries: in some countries Mosques are gender inclusive and in others, they are gender exclusive.

Muslim women who were born and raised outside the United States described Mosques in their country origin to be exclusively masculine institutions, they remarked that Mosques in the United States were by far more inclusive. By contrast, their U.S. born and raised counterparts appreciated their role in the Mosque, but also pointed to the shortcomings in the sense that there is a gap between men and women in terms of access to the Imam, services, resources offered by the Mosque. Nearly all participants advocated for an active role of women in many aspects of the Mosque. For instance, it was pointed

"I would like to see women speak more in Khutbah and sermons. I respect that the Shaikh or Mufti possess the highest level education and that might be a requirement to deliver Khutbah and religious speeches ... , but sometimes there are women that do Islamic studies and some of them are PhDs or some of them maybe as qualified as Muftis (religious experts) for real or they [women] have gone to Haj (pilgrim) ... , I would like to qualified women speak on Friday Sermons."

Participants appreciated the religious obligations and distinctions relating to the role of men and women in Islam. In light of appreciating that traditionally the Imam has to be a man, one of the participant pointed to several other areas where improvement can be made and women can be allowed to play an equivalent role to that of men in the Mosque. As indicated in this quote: “There are some instances and I don’t know if that can happen everywhere. I have seen in retrospective, in California, women Imam leading the prayer, but it was only for women. So you have to be still in line with Islam. I am all for women empowerment. I am all for women to having their voices heard, but the traditional aspect of it a male leading the prayer, I still think it should be a male leading the prayer.”

In some way or another, all respondents described the term Imam equals man. Because men are required to perform Friday prayer in the Mosque together with congregation and women are not, this has historically resulted in the formation of Mosque as a masculine space (Batuman 2018). Additionally, some participants cited culture as an important instrument in the formation of traditions and social norms, regulating Mosque as a space to be used only by men. Culture may also legislate the Mosque as a space where the main prayer hall is allocated to men and a separate section designed as a secondary element appropriated to women. Although, this is not the case in every Islamic country. The cultural component is discussed in detail under the subheading, inclusivity.

Countries differ in the general degree to which their national cultures are masculine and feminine (Hofstede et al. 2010). Despite the central role of man in the Mosque, many of the respondents reported that they benefit from the Imam’s role as a servant leader. However, the benefits come indirectly. For instance, many of the Mosques are segregated putting men and women in separate halls. One participant observed that “women either pray in a separate hall or their section is separated by a barrier [i.e., glass wall or portable dividers]. The Imam conducts much of the religious activities [i.e., leading prayer, delivering speeches, religious sermons, etc.] in the men section. Women can listen and observe the Imam through a T.V. screen in their sections.” While these barriers become more relaxed, the idea behind such division is above all culturally driven. Provided these barriers along with culture-driven practices put women at disadvantage and hence, hindering their ability to benefit equally from services and resources provided in the Mosque.

7.3. Community

Reflecting upon the experiences of participants, it is argued that the concept of Mosque is context bound. In the Western context, Mosque is a space not only for religious worship, but also a platform for community activism: social, political, charitable, and welfare (Predelli 2008). In this sense, the Mosque is a platform providing opportunities to both men and women to come together as a community. There is credible evidence suggesting that the number of Muslim women practicing religion and participating in events and activities in the Mosque, especially, Mosques in Western countries, is rising (Bhimji 2009; Gilliat-Ray 2010). By contrast, in many parts of the Islamic world, the Mosque is a space used primarily by men to pray and socialize. Despite men dominated space, nearly all respondents in this study attested to the fact that Mosque is a symbol of community and Imam is the servant of that community. As noted:

“Yes, we also have a community of networking. For instance, my uncle is an assistant principle, he also volunteer at the other mosque [in his home town]. Our Mosque run on donations from the community. When I say it runs on donations, [it includes] everything the Sunday school where teacher teach K-through 12 grade, all of this is to try to teach children and adults Islamic studies and so we run on donation. It’s a lot of work, its how churches are run in the US. It’s a group good people trying to make a community.”

The way a servant leader conducts his or her state of the affairs can largely and directly and indirectly impact collaboration and cooperation among congregation (Russell and Stone 2002) in the community. Promoting a sense of community in the view of Van Dierendonck (2011) is an attribute enabling servant leaders to motivate people towards working together and caring for each other.

The findings from this study demonstrate that much of Imam's preaching revolves around instilling a sense of community. One of the respondents stated, "In Islam, the whole Muslim population in the world is one people and therefore, one community". Moreover, the sense of community runs deep in Islamic societies because it is emphasized in the Quran. It is stated in the Quran 4:36 (Ali 1975) "Serve God, and do not associate any partners with Him; and do good—to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, and the companion by your side, the way-farer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: for God loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious". It is a combination of direct call from God and emphasis from Prophet Muhammad and his immediate followers that is shaping Imam's professional status and role in the interest of community development.

In addition to facilitating marriages and performing funeral services, tasks fundamental to community development, one respondent mentioned that "I have heard Imam on the loudspeaker speaking very highly about family relationship and anyone who promote[s] a sense of family is a servant leader in my opinion". Maintaining family relationship, for example, "is deemed as an act of worship" pointed one participant. Because relationship is upheld important in Islam, the Imam goes to great length by stressing its rewards and punishments on several occasions, especially in Ramadan—a month in which every Muslim is obliged to fast, give charity, and share food with the neighbor and poor in the community. The strong sense of community was emphasized in the one of the remarks:

"The Management of the Mosque have made a playground for children [in the community]. Eventually, they want to develop a community center where they want to have a full on nurse—where it will function like a 24 h clinic. Right now, for people that are low income family and people who don't have health insurance, and even people in that areas that are not even Muslim, they have access to a full clinic that runs every weekend. So what they are trying to do is to serve the whole community."

Women's increased participation has been accommodated via the introduction of designated, gender-segregated spaces in some, but not all mosques. Hegemonic societal norms dictate the separation of women and men during prayer due to women's childbearing role and a perceived need to control male sexual lust (Mernissi 1991; Ahmed 1992; Hammer 2012). Women's participation is thus conditioned upon the availability of a gender segregated physical space, with a separate space, distinct from the main prayer room, and in many instances with a separate entrance too. In general, when Mosques offer women physical spaces, typically such spaces are substandard in quality and size compared to men's spaces, therefore, demonstrating "an overall prioritization of male space and needs" (Shanahan 2014, p. 15). Many mosques also block women's participation by not offering them a designated space (Roald 2006). In short, mosques in all countries are primarily governed by men, and men occupy the main position of religious leadership, the imam, who leads prayers.

7.4. Accessibility

Women's access to go to the Mosque, interact with the imam, and benefit from other sources of religious authority are issues remain largely unexplored (Nyhagen 2019). The way in which Imam's makes himself available to members of the community evoked strong and mixed feelings among respondents. Besides mentioning, on a more general level, their disapproval of the ill-treatment of women in predominantly Islamic countries, respondents expect, especially the Imam to become a voice for women rights. More specifically, participants voiced their dismay about what they consider unacceptable preaching in some Muslim societies against women. Religious fundamentalism, according to Mahmood (2018) continues to promote misconceptions about women in certain Islamic societies and hinder them from playing a vital role in their communities.

This finding is consistent with Greenleaf (1977) assumption that servant leaders go beyond to serve his followers. Respondents who were born and raised outside the United States stated "the Imam lives in the Mosque and he is available in the service of the community twenty-four hours and seven

days a week". However, men and women differ in the degree to which they have access to the Imam. Considering cultural and religious factors, respondents unanimously agreed that men by large have more access to the Imam than women. While one participant who was born and raised in the Middle East reflected on an instance in which a group of girls visited the Imam for clarification of religious concepts, other participants, who were born and raised outside United States, revealed that that they would feel uncomfortable to go to the Mosque by themselves or with their female friends mainly due to cultural pressure from men in their home countries. Another respondent born and raised in North Africa stated, "In my hometown, I cannot dare to go the Mosque as a woman by myself because my neighbors will frown upon me and my family". The foreign born and raised participants expressed greater satisfaction with the way Mosques are run in the United States. One of the participants said,

"When I first arrived in the United States, I did not know anyone and I had to find suitable accommodation. I searched for the Mosque and soon I was directed to a Webpage that had the contact information of the Imam. After speaking with the Imam, he came and helped me with transportation and introduced to other sisters. With their help, I was able to find a comfortable place".

By contrast, the U.S. born and raised participants, while appreciating the fact that they now have more access to resources, including the Imam, than ever before, they pointed to areas of improvements. Thus, for examples, areas which were identified for improvements included: allowing more women to serve on the management board of the Mosque, removing spatial barriers between men and women, eliminating separate entrances for men and women, allowing more interaction between men and women, and giving women chances to teach and preach to the community about Islam and life. The data shows that Mosques differ in the general degree to which women have access to the Imam, services, and resources offered.

Thus, for example, some participants noted that Imams in their Mosque make deliberate effort to engage women at every level and make himself available to listen to their concerns and address them in a timely fashion. One participant commented, "I like going to my Mosque because the Imam's teaching resonates with me. Not only that, our Imam is available to answer all kinds of question. Because of COVID-19, we cannot go to the Mosque and so the Imam preach and educate us through preparing YouTube videos and going live on Facebook." Another participant expressing her dissatisfaction with one of the Mosque she used to go to. She noted:

"It was a beautiful building but the women entrance and the men entrance were not only separate, I get their separate but the building was designed so that you came in from a separate access. It's almost like two buildings just put together. So, I would have to go between buildings. I couldn't even get to the men's building inside, but I'm a single parent of a male child. He's over in the male side with my friend's husband. So I remember having to deal with that and I couldn't I tried to go pick up my son or see what he was up to and I didn't even know how to get in there."

The participants also indicated that men access to the Imam is direct, while women access is primarily taking place by indirect means. One participant stated that because it is culturally prohibited for her to interact with a man (and because Imam is a man), when she has any questions or needs religious insights, she asks her father or brother to take her questions to the Imam and then return with answers. Another participant stated that she used Imam's wife to ask questions and seek information. In summary, getting to the Imam is possible for women, but the way to get to him is different. For men, it is direct, face to face accesses; for women, by contrast, it is usually limited to intermediary (i.e., male family member or Imam's wife or daughter). All participants pointed to culture and tradition, more than religion, to be the fundamental problem barring women from having equal access to resources in the context of Mosque as well as other aspects of life.

7.5. Inclusivity

Overall, all respondents perceived the Mosque to be a man dominated space. However, many of the respondents pointed that Mosques in the United States are more gender inclusive than Mosques outside the United States. One of the respondent remarked, "Before coming to the United States, I did not know that Mosques are called The Islamic Centers". She reflected on her arrival to the United States as a graduate student and expressed her gratitude for being able to have the opportunity to go to the Mosque, make friends, and stay connected with the community. Additionally, another participant pointed to increasing participation of women in the Islamic Center in her community, especially women participation in the organization structures of the Mosque as well as their role in teaching children and planning events and activities.

In addition to the positive remarks by interviewees about Mosques in the United States becoming more inclusive, the author checked the Websites for many Mosques across the United States and noted that women were serving in various capacities on the Mosque's administration board. The researcher also observed that Muslim women were holding top ranking position on the management board of Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on university campuses in across the United States. MSAs are the primary bridges between the Mosques and universities or college campuses. Muslim women were serving in the leading roles within these student organizations alongside their Muslim men counterparts.

Many of the respondents expressed their gratitude for their local Mosques due to received benefits in many forms. These benefits range from being helped with accommodation and transportation, belonging to a community, having the opportunities to learn, and finding social and emotional support. Additionally, some participants reflected upon significant differences between the role of men and women in the context of Mosque in the United and their countries of origin. As pointed earlier, respondents observed that culture accounted for much of the barrier to women participation in the Mosque in the United States and abroad. It was remarked:

"I started going to the Mosque in my hometown as a youth from 5 years old till I was 18, attending Sunday school and then I became a teacher there for two years, teaching 5 years old preschoolers. The one thing I didn't like most in particular up until the age of 16 was because that Mosque was very segregated. It was strictly South-Asian people. Although they were very nice, it was more of their culture in the Mosque, than religion. I felt like their values of that Mosque teaching were bringing stuff back from over there [South-Asia] as supposed to where the Mosque I am going now. I feel comfortable at this one [current Mosque] because I feel like it's more accepting and less judgmental."

It was observed from conversation with many of the interviewees that they were well informed about their rights as women. To that extent, one interviewee pointed, "Because women have almost equal rights in the United States, many Muslim women who come to study in the United States, no matter what country, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Turkey or Indonesia, they adhere to the laws and norms in the United States, and therefore, participate in events and activities similar to that of their male counterparts. This is a good thing". In light of this view, it was repeated many times by many participants that Mosques in the United States are becoming more and more diverse in terms of demographics. Therefore, in order for the Mosques to become more inclusive and better serve the next generations of U.S. born Muslim men and women, they need to have U.S. born Imam, who understand the culture and modern day issues of young people. Lastly, it was noted that more women are needed not only on the management board of the Mosques but also to speak and have a real voice in the community.

7.6. Summary of Findings

Overall, in seeking to understand Muslim women's perspectives of servant leadership in the context Mosque, the emerging themes from the interview data are conceptually aligned to a certain degree with the nature of servant leadership described by [Laub \(1999\)](#). For instance, two of the five

dimensions: serviceability and community are closely connected with servant leadership features such as “develop followers”, “instill a sense of community”, and “display authenticity”. The availability of the Imam to serve the community twenty hours and seven days a week is nothing short of the features of servant leadership such as “display authenticity”, “value followers” and “provide direction”. In the same fashion, the Imam’s effort to motivate his followers toward brotherhood and sisterhood is well aligned with the “instill a sense of community” characteristic of servant leadership pointed to in the conceptual framework. However, three of the principle findings (i.e., Masculinity, Accessibility and Inclusivity) diverge from the domain of Laub (1999) conceptual explanation of servant leadership. Considering that servant leadership is a Western concept and focus on Western context, such deviation should not be taken as a surprise.

However, the dissimilar results demand that there are areas for improvements. Nearly all participants advocated for increasing women’s access to the Mosque as a space, its decision-making board, and its resources. They also emphasized that the Imam to be U.S. born and raised. Having a profound understanding of the mainstream culture in the United States will enable the Imam to be more effective in guiding the community, especially youths. While many Mosques in the United States are deemed inclusive and welcoming to Muslim women, some are yet to become more accessible and inclusive. One of the biggest obstacles for Muslim women concerning Mosques in the latter category has more to do with culture than it has to do with religion. When culture was discussed, participants from all backgrounds pointed to South Asian culture as the main obstacle for accessibility and inclusivity. In *Mapping South Asian Masculinities*, Chakraborty (2014) went so far to argue that “the analyses of some of the critical historical events that shaped (and continue to shape) South Asian men and masculinities alert us to the threat of, and the challenges to, dominant discourses of gender, sexuality, religion, and nation” (418). In short, culture of national origin plays an important role in the degree to which Mosques are inclusive and accessible in the United States.

8. Conclusions

There is an emerging trend within scholarship pointing to the fundamental question of whether or not Mosques are gender inclusive spaces (Nyhagen 2019). Indeed, much of this literature focus on Mosques in the Western (i.e., Europe and North America) context (Predelli 2008; Lewicki and O’Toole 2017; Hammer 2012). However, there is less or no evidence documenting Muslim women’s perspectives on Mosque and its servant leader, the Imam. By conceptualizing potential origins of servant leadership in the context of Mosque, this inquiry contributes a much needed understanding of servant leadership practices to the existing literature. Emerging from Muslim women interviews, the taxonomy delineates five categories and 15 sub-categories related to servant leadership in the context of Mosque: (1) Serviceability, (2) masculinity, (3) community, (4) accessibility, and (5) inclusivity. While some of these categories may appear obvious, an adequate framework encompassing all potential sources of favorable and unfavorable perspectives of Muslim women has not yet been identified in the existing literature, therefore, the comprehensiveness of this taxonomy alone makes a major addition to knowledge.

The research demonstrates disparities between men and women access to servant leader (Imam), religious services, and resources provided by the Mosque. The study highlights the fact that Muslim women do benefit from Imam’s leadership and his service; however, the benefits come largely indirectly. The study implies that Muslim women remain informed of the disparities in the context of Mosque and that they have a strong desire to change the status quo. Not just that, Muslim women strive to maximize their benefits from services and resources provided by the Mosque and do so in a more direct manner. The observed inequalities are natural, given the long-last traditions and customs in many of the developing countries (see Jabarkhail and Dooley 2019). Consequently, the developed taxonomy covers Muslim women’s perspectives on servant leadership and presents a contemporary view and a vital extension to the existing scholarship on this style of leadership, which fails to include the broad spectrum of outlooks that may or may not constitute servant leadership.

9. Limitation

The unexplored nature of Muslim women's views on servant leadership and the objective of generating a comprehensive categories and sub-categories of servant leadership in the context of Mosque rendered a qualitative case study as the most appropriate research method. The findings of this study must be viewed with the common drawbacks of the qualitative line of exploration in mind. The distinguishing feature, for instance, in qualitative research is not to generalize, but to conceptualize (McCracken 1988). In this view, the findings of this study remain abstract and not representative of the general population. Additionally, this study was undertaken in February of 2020, right before the global Pandemic struck the United States. In order to protect the health and safety of the researcher and that of the research participants and to remain in compliance with the national guidelines as well as instructions from the university's Division of Research, the researcher had to rely on data collected via online interviews. All eight interviews were conducted using Zoom video communication platform.

Future studies should therefore take a face-to-face interview approach. Additionally, future research should consider a confirmatory method of the developed taxonomy. Exploring similarities and difference, comparison analysis, between Muslim women perspectives of servant leadership in the context of Mosque and Christian women perceptions in the context of Church or women's view in other religions may result in meaningful insights. The findings of this study provide an ideal starting point for developing a formative assessment tool of servant leadership in the context of Mosque, whereby each of the five categories may be viewed as a facet of the formative construct. Exploring servant leadership from Muslim women's perspectives in the context of Mosque and its facets would allow scholars, professionals, and religious leaders to identify areas of perceived inequality of opportunity and hence, take necessary measures to direct improvement efforts in these areas.

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